Theodore Roszak's The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein: A Countercultural Perspective on Alchemy, Gender and the Scientific Revolution

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"Theodore Roszak's *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein*: A Countercultural Perspective on Alchemy, Gender and the Scientific Revolution" (2011)[1]

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In *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, Anne K. Mellor's persuasively argues that *Frankenstein* is a critique of the eighteenth-century scientific discourse that worked to underlie an ideology of gender polarization in which masculinity represented the human aspects of knowledge, power and reason. Mellor points out that Francis Bacon "identified the pursuit of modern science with the practice of sexual politics: the aggressive virile male scientist legitimately captures and enslaves a fertile but passive female nature."[2] From the seventeenth century onwards, science became increasingly linked to concepts such as control, power, and influence, especially the control, power and influence of male scientists over Mother Nature.[3] Rienk Vermij argues that it was in England specifically that the experimental method took root.[4] During the eighteenth century Isaac Newton superseded Bacon as the icon of scientific investigation. His empirical method was judged the best method to systematize Nature, not the least because his system offered proof of God's active engagement with the natural world.[5] In the course of the eighteenth century, science was no longer perceived as a radical or even heretical endeavour. It became an

[1] This article was published in volume 1 of *Restoring the Mysteries of the Rainbow: Literature's Refraction of Science,* edited by Valeria Tinkler-Villani and C.C. Barfoot, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2011.
[2] Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, London, 1988, 89.
[3] See also Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco, 1980.
[4] Rienk Vermij, *De wetenschappelijke revolutie*, Amsterdam, 1999, 106.
[5] Ibid., 113-14.

orthodox, even pious occupation that would offer the scientist not only knowledge about the natural world, but also social status and influence.[6]

More recently, developments in chaos theory have problematized the notion of order in science, but the lay theory about scientists is still that they control and manipulate nature for the benefit of mankind.[7] According to Mellor, Victor Frankenstein, in trying to create a living being, represents what she calls "'bad' science, the hubristic manipulation of the elemental forces of nature to serve man's private ends."[8] The many film versions of the novel have continually re-affirmed this interpretation of Victor, emphasizing his hubris and its evil consequences.[9] From this critical perspective, *Frankenstein* is a negative novel, a bleak prophecy about the effects of "bad" science, supported by a patriarchal social structure.

Theodore Roszak's *Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein* (1995) is a rewrite of Shelley's novel about the monstrous consequences of masculine scientific hubris. By altering the perspective from which the story is told, Roszak imagines a new context into which the tale of the scientist and his monster can be positioned. Unlike the original, Roszak's novel is a positive fiction. He places Victor and Elizabeth within a countercultural alchemical nature cult, in which the masculine scientific rhetoric of control, power, and influence, are replaced by terms such as community, harmony and respect. In doing so, Roszak brings to the foreground the latent dissident potential in the novel. Before analysing how Roszak raises this dissident potential into focus, it is important to outline from which critical context he approached Shelley's gothic masterpiece.

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[6] Ibid., 115.
[7] See James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science*, New York, 1987.
[8] Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, 89.
[9] See especially the iconic Frankenstein films: *Frankenstein* (Universal, 1931) and *The Curse of Frankenstein* (Hammer, 1957).

Roszak is a historian of science, eco-psychologist and novelist who is best known for coining the term "counterculture" in 1969. For Roszak, the counterculture movement reacted against the fact that "the general public has had to content itself with accepting the decision of experts that what the scientists say is true, that what the technicians design is beneficial."[10] Countercultural philosophers rebelled against the dominance of scientific rationalism as an ideology through which the state and the individual make sense of the world. Roszak explains that modern society's trust in the expertise of scientists is as unwarranted as the supposedly ignorant trust of ancient peoples in magic. Modern society, according to Roszak, writing in the late 1960s, is blinded by the rhetoric of objectivity and truth that defines contemporary scientific discourse: "it is remarkable how nonchalantly we carry off our gross ignorance of the technical expertise our very lives depend upon," Roszak argues, "we live off the surface of our culture and pretend we know enough."[11] Roszak explains that "for most of us the jargon and mathematical elaborations of the experts are so much mumbo jumbo. But, we feel certain, it is all mumbo jumbo that *works* – or at least seems to work, after some fashion that the same experts tell us should be satisfactory."

Roszak deconstructs scientific rationalism by addressing science in terms of magic – its ideological counterweight in Western culture. Just as Mellor differentiates between bad and good science, Roszak differentiates between bad and good magic. Bad magic is science as practised by scientists and supported by institutions with the aim of acquiring status, power and a controlling influence within the existing social, political and economic structures in the Western world. Roszak explains how bad magic works by offering the following hypothesis: "if enough experts told us strontium 90 and smog were good for us, doubtless most of us

[10] Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*, Garden City: NY, 1969, 263.
[11] Ibid., 258.

would take their word for it."[12] Bad magic is the kind of science on which the individual relies for his well being without having any control over, or insight into, its workings and results. The advertising industry tends to use bad magic to sell products. TV viewers are continually shown actors in white coats who tell them that this or that product is new and improved and better for our skin and the environment. This advertising strategy is used to sell anything from soap to station wagons. According to Roszak, most people simply have too little knowledge not to believe in the scientist. In the same way, ancient cultures trusted in the healing powers of the shaman, while others believe in and rely on the benevolence of a deity to ensure their well being. As much as magical traditions are frowned upon in most Western cultures, Roszak argues, science performs the same cultural role as magic.

Significantly, in the late 1960s, Roszak identified in American youth counterculture a growing section of society that rejected this blind belief in the authority of the scientists and fostered a genuine interest in magic. For Roszak magic is not "a repertory of clever stunts," but "a form of experience, a way of addressing the world" of experiencing alternative realities.[13] When Roszak speaks of science and magic he is fundamentally speaking of worldviews, perspectives on human life and its relationship to nature, rather than material practices such as spells and experiments. He explains that "the essence of magic lies in [the] sense that man and not-man can stand on communicable terms with one another." Significantly, Roszak contrasts the experience of the magician or shaman, to the experience of the scientist: "Unlike the scientific experiment, which is depersonalized and so should work for anyone who performs it, the magical relationship is available only to those chosen by the presences themselves."[14] Roszak speaks in terms of election, with the shaman elected to his

[12] Ibid., 259.
[13] Ibid., 244.
[14] Ibid., 245-46.

office of magician rather than choosing to learn to become a magician, emphasizing the personal nature of the relationship between the individual and the surrounding world. This concept of election plays an important part in the Elizabeth's *Memoirs*.

In *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein* Roszak once again turns to the world of magic to construct a counterculture that offers an alternative perspective on relationship between mankind, science and nature. The novel came about, Roszak explains, because he "felt that the *Frankenstein* Mary most wanted to offer the world lies hidden in an under-story that only Elizabeth could have written," and as a consequence of her murder in the novel, has remained untold for almost two centuries. This under-story is the story of an alchemical cult, into which Elizabeth and Victor enter as a prophetic couple that will bring about the alchemical union of opposites. The magical project fails, as the *Memoirs* explain, because of Victor's assimilation into the rationalist world of his father and his university professors. While Roszak explains that his "retelling of the tale parallels the original version, but views the events as only Elizabeth could have known them," his novel is in fact a dissident reading of the novel activated by the cultural schemata that inform Roszak's own mode of thought: the countercultural movement, eco-psychology and magic.[15]

The most significant aspect of Roszak's rewrite of *Frankenstein* is his foregrounding of the dissident presence of alchemy in the novel. The realm of magic and nature is a dissident subculture to Baron Frankenstein's world of enlightenment and free-trade. In the original novel alchemy is mentioned only fleetingly, in the context of Victor's youthful enthusiasm for Agrippa and Paracelsus, which is quickly contrasted to his university education. Roszak, on the contrary, takes 250 pages to get to the point of Victor's departure for Ingolstadt. Roszak's focus on the difference between Victor's education at home and at the university highlights

[15] Theodore Roszak, *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein*, New York, 1995, ix. All further references to this edition are in the text.

his alternative perspective on the novel. *Frankenstein*, for Roszak, is not a story about the creation of a monster by a mad scientist, but a story about the incorporation into scientific rationalist ideology of a young man who stood at the point of being initiated into the magical practices of alchemy.

From Roszak's perspective, alchemy is not the androcentric pseudo-science that leads to the erasure of feminine, by circumventing woman's role in the human reproductive process, as several feminist theorists have suggested.[16] Instead, alchemy is closely allied to a nature cult worshipping mother earth, rather than God the father, as the origin of existence. As such, Roszak's novel is a prime example of the significance of the alchemical myth to contemporary ecological thought.[17] Roszak explains that alchemy is a philosophy, the central idea of which is "As above, so below." Alchemists were concerned with the "cosmic unity" of the universe, the macrocosm, and perceived the soul of mankind as a microcosm: "macrocosm spoke to microcosm; microcosm reflected macrocosm."[18]

Although Peter Marshall claims that "there are many aspects of alchemy that are anti-ecological," he also acknowledges that alchemy is a significant source for ecological thought by explaining that "alchemists did not separate man from nature as later scientists did; on the contrary, they considered our species to be an integral part of nature, with man as a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm of the universe."[19] According to Roszak, "for the better part of two hundred years, keeping these two realms [man and nature] divorced and not even

[16] See Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, New York, 1994, 87-88; Nancy Tuana, "The Unhappy Marriage of Alchemy and Feminism," in *Prairie Home Philosophy*, ed. Mark Chekola, Moorhead: MN, 1987, 110-22.
[17] The ecologist John Todd was one of the first scientists to openly recognize the ecological nature of alchemy when he named his ecological utopian research and education project New Alchemy (see Nancy Jack Todd and John Todd, *From Eco-Cities to Living Machines: Principles of Ecological Design*, Berkeley: CA, 1993, 1-11).
[18] Thoedore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsycology*, New York, 1992, 15-16.
[19] Peter Marshall, *Nature's Web: An Exploration of Ecological Thinking*, London, 1992, 165 and 152.

on speaking terms has been the signal endeavour of rational thought and sound science."[20] Roszak's eco-psychology is a good example of how alchemy can inspire alternative ways of thinking about mankind's relationship with nature. This separation of man and nature on both a psychological as well as material level is what Roszak seeks to bring to an end by using alchemical imagery in *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein*. Just as *Caleb Williams* (1794) was William Godwin's fictionalization of *Political Justice* (1793), so *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein* can be read as a fictionalization of Roszak's ideas about how to re-establish a psychological connection between mankind and nature.[21]

For Roszak, alchemy is a fruitful cultural schema because "it was the alchemists, working along the shadowy fringes of medieval culture, who made the most consequential use of the anima mundi. For the 'chemical philosophers,' she became the reigning mistress of all natural forces."[22] Today the "mother earth" rhetoric is expressed most poignantly through the Gaia hypothesis, described by Merchant as a mode of thought that "drew scientific attention to the concept of the earth as a living organism."[23] Traditions of "natural magic" certainly influenced the development of modern science.[24] Roy Porter explains, however, that, "after 1660, the Aristotelian metaphysics of elements, humours, substances, qualities and final causes, so long dominant in the universities, as well as rival Renaissance neo-Platonic and hermetic visions of a spiritual universe, were finally superseded by models of Nature viewed as matter in motion, governed by laws capable of mathematical expression."[25] Since the rise

[20] Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth*, 16.
[21] A good example of how conventional this dualistic thinking about mankind and nature has become is the way, in the context of competitive endurance sports, humans are always spoken of as battling the elements – succumbing to the sun's rays, championing the snow, defying the tempest and taming the waves.
[22] Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth*, 140.
[23] Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment*, New York, 1996, 4.
[24] For an overview of the influence of natural magic on scientific theory, see John Henry, *The Scientific Revolution and the Origins of Modern Science*, 2nd edn, Basingstoke, 2002, Ch. 4.
[25] Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment*, New York, 2000, 138.

into dominance of enlightenment rationalism in the eighteenth century, magical worldviews, including alchemy, have become sub-cultural phenomenon that allow dissident thinkers to express an alternative point of view on mankind's relationship to nature. Roszak believes that Shelley incorporated into *Frankenstein* a subcultural perspective on scientific rationalism and its relationship to socio-political gender ideology, which she was unable to thoroughly articulate because of the literary and social conventions of her day.

Although Roszak firmly believes in the benefits modern science can offer human civilization, he explains that one of its major flaws has been science's masculine gender bias:

the theories, methods, and sensitivities of Western science have, for four centuries, been under the control of an exclusively male guild. For the greater part of that period, the society that shaped every scientist great and minor was male-dominated through and through. That society took all that was male to be 'normal', whether in politics, art, the economy, scholarship, social ethics, or philosophy.[26]

One of Roszak's main aims in writing *The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein* was to create an awareness of the need for "a bias-free, non-gendered science." For Roszak, "the old Earth Mother religions expressed a remarkable intuitive appreciation of natural systems."[27] When he read *Frankenstein*, Roszak realized that "Mary [Shelley] recognized that alchemy was a deeply feminized approach to nature." In the alchemical myth, Roszak explains the mystic sister was always there to supply those womanly qualities the male sage was bound to need."[28] The Mother Earth cults and the alchemical myth of the eternal feminine, for Roszak become western myths that can help an overly androcentric scientific worldview to become

[26] Theodore Roszak, *The Gendered Atom: Reflections on the Sexual Psychology of Science*, Totnes: Devon, 2000, 14.
[27] Ibid., 19.
[28] Ibid., 113.

more biocentric, meaning not gynocentric, but suggesting a harmonious confluence of male and female visions in a more complete vision of mankind's relationship to nature.

The original novel is dominated by two male voices, Walton and Victor. Roszak, however, uses a single female voice to tell his tale. Walton is turned into the object of satire as an editor who continually reveals his androcentric prejudices through his misguided commentary on the alchemical cult. In the Preface to *The Memoirs*, Roszak initially speaks through the character of Walton when writing that "there are lessons in this matter that I would not see lost on my colleagues in the scientific fraternity" (xiv). Walton, in Roszak's novel, is the same Walton as in *Frankenstein*, but he has a different function. In Shelley's narrative he functions as a double to Victor, another scientist of unorthodox education who suffers from hubris and an over inflated sense of his own significance: "you cannot contest," he writes to his sister in the original novel, "the *inestimable benefit* which *I shall confer on mankind* to *the last generation*, by discovering a passage near the pole to those countries, to reach which at present so many months are requisite; or by ascertaining the secret of the magnet, which if at all possible, *can only be effected* by an undertaking such as *mine*."[29]

In the quotation, Walton describes himself as a hero of the new economy as much as of science. His discoveries will benefit primarily those involved in the growing international free-trade market that is transforming Britain into a world power. In Roszak's book, however, Walton presents himself initially as a moralist and philosophical investigator, wondering "how so gifted a mind [as Victor's] had lost its way and debased its genius. Along what paths and under what influences had he been drawn to his tragic vocation?" (xiv). Roszak's Walton finds the answers to these questions in "the writings and papers of Elizabeth Lavenza, Frankenstein's adopted sister and later fiancée" (xvi). Her voice remains silent throughout the

[29] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, the original 1818 text, eds D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf, Peterborough: Ontario, 1999, 50 (italics added).

original novel. It is, however, a significant voice, according to Roszak's Walton, that needs to be heard, if the true moral of Victor's tale is to be understood. It is even more significantly a voice that, throughout the novel undermines and ridicules Walton's ideological perspective.

Roszak shows how misguided the original Walton is in interpreting Frankenstein's story. Roszak's Walton, unlike the original character, confesses that Victor "talked at some length – often in an almost hallucinatory manner – about his early alchemical studies and about the role his fiancée had played in these experiments; but his remarks were obscure and frequently too unsavoury for my taste." In this passage, Roszak's Walton reveals his own androcentric rational scientific bias towards alchemy. He views it as mumbo jumbo, attributes Victor's talk to "his feverish state of mind" and dismissed it as mysterious and unscientific lore, in which women are incorporated into the experiments, repellent to his own rational-scientific mindset, while he presents himself as a moralist, trying to get to the truth of Victor tale. Walton reveals himself as a caricature of the scientist because of his complete and utter inability to believe in the relevance of the alchemical myth. Elizabeth's *Memoirs* constitute his re-education as a scientist to some extent, but he comes the conclusion that through his investigations into the alchemical legends, he "could no longer tell which of these two – Victor or Elizabeth – had debauched the other." Roszak's Walton, forced into acknowledging the presence of alchemy in society still thinks in terms of binary oppositions: science is good, alchemy is bad, either Victor or Elizabeth is innocent and the other corrupt in turning to alchemy and getting the other involved. Unable to attribute equal power, knowledge and a willingness to dabble in alchemy to both Victor and Elizabeth, he becomes worried that "Elizabeth, far from being a reluctant participant in her lover's unnatural pursuits" in alchemy – the only plausible position in which Walton can place a women in relation to science – "was to some degree their initiator."

A powerful female individual who performs alchemical rituals, according to Walton, can only be a corrupting influence. However, the memoirs he has been given force him to conclude "what I would once have found unthinkable is indeed true": Elizabeth and Victor initially were equal participators in a nature cult over which baroness Caroline Frankenstein presided as queen (xvii). Roszak satirizes Walton's continual efforts to hold onto his androcentric perspective, as well as his "steadfast allegiance to the ideal of scientific objectivity" in the original novel, by making him speak of the nature cult and the feminine role in the alchemical experiment played by Elizabeth as a form of "female degeneracy" (xviii). The story that unfolds in Roszak's novel tells a tale with an opposite moral to that which Walton wishes to express: it is not a story of female degeneracy and witchcraft challenging the rational scientific enterprise, but the story of how the dominant androcentric rational-scientific ideology represses a dissident alchemical subculture through an act of wilful misrepresentation.

Roszak's Elizabeth explains how within the Frankenstein household "the Baron's children … were meant to become the very models of Enlightenment" (57). Elizabeth reveals, however, that the Baron's perspective on learning is essentially rationalist, scientific and thoroughly androcentric. When asking the question, "how can we tell without fair trial which of our women may not be harbouring masculine faculties of mind," he shows simultaneously his belief in the intellectual capabilities of women and men and his belief that such capabilities are inherently masculine (58). Victor is shown to be the privileged pupil in the household purely because he happens to be the male child and is therefore considered inherently to possess these masculine intellectual qualities. It is Victor who learns how to measure and master the natural world, as Elizabeth looks on. A believer in the Lockean concept of the *tabula rasa*, the Baron is orthodox in his gendered perspective on learning: a

woman can become as learned as man only by learning to develop a masculine mind. Femininity is not an intellectual virtue. The Baron's gendered perspective on learning is significant in the novel, since Roszak introduces alchemy as a mode of thought, open to men, but feminine in nature.

Roszak turns to the stock gothic device of the mysterious labyrinthine mansion to introduce the presence of alchemy into the novel. Victor, not satisfied with the teachings of Professor Saussure, in "the secret resources of the chateau," discovers "a greater teacher than any of the tutors who came calling" to instruct him in enlightenment ideology (60). The ideological significance of the presence of an alchemical emblem book in the dark recesses of the family mansion is highlighted by Victor's remark to his sister that Jeanne d'Arc was initially "burnt for a witch … but then the church changed its mind and named her a saint." Victor here draws attention to the significance of ideological perspective on issues surrounding the legitimacy of learning and the nature of knowledge. Knowledge inexplicable within the parameters of the dominant ideology in one age or culture, and considered dangerous, may turn out to have articulated a genuine alternative worldview that challenges the status of the orthodoxy at the time.

Victor finds such a worldview as an alternative to that he is being introduced to by his tutors in "the oldest tower of the house," which, according to the inhabitants of the chateau, is "an unpopulated ruin … whose narrow windows had long since been grown over by vines" (63). Roszak presents this old, crumbling, forgotten wing of the Frankenstein mansion in true gothic style. Pictures on the walls of the chamber reveal to Elizabeth "wispy figures floating through darkly shaded woods, garbed in the pale robes that lent them a spectral aspect." Significantly, it is forgotten only by the characters who adhere to Enlightenment ideology. The significance of the ideological perspective from which these

pictures on the walls are viewed becomes apparent from Walton's choice of chapter title, "the evil pictures," and Victor's subsequent critical commentary. Victor tells Elizabeth that the Baron "is ashamed of these … that is why they are hidden away up here" (64).

However, "the air of unearthly strangeness that surrounded them" the "scenes of night lit only by some waning remnant of the moon" and their quality of being "touched with a phantom of phosphorescence" grabs Elizabeth's attention. Unenlightened in the ways of rational science, to Elizabeth these pictures peopled only with female figures represent a wonderful scene, not a fearful supernatural cabal. At this point in time, Victor is shown to accept his tutors' and Walton's androcentric, rational-scientific, perspective by judging the pictures of ethereal figures in a nightly wooded scene as evil pictures, "because they are witches!." Contrary to her stepfather and Victor, Elizabeth "saw nothing 'evil' in them, such as Victor has promised." To her, the pictures of naked women in a wooded nightly setting, were not supernatural fantasies, but "on the contrary, these figures were all too realistically depicted, lounging or sprawling with no attempt at modest concealment – and this whether they body was scrawny or obese, deformed or frankly voluptuous" (65).

Through the gothic imagery of a desolate castle tower, hiding mysterious canvases portraying a mysterious witch cult, Roszak draws attention to the extent to which an ideology of gender polarization underlies rational scientific thought. Witchcraft has had a long-standing popular connection with the feminine, while science, its ideological opposite has been for centuries been linked to virtues in Western society most often associated with masculinity. In this chapter of the novel, gothic conventions become a means to challenge the androcentric *status quo*. The enlightened household of Baron Frankenstein is revealed to contain a dark and secret wing that harbours all that needs to be hidden to create the illusion of stability. Elizabeth's story reveals that the Frankenstein home does not shelter the happy family Victor

himself sketched in the original story. It is a home strongly segregated by an ideology that genders human knowledge and privileges the masculine, objective, empirical and particularly rational scientific enterprise above the feminine-defined (but not essentially female) world of spirit, nature, desire and imagination.

Roszak reveals that Lady Caroline is a female alchemist. Her laboratory is described by Elizabeth as follows:

In the shadowed recesses of the room I could make out rows of vessels and stoups that held coloured fluids, and in them floating substances I could but dimly discern: vines and tendrils they seemed to be, or the preserved remains of insects and animals. The walls everywhere displayed antique charts and enigmatic emblems, many of them human forms contorted into monstrous anatomies.

Everything in the room was excessively untidy. Moreover, it was filled with acrid chemical odors that tickled my nose.

Just as the shadowy recesses of the mansion hide alchemical paintings and manuscript, so the shadowy recesses of Lady Caroline's chamber reveal an alchemical laboratory. The setting reflects the theory of nature propounded by the alchemists, and is contrasted with a modern laboratory and androcentric scientific rationalism: "As you see, the servants don't clean here; they are not allowed to," Lady Caroline says to Elizabeth, identifying her secret alchemical chamber – itself a microcosm of the house – with the natural chaos of the wilderness as opposed to the artificial order and sterility of the scientific lab (75).

While Elizabeth is introduced into the feminine world of Lady Caroline's nature cult, and is taught the secrets of alchemy, Victor, under influence of his father and tutors states: "I intend to be a man of science" (82). In the course of the novel, Roszak alters the very nature of the Frankenstein household, in order to articulate his vision of the importance of the

alchemical myth that informs the original text. In Shelley's novel, the Frankensteins are a typical late-eighteenth-century bourgeois family, ruled by an apparently benevolent patriarch who seemingly has the best intentions for his wife, children and the community at large. In Roszak's novel, the Frankenstein household is split by a gendered rivalry between masculine science and reason and feminine alchemy and imagination, which in turn is mirrored by the mansion's architectural peculiarities – an open public main structure with and a private crumbling gothic tower hiding its secrets. Indeed, Baron Frankenstein and his wife are pitched against each other in a war of influence over their children. Baron Frankenstein openly ridicules the unorthodox learning of Lady Caroline and uses all his public influence to find the best scientific minds to teach Victor how to become a proper scientist. He wishes Victor to marry Elizabeth so as to continue the family line. However, Lady Caroline tells Elizabeth that "the kinship that I would have grow between you and Victor is more than a matter of blood; it will be of a kind for which our world has as yet no name. Let us call it simply union" (88). For a while all goes well and Elizabeth recounts how at moments Victor "tried to learn my gentler way of viewing Nature near at hand." She writes: "Victor and I had soon become fast friends and fellow adventurers, roving the lush country about like innocents in an Eden restored" (93-94).

But in a playful frolic, Elizabeth soon discovers Victor's masculine need to dominate and the two slowly grow apart as she is initiated into the all-female nature cult by Lady Caroline and Victor increasingly enters into public society. As Lady Caroline teacher Elizabeth that "Earth is a woman as we are" (115), Elizabeth becomes aware that despite his "tenderness of heart" her father "became increasingly preoccupied in urgent commercial ventures that kept him away from home for months at a stretch" and that "his trade was principally in gold" (121). The Baron is the vulgar alchemist, only intent on turning lead into

gold for quick monetary gain. He is the bad scientist, who uses his knowledge to increase his status and influence and expects unqualified obedience form Victor, who under his guidance and that of his tutors appropriates his thoroughly androcentric scientific point of view. With regards to lightening, Victor, under the influence of his father and tutors, explains to Elizabeth, "man shall tame it as they have tamed the wild horses and make it work for us like a slave" (124).

In an attempt to link alchemy more closely to a dissident form of nature mysticism, Roszak allows Lady Caroline to explain to Elizabeth: "the great Paracelsus once said that if you would know how to heal, go among the women and learn from them? He was himself the student of a sorceress whose name is among the unknown" (127). Marshall explains that Paracelsus was a rebel in his day, defying state, religious and university authorities with his unorthodox medical practices and in his belief that "magic could manipulate the hidden forces of the universe" and that "nature is a living, flowing dynamic whole."[30] In the original story, Victor admires the alchemists and the Baron ridicules them as "sad trash."[31] By making Paracelsus an ally of the all female nature cult, who, like other mythical and fictional alchemists, know "the secrets of herbs," Roszak draws attention to the significant presence of these names in the original text. In the original the connotative effect of the alchemists' names explains to the reader Victor's engagement with magic and superstition. In Roszak's novel, their philosophy becomes an actual dissident presence in the very private sphere of the Frankenstein household. Francine, Elizabeth's instructor, explains to Elizabeth how her mother is able to successfully lead her alchemical nature cult. Although he knows about the paintings and her mother's unorthodox learning, the Baron simply "turn[s] a blind eye" (134).

[30] Peter Marshall, *The Philosopher's Stone: A Quest for the Secrets of Alchemy*, London, 2001, 349-50.
[31] Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 68. Roszak has Elizabeth refer to this original scene (*The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein*, 178).

His enlightened disposition allows him to let others believe in what he personally mocks. The Baron's rational scientific outlook makes him feel smugly superior to those who adhere to what he perceives as ancient, outmoded belief systems.

In Mary Shelley's original, Victor comes into contact with alchemy by accident, as the family seeks shelter at an inn at Thonon where Agrippa's books lay in view for Victor to peruse and with which to pass the hours of dismal weather. In Roszak's version, Lady Caroline orchestrates a trip to Thonon to introduce Victor into alchemical teachings and the knowledge of the chemical wedding by acquainting him there with "The Rose Book," suggestive of the Rosicrucian "Chemical Wedding" of Christian Rosenkrantz. Victor is guided towards the acquisition of alchemical knowledge by his mother; he does not discover it by chance. This heightens the dissident potential of Lady Caroline's enterprise, since it seems a conscious act of defiance against the prevailing social order. Elizabeth and Victor become Lady Caroline's male and female subjects in the alchemical experiment leading to their unification in the androgynous ideal. Roszak uses the gothic convention of turning the house into a symbol for the human mind to great effect by explaining that alchemical knowledge is not something one comes across by chance while wondering around in the public domain in search to kill a few dreary hours, but a secret presence on the inside into which each member can be initiated and which can have a profound effect on the individual.

Part Two of the novel comprises mostly of selections from Elizabeth's diaries recounting her experiences as she undergoes the experiment of the chemical wedding. The editor, Walton, plays a significant role in getting Roszak's intentions across. He intrudes into the narrative with commentary about the myth of the *soror mystica* in the alchemical legend, the female companion who was thought to also possess the secret knowledge and who could perform the sacred operations of the alchemist. Instead of shedding more light on the

alchemical mystery unfolding in the diaries, his language reveals his ingrained androcentric prejudice towards alchemy. He expresses great concern about the potential success of the alchemical project: "I believe the result would have been nothing less than the root-and-branch subversion of Christian sexual mores" (193).

Allowing Walton to intrude into the memoirs with editorials explaining to the reader the history of alchemy, and explaining the danger it poses to the *status quo*, works to highlight to the reader the significance in the story of ideological point of view. Instead of the dominant voice in the original story, Walton's voice, in Roszak's novel, functions as a commentary. He is not a participator in the tale and so unable to control the narrative or to influence the outcome of the story. Despite his horror at what he is confronted with in Elizabeth's *Memoirs*, Walton, the rational scientist, cannot ignore the fact Victor told Elizabeth, at one stage in the experimental process, "I was both you and myself, boy and girl. I seemed to float upon the air like a spirit" (196). Victor, at this point in the story, is becoming aware of the androgynous idealism within the alchemical myth. Where he at first tried to dominate Elizabeth in their play, he now comes to respect and even fear her sexuality and intellect (200). This leads Walton to another editorial about the androgynous nature of the alchemical experiment: "It was something even more insidious than the subversion of Christian sexual morality. I believe she [Caroline] hoped to bring about *the unmanning of European science*." According to Walton "she meant to invade the scientific workplace with forms of erotic dalliance that would undermine its essentially, and necessarily masculine rigour" (207-208).

Roszak's Victor shares the original Victor's initial idealism about the possibility of using alchemy to transform the world into a better place:

we might turn the sands of the desert into fertile soil and stones into bread to feed the hungry. We might banish disease from the human frame and make men invulnerable to death.

We might call up undiscovered powers and drive them to plough and delve and build for us. We might never again need to toil in the sweat of our brow. Perhaps this is the work God has left for us to do: to create a race of happy and excellent men. (223)

Although there is much idealism in what Victor is dreaming about, the seeds of corruption are present in his use of verbs such as "to banish," "to drive," "to delve," and "to build." Elizabeth describes how, in his idealism and determinism to finish the great work, "he was "supremely confident" and "too forceful; where I hesitated and hung back he would plunge forward, convinced that he knew the true goal of the chymical [*sic*] philosophy – and even better than Seraphina [the wise woman] or Mother. He spoke of it as the inner most knowledge of the world." Victor's incapability to exchange his androcentric vision for the alchemists androgynous worldview, forces him to think in terms of binary opposition even in conducting alchemical experiments. Elizabeth explains that he becomes obsessed with the alchemical myth of the homunculus, the artificial man, not as a conceptual ideal, but as a possible slave "to do our bidding" (235-36). His early education in scientific rationalism, and the masculine ideology of superiority, still forces him to think in terms of domination rather than communion.

For Victor, alchemy slowly loses its potential to express a utopian idealism and, like the knowledge and tools of the modern scientist, functions as a means to an end – the end being the control of matter for the benefit of human happiness, in which happiness is measured in materialistic terms. While his mother had educated him to become "the alchymical [*sic*] Isaac Newton," an androgynous synergy of masculine modern science and the idealism adhered to by her feminine alchemical nature cult, Victor slowly starts to identify solely with the name of the great scientist in his mother's metaphorical vehicle, not the adjective she had added to the name of the scientist in order to create a tenor denoting balance

and equality, rather than scientific rationalism and dominance (283). After the death of Lady Caroline, "father would have his way" and Victor, frustrated and impatient with the alchemical experiments leaves "for Ingolstadt to begin his university education" and to learn "the modern system of science," as his father had called it (263).

Understandably, at this point in the narrative, Roszak loses sight of Victor for a while as he follows Elizabeth's transformation into "a feral woman," a dweller in the woods, a converser with birds. By altering her ideological point of view, dismissing the lens of enlightened reason and adopting the imaginative alchemical-ecological lens, she confesses, "men appear to me as monsters" (284). This phrase introduces the final part of the novel in which Victor's creation meets Elizabeth in the woods and the two become companions for a while. Elizabeth explains, "when I am with him, I feel once again close to the heart of Nature as I did in the forest. His presence does not disturb the elevation of my thoughts – for it does not seem to be a human presence." Elizabeth suspects the creature can actually converse with her pet bird Alu and concludes that "there is more pristine Nature in the man than I had found in any speaking being I have met" (391). In contrast to Elizabeth's characterization of the creature as a child of nature, Walton, in his final editorial calls it "the fiend," and describes it as "a grotesque being … something so unnatural" (409).

Impatient as the Baron was in getting Victor off to university, at the end of the *Memoirs*, as his health declines, he is even more impatient for Elizabeth and Victor to be married. Elizabeth writes: "So there will be a wedding. Because father wants it. Because I am supposed to want it. Because Victor can no longer delay it. Because everybody expects it. Because Adam [the monster] has willed it" (411). By the close of the novel the Baron and Walton are shown to represent the dominant ideology, and the creature a product of Victor's incorporation into their world. Science and patriarchal custom have defeated the alchemical

nature cult, but only by forcefully suppressing its existence and in doing so it has forced to recognize its power and validity as an alternative worldview and pressuring Elizabeth into conformity through marriage. However, she remains defiant in defeat: “But I will have no children!! I will deliver no babies to the claw!” (411). Her power rests in a refusal to support the androcentric world of the Baron, Walton and by this stage Victor, which is reliant on male offspring for its perpetuation. The novel fittingly ends with Elizabeth’s fragmentary vision of “the death of the world,” in which Roszak recapitulates the theme of the entire novel, how androcentric scientific practice and the institution of patriarchy are not only oppressing women, but destroying Mother Nature as a whole – a countercultural perspective Roszak has been voicing since 1968 (420).