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Anarchic alchemists: dissident androgyny in Anglo-American gothic fiction from Godwin to Melville

Leeuwen, E.J. van

Citation

Leeuwen, E. J. van. (2006, September 7). *Anarchic alchemists: dissident androgyny in Anglo-American gothic fiction from Godwin to Melville*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4552>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

PART 2

**TYPES OF ANARCHIC ALCHEMISTS
AND FORMS OF DISSIDENT ANDROGYNY
IN ANGLO-AMERICAN GOTHIC FICTION**

CHAPTER 4

DISSIDENT ANDROGYNOUS PRESENCE AND ANARCHIC VOICE IN *ST LEON*, *WIELAND*, “MORELLA” AND “LIGEIA”

William Godwin's *St Leon* (1799), Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798) and Edgar Allan Poe's tales “Morella” (1835) and “Ligeia” (1838) are all first-person confessional narratives. In each gothic story, the narrator, who views the world through an androcentric lens, laments the disintegration of what he or she believes was once a harmonious social existence in which men and women, united through marriage, held equal status and shared both property and familial responsibilities. A key theme these texts share, therefore, is the deconstruction of domestic ideology by an unknown and uncontrollable force. In all four narratives, a mysterious figure appears, holding apparent supernatural powers, which in each case is linked to the alchemy. This gothic figure functions as the uncontrollable force that destroys the domestic idyll. In each text, the clash between the anarchic alchemical figure and the androcentric narrator shows that an ideology of gender polarization informs the narrator's domestic idyll, which is unmasked as social a structure founded on the perpetuation of male privilege. The significance of gender as a determining factor in creating individual identities and social roles is highlighted above issues of class and race in these texts because the entirely self-reliant, socially androgynous, and apparently immortal anarchic alchemists function primarily to unveil one of the key faultlines of an aristocratically based patriarchy: its reliance on the idea that institutions such as marriage, the family and primogeniture support a natural order in which the masculine is privileged over the feminine.

The unmasking of this faultline in the dominant gender ideology occurs because in each tale the anarchic alchemist's dissident androgynous presence and anarchic voice trigger a hysterical reaction in the androcentric narrator and other figures aligned to his or her ideological point of view. It should be understood that the term “dissident androgynous presence” does not signify a lack of definitive male or female physical characteristics, or a fusion of both. The anarchic alchemists are not androgynous in the popular sense (effeminate men, or masculine women). In a world in which gender is closely tied to social position, occupation, public and domestic roles, the anarchic alchemists are androgynous in the sense that because of their complete self-reliance, their abject social status and apparent magical powers they are uncategorisable according to the ideological factors that determine the narrator's sense of self in a world perceived as gendered according to fixed, natural male and female identities and roles. They are androgynous because as uncategorisable individuals, they refuse to perform the expected male and female roles and thus defy the customs and traditions that endow men and women with their specific identities and social statuses. In short, the anarchic alchemists exist outside of “the gender boundaries” that Lorber argues need to be defended to uphold “the gendered

social order” (Lorber, *Paradoxes* 27) He (and in the case of Poe’s tales, she) occupies no ideologically gendered social role and has no gendered status as patriarch or patriarchal dependent. The anarchic alchemists are neither family patriarchs nor angels of the house. The term “anarchic voice,” in this chapter, does not refer to the alchemical figures’ exposition of Godwinian philosophy (in the sense that some of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poetic speakers can be said to do). Their voice can be called anarchic because the narrators’ reaction to it reveals that it is an individual voice that in speaking refutes the existing laws and customs of communication and the shared modes of thought that allow communication to be effective and mutually supportive. The anarchic alchemist’s voice is irrepressible and seemingly fantastic, which threatens to erase the gendered socio-political boundaries that ensure the hegemony of the very androcentric culture to which he (or she in the case of *Wieland*) prescribes and which buttresses the stability of each narrator’s identity and social position within the world they idealize and the loss of which all lament.

Godwin’s St Leon: the Anarchic Alchemist and the Aristocratic Patriarch

In *Gothic & Gender: An Introduction* (2004), Donna Heiland argues that, in his gothic fictions, “Godwin delineates the patriarchal structures of British society, in more specific detail” than many of his fellow gothic novelists.¹ This is especially true of *St Leon*. In this novel, marriage, primogeniture, and the idealisation of the domestic sphere are central concerns. *St Leon* can be read as an investigation into the oppressive nature of domestic ideology and the institutions of marriage and primogeniture in a world in which patriarchal ideology and an androcentric worldview enjoy hegemonic status. *St Leon* tells the story of a sixteenth-century French aristocrat whose individual identity is founded on an adherence to a feudal gender ideology in which masculinity is equated with authority and in which women play only a supporting role to masculine valour. After St Leon’s disgrace and exile, the one-time aristocratic leader seems to find solace from what he perceives to be an aggressive and destructive masculine public world in what he describes as an ideal and apparently androgynous (but ultimately parasitic) domestic union with his wife Marguerite de Damville. The St Leon family retreats to a rural and private domestic idyll in the Swiss mountains. St Leon’s humble utopia is disturbed, however, by the appearance of a mysterious alchemist. In the course of his confessional narrative, St Leon reveals how the alchemist’s androgynous presence and anarchic voice unmasked his domestic idyll as equally founded on the patriarchal ideology and androcentric worldview that had dominated his earlier aristocratic existence at the outset of the novel. Before I analyse the function of the dissident androgynous presence and anarchic voice of the alchemist in *St Leon*, it is useful to give an outline of the most significant cultural schemata that informed the production of Godwin’s *St Leon*: 1) the 1790s politico-philosophical debates on gender roles, as represented most powerfully in the patriarchal rhetoric of Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and the British radicals’ reaction to this treatise; 2) the role that visionary utopianism played in the articulation of these alternatives to the Burkean stance; and 3) the presence of the cultural schema of alchemy in Godwin’s

¹ Donna Heiland, *Gothic & Gender, an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) 83.

seemingly rational, yet overtly utopian and visionary anarchist thought that forms the philosophical basis of most of his gothic novels.

During the 1790s, Godwin was not only famous for writing a popular, yet ideologically critical, gothic novel: *Things As They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794). In fact, a year earlier, Godwin had become famous after the publication of his radical proto-anarchist treatise *Political Justice* (1793). Like many of the radical philosophical treatises of the 1790s, *Political Justice*, like Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), is in certain respects a reply to Burke's *Reflections*. Significantly, it is as a reply to Burke that *Political Justice* engages most overtly with the coercive nature of the ideology of gender polarization that informs Burke's idea of the natural order of British society.

In his *Reflections*, Burke appeals to the abstract notion of inheritance as the keystone not only of the British constitution but of the social order in general. His argument initiated a host of hostile reactions from the British radicals who had supported the French Revolution in its infancy, Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft and Godwin amongst others. Burke's argument has become paradigmatic of the conservative reactions that followed the French Revolution. His *Reflections* define the British constitution as "an estate specially belonging to the people," which they inherited from their forefathers and which was to be "transmitted to our posterity."² The rhetoric of inheritance vindicates the established political order, the monarchy, as "an inheritable crown" with a supporting "inheritable peerage" as well as a "house of commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties, from a long line of ancestors." Ronald Paulson calls this vision of political order, "Burke's own distinctive metaphor of organic nature."³ For Burke, the concept of inheritance ensures "the happy effect of following nature, which is wisdom without reflection, and above it." Equally, "the idea of inheritance furnishes a sure principle of conservation, and a sure principle of transmission; without at all excluding a principle of improvement." In Burke's vision of the natural state of society, the British people are in fact one happy family with a seemingly benevolent father figure, the monarch, passing down his patrimony to the eldest and wisest sons, the aristocracy, in order to ensure the stability of the nation and the happiness of all. State and home form one organic whole in Burke's concept of the "condition of unchangeable constancy" that, according to him, characterises the nation (*RFR* 184).

Burke stresses a continuous "conformity to nature" as the best means of preserving the inherited freedoms and liberties that for him characterise the British state. Significantly, as his rhetoric implies, Burke's public politics project this natural state onto the individual by invoking natural gender identities for men and women, in which, by nature of the law of primogeniture, "a rational and manly freedom" becomes the ideal (*RFR* 185). This political philosophy of natural inheritance in an organic social structure necessarily privileges men above women because the natural society, as Burke pictures it in 1790, is founded on patriarchal laws. In Burke's picture of the natural state of human society, women figure only in the role of mothers to the sons of the nation. He criticizes the French Revolutionary mob for attacking a French queen who was the mother to "gallant men, in a

² Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J.C.D. Clark (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001) 183-4.

³ Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983) 58.

nation of men of honour, and cavaliers.” Burke laments that “never, never more shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom” (RFR 238). In this lament, Burke depicts the French Revolution as a family feud in which unruly sons unnaturally usurp the position of the parent who has nurtured them. Without the guidance of the mother, these unruly sons bring about unnatural chaos. 1790s public politics, as represented by Burke, is clearly defined by domestic discourse and underscored by an ideology of gender polarization in which women function as the nurturers of the men who inherit from their ancestors the privileged liberties given them by the British constitution.

Soon after the publication of Burke’s *Reflections*, Thomas Paine published *Rights of Man* (1791-2), which would become the most popular and infamous attack on Burke’s vision of the natural order of British society. Paulson demonstrates that Paine’s treatise reverses Burke’s use of organic metaphors by using the same metaphors of organic growth to argue for the inevitability of “the fundamental transformation of society,” rather than a naturally static state (Paulson 74). Mary Wollstonecraft was the first to recognise and publicly condemn Burke’s appeal to the patriarchal ploy of institutional male primogeniture as the natural foundation of any stable society. Her work specifically reveals how Burke’s concept of an organic social order in fact relies on a man-made ideology of gender polarization in which women were attributed secondary status. In her *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, she argues that primogeniture has historically ensured the dominance of the aristocracy to the detriment of most individuals including those members of the propertied classes who are not the heir to the family estate. Wollstonecraft recognises, as Paulson point out, “the relationship between English liberty and the servitude of women” (Paulson 80). From this insight she argues that Burke’s idea of the happy effect of following what he believes is nature has ensured that “one half of the human species, at least, have not souls.”⁴ According to Wollstonecraft, “Nature,” in Burke’s vision, “by making women little, smooth, delicate, fair creatures, never designed that they would exercise their reason to acquire the virtues that produce opposite, if not contradictory, feelings” (VRM 240). Pamela Clemit points out that Wollstonecraft’s writings on the whole stress the need for a harmonious relationship between mankind and nature.⁵ Wollstonecraft points out that in Burke’s natural order, by contrast, mankind must “be reckoned an ephemera” subject to the laws of inheritance, living only to pass on the family property and status to the next generation (VRM 20-1). For Wollstonecraft, Burke’s philosophy of inheritance as the natural state of society has in fact enslaved mankind to an artificial property system that perpetuates inequality and unnatural reverence of superiors, which is underscored by a gender ideology in which women are formed to be “vain inconsiderate dolls,” rather than equal partners (VRM 238).

In *Political Justice*, the most notorious radical publication of the period, Godwin does not directly address the way in which an ideology of gender polarization ensures the

⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman; A Vindication of the Rights of Woman Men; A Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1790, 1792, 1794; Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1993) 46.

⁵ Pamela Clemit, introduction, *St Leon* (1799; Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1994) xv.

hegemony of androcentric culture in his time. Like Paine, Godwin claims that naturally (by which he means free from external ideological influences) “man is in a state of perpetual mutation,” towards a better individual and consequently social form of being.⁶ His philosophy is characterised by a strong belief in the possibility of individual mental improvement, through the exercise of an innate moral sense. Godwin argues that any form of government stunts mankind’s tendency toward individual mental development because those in the governing positions will create laws and moral codes that will ensure their permanent empowerment. Because he believes that this is the nature of government, for Godwin “government is the perpetual enemy of change,” an artificial construct that stifles both individual and wider social progress (*PJ* 252). Godwin recognises that government is not a disinterested ruling body but has historically ensured the hegemony of those empowered by its laws and customs. It is through this insight that Godwin engages with the issues raised by Wollstonecraft about gender inequality.

In *Political Justice*, Godwin shows his awareness that the governing body has historically been a masculine elite in possession of property, representing patriarchal institutions such as the Church, Monarchy and Aristocracy, and which, in his own time, included the emerging new-money landed gentry and mercantile elite. By 1793, Godwin realised that the interrelatedness between property, government and power had led to the present situation in which the “legislation is in almost every country grossly the favourer of the rich against the poor” (*PJ* 93). While his critique of government stresses class issues by focussing on the property gap between empowered and subaltern groups, Godwin was not unaware of the significance role that an ideology of gender polarization played in buttressing the status quo (see *PJ* 392). Godwin is aware that in the present form of government, “women and children lean with an insupportable weight upon the efforts of the man” (*PJ* 89). For Godwin, androcentric forms of government and social institutions have created an “incontestably artificial” society which is unnaturally stratified into classes and spheres of action that with the aid of institutions such as law, education, marriage, the idealisation of the domestic family unit and a masculine public sphere of politics and economics work to sustain the hegemonic position of the masculine ruling elite, while ensuring women’s (as well as all other non-propertied individuals), dependence on this masculine power base.⁷

Jürgen Habermas has theorised in more detail how an artificially constructed ideology of gender polarization during the eighteenth century worked to ensure masculine hegemony by projecting male and female genders onto separate social spheres. He explains that in the course of the eighteenth century, “the market had replaced the household” as the locus for economic activity, and through internationalisation and its subsequent interactions within state legislature increasingly took on a public character.⁸ This public sphere of politics and commodity exchange was by default a masculine sphere since the laws that governed it recognised only men as the possible property owners. Within

⁶ William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 3rd ed. (1798; Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1985) 253.

⁷ Peter Marshall, ed., *The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin* (London: Freedom Press, 1985) 140.

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederic Lawrence (London: Polity Press, 1999) 20.

bourgeois culture, the only possible participatory role for women was that of consumer or domestic labourer, two ideological boundary-crossing feminine roles that remained under strict surveillance and depended for their validity upon the head of the household. Even when working-class women entered the factory, eighteenth-century marriage laws ensured that their property would remain in the hands of the husband. Because these laws could be changed, the masculine order that dominated the public sphere attempted to “justify their retention there,” as Bridget Hill explains, by expounding a gender ideology in which men’s natural sphere became that of the workplace, commerce and politics, while it stressed “the moral duty of wives and mothers to devote themselves exclusively to home and family.”⁹ This gender ideology of separate spheres for men and women pressured individual women into remaining within the domestic sphere, since it was only within this sphere that femininity was publicly recognized as a marker for identity. As a consequence, men were equally cajoled into leaving the home, to enter into the public world of politics and commodity exchange so as to consolidate the dominant status their masculine gender allotted them. Should they remain at home, men were in danger of being judged effeminate, which would undermine their inherited liberty and privilege.

Significantly, Habermas stresses that these polarized spheres, in Godwin’s time were not actually but only ideologically separated. In reality, they were intimately connected spheres of human action and thought – graphically better represented as two concentric circles than separate spheres – the masculine public sphere encompassing the feminine private sphere. The private sphere of the home and family, Habermas explains, “played its precisely defined role in the process of the reproduction of capital.” Not only did it provide the site of product consumption but, as Hill also stresses, “as an agency of society it served especially the task of that difficult mediation through which, in spite of the illusion of freedom, strict conformity with societally necessary requirements was brought about” (Habermas 47). Godwin’s first gothic novel, *Caleb Williams*, illustrates Godwin’s concern with the coercive effects of conformity to ideologically prescribed social roles and the dissident potential of individual acts of non-conformity. In this gothic novel of domestic and public tyranny, the servant Caleb suffers persecution to the point of madness after his initial transgression of social decorum leads him to uncover a much greater social transgression by his seemingly benevolent aristocratic master, Falkland, who has murdered a rival squire in order to ensure his empowered position. While in *Caleb Williams* Godwin is more overtly concerned with delineating the coercive nature of dividing up body politic into various classes with unequal rights, in *St Leon*, he focuses on the institutions of the nuclear family and marriage. Godwin uses the schema of alchemy to unmask the faultlines of an ideology of domesticity founded on patriarchal privilege that prescribes to men and women complementary, but unequal, and rigidly polarized male and female identities.

Andrew McCann has explained that the institutions of marriage and the family, during the 1790s, helped to underscore this notion of inherently separate, yet complementary, gendered spheres of action for men and women. Both institutions, he argues, allowed “the male family head...to return to the hearth not as patriarch nor as an economic agent, but as a human being characterized by the uncoerced rationality and

⁹ Bridget Hill, *Women, Work, and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) 123.

affection that he shared in common with other family members.”¹⁰ The man in the home completed what appeared on the surface to be a social and spiritual androgynous ideal of harmony between the sexes. Separate spheres ideology not only created and fostered the illusion of naturally complementary gender roles for men and women by stressing that in a union by marriage they formed an ideal androgynous whole. Such ideology simultaneously veiled the legal inequalities that defined marriage and ensured a masculine socio-political hegemony. As McCann argues:

this myth of the bourgeois family also managed to efface both the conditions that secured the legal authority of the male family head, and the residual economic relations in which marriage was seen as a contractual exchange of property, women, status and social legitimation (McCann 10).

Hill also emphasises that the idealisation of marriage as a utopian, socially androgynous institution during the eighteenth century, veiled the masculine privilege it ensured in both the public and private sphere. She draws attention to the fact that “the main purpose of the law as far as it concerned wives was to define the property rights that must be surrendered by them on marriage” (Hill 197).

Parts of Godwin’s *Political Justice* attack precisely this institutionalised expectation of conformity the masculine public sphere’s demands of the private individual and the polarized gender roles with their institutionalised unequal statuses, which privileged masculinity. Godwin argues that marriage, as it was legally defined in the 1790s, is one of the greatest of social evils because he recognises it as a public legal ceremony that stands at the basis of the creation of the idealised private family unit which ensures the hegemony of androcentric culture. Marriage, presented as the ideal complementary union of husband and wife, Godwin realises, is in fact intrinsically tied to legal and cultural coercive institutions and practices, which police the ideological gender boundaries that ensure masculine hegemony. Godwin’s insight into the ideological nature of marriage and its privileging of men over women is foregrounded because he in speaking about these issues he always uses economic metaphors. In the first edition of *Political Justice* marriage is “an affair of property, and the worst of all properties,” turning what he believes should be an equal partnership based on mutual affection and intellectual esteem into a process of economic exchange in which political power is at stake (AW 83). In the third edition of his *Enquiry*, Godwin still argues against marriage as a viable social institution, because in its present state it is “a monopoly, and the worst of all monopolies” in which “so long as I [the man] seek, by despotic and artificial means, to maintain my possession of a woman, I am guilty of the most odious selfishness.” For Godwin, as long as public law created by and for the dominant masculine order intrudes on the individual’s private life and affections, there can be no equal relations between women and men. Within this socio-political paradigm, Godwin argues, women are simply not considered equal partners by law, but can be defined only as an “imaginary prize,” to be won in a perpetual power game

¹⁰ Andrew McCann, *Cultural Politics in the 1790s: Literature, Radicalism and the Public Sphere* (London: MacMillan, 1999) 10.

between men. Godwin's concludes that "the institution of marriage is made a system of fraud," since women like slaves or wage labourers are cajoled into the service of property-holding men, rather than finding empowerment in their own self-chosen sphere of action as social and political equals (*PJ* 762).

Godwin's analysis of the British social structure during the 1790s is one of institutionalised inequality in which an ideology of gender polarization works to buttress the institutions that for centuries have ensured masculine domination and have privileged the androcentric point of view and a patriarchal social structure. Significantly, this highly rational critique of the status quo is founded on Godwin's very individual and visionary utopian vision of how such institutionalised inequality can be eradicated. In essence, his deductive reasoning that leads him to a critique of the present is a means to logically make possible a visionary goal that as yet has to remain a purely imaginative construction. It is his penchant for using a visionary imagination to form utopian political theories that most likely made the legends of alchemy the right cultural schema for Godwin, since the alchemist's magical powers, immortality and unlimited wealth would openly challenge a status quo founded on the patriarchal law of primogeniture and an economic ideology supported by institutionalised property inequality.

Although Godwin's ideas in *Political Justice* are presented to the reader by means of rational argument, they are not founded in reason alone. One of Godwin's biographers, Don Locke, titled his account of the author's life and work *A Fantasy of Reason* (1980). Marie Roberts also points out that, in fact, "Godwin insisted...upon the interdependency of rationality and the creative imagination, reason and passion" (M. Roberts 26). The visionary aspects of Godwin's philosophy and his plight as a radical in reactionary times has led several critics to construct a link between the figure of the alchemist in *St Leon* and his creator – between the magical powers of alchemy and Godwin's anarchist ideals. An investigation into the similarities between the cultural schema of alchemy and the intellectual position and visionary anarchism of Godwin can strengthen a reading of the alchemist in *St Leon* as an abject figure with a dissident androgynous presence and an anarchic voice, who reveals the hegemonic domestic ideology to be a thinly veiled patriarchal tyranny as it uncovers one its major faultlines: the fact that domestic bliss is only bliss when viewed through an androcentric lens.

J.M. Roberts explains how radical political reform and visionary philosophy went hand in hand during the 1790s. He argues that despite the dominant presence of Enlightenment rationalism in Godwin's time, the second half of the eighteenth century was also "the Golden Age of Mystification."¹¹ He points out how "in sheer numbers, there have probably never been so many secret sects and societies in Europe as between 1750 and 1789." In turn, he explains that these societies, while often derived from the Masonic tradition, proliferated into all kinds of offshoots, and that some new independent societies also saw the light of day. While he divides secret societies into three main sub-categories, he states that "there is no sharp line at the boundaries where the three classes meet" (J.M. Roberts 90). In the wake of the French Revolution, secret societies, mystical, magical, or

¹¹ J.M. Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972) 105.

rational, all blend together to form an esoteric threat to the dominant order's reliance on a rationalist outlook to interpret the world around them.

In Godwin's time, the late eighteenth-century fear of esoteric subversion was best articulated by John Robinson in his *Proofs of Conspiracy* (1797) and by Abbé Barruel's *Memoirs, Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (1797-8), both of which Godwin had read, Clemit explains in her introduction to *St Leon*. In these paranoid accounts of the origins of the French Revolution and the dangers of secret societies to the status quo in general, secret orders of various types are identified and blamed for the fall of the ancient regime. The most powerfully present order in the late eighteenth-century paranoid mind was the Bavarian Illuminati, a German Masonic-style secret order founded by Adam Weishaupt at Ingolstadt in 1776. Roberts explains that "like the Rosicrucians, the Illuminists were intent upon world reform through mystical illumination" (J.M. Roberts 105). They were "anti-clerical" and held "egalitarian" beliefs, ultimately seeking "a peaceful transformation of public attitudes and morals." Aware of the fact that their ideas were highly unorthodox and subject to censure and persecution from the dominant order, they attempted to achieve their political aims through "the machinery of secret societies" (J.M. Roberts 120-124).

While reactionary accounts of the revolutionary fervour of the 1790s paint this radical secret society as a danger to the status quo, for a radical such as Godwin, their ideas must have been at least appealing, even if their style – a secret, hierarchical Masonic grade system of illumination – went against his own philosophy of strictly uncoerced individual rational illumination and sincere public discussion. Significantly, Markman Ellis explains that the individuals belonging to this order had links to the cultural schema of alchemy because they used secret names "derived from classical and alchemical sources."¹² Christopher McIntosh points out that Weishaupt was "repelled by the alchemical and other 'follies' of the Rosicrucians" (McIntosh 103). This did not stop the Illuminati from being popularly judged as an alchemical order not dissimilar to the Rosicrucians Weishaupt so despised. When Baron von Knigge joined the order in 1779, Roberts explains, he brought to the order a fascination with "the mysterious and mystical," linking even the rational Bavarian Illuminati with magical practices (J.M. Roberts 124). Ellis is insightful in describing this mythical radical order as "the spectre" that "haunted Europe" during the 1790s. It is not important whether this society and its individual members actually had a large-scale political influence on the European political stage at the time. What is significant is that they were popularly believed to operate invisibly, magically even, and were feared as harbingers of chaos, rather than progress and civilization.

Significantly, Roberts explains that "by the end of the 1780s enormous confusion existed about the whole world of masonry, secret societies and sects; everything was by then so muddled up that the uninitiated could not be expected to make distinctions where even adepts often found themselves at sea" (J.M. Roberts 131). As mentioned above, the myth of the Illuminati was complemented by the newly-fuelled interest in the legend surrounding the seventeenth-century Rosicrucians, whose links with the alchemical legends surrounding the mythical Christian Rosenkranz, endowed their political agendas with the aura of magic and the supernatural. McIntosh explains that, initially, "the Brotherhood of

¹² Markman Ellis, *The History of Gothic Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000) 138.

the Rosy Cross...devoted themselves to healing the sick and to spreading wisdom...always working incognito.” Like the Illuminati, but in a much more visionary and mystical manner, they had offered “a vision of society nourished by ancient wisdom while advancing fearlessly into the future” (McIntosh 24). As McIntosh explains, while there existed “a wide gulf” between seventeenth-century Rosicrucianism and the eighteenth-century German sect, characterised more by a form of enlightenment despotism, J.M. Roberts contends that all these legends were amalgamated in the popular mind into a general idea of secret, invisible, mystically underscored radical reform (McIntosh 29). Crosbie Smith has added extra weight to the idea that secret orders, radical reform, and alchemical powers were all part of a single cultural schema during the 1790s by arguing that apart from the legends of Rosicrucians and Illuminati, “‘enthusiasts’ for natural philosophy, often associated with radical religious sects, with superstition and even with magic, were commonplace in late eighteenth-century England.”¹³ He explains that “given access to the powers of nature, these dangerous individuals were themselves powers for social, political and religious instability. Natural philosophy itself, which offered a route to stability and perfection, if left unpoliced, could easily function as a path to chaos and revolution” (Smith 49). The presence of an alchemist in *St Leon*, then, does not have to be read as merely a fantastic gothic device that would ensure the novel a popular readership. Godwin, in fact, was quite serious about his alchemist. Clemit argues that “Godwin’s reading of the works of Hermes Trismegistus while planning *St Leon* in 1795 indicates his attraction to the original visions of the occultists in the Hermetic and Paracelsian traditions,” linking at least his reading, if not his actions to the schema of mystical reformism alive in the 1790s (*StL* xviii). Marie Roberts’ research into Godwin’s interest in alchemical lore shows that he also read Bacon’s *History of Life and Death* and Paracelsus’ treatises on long life and the transmutations of metals (M. Roberts 40). In his preface to *St Leon*, Godwin acknowledges a debt to Dr. John Campbell’s *Hermippus Redivivus*, a book containing various legends of alchemy including one about Nicolas Flamel, whose legend was recounted briefly in chapter two (*StL* xxxi).

Godwin’s later work, *An Essay on Sepulchres* (1809), shows the anarchist philosopher reflecting on his role as radical voice during a reactionary period and provides further evidence of the visionary nature of his thought. In this essay, Godwin no longer sees himself as a pure rationalist, but describes himself in the nature of a hermetic visionary who stands closer to a Blakean type of mystical radicalism than the rationalism of the French Philosophes who had influenced him so much in his earlier career. By the early nineteenth century, Godwin seems to have become more self-reflexive about the nature of his radicalism. He becomes aware of how much his intellectual opponents, by means of character assassination, have managed to nullify the potentially practical and utopian effects of *Political Justice*. By 1809, Godwin’s philosophy had become the object of ridicule, the wild speculations of a dangerous idealist, lacking those important ingredients of common sense and political utilitarianism to make them practical alternatives to the status quo. In *The Spirit of the Age* (1824), William Hazlitt sums up this view of Godwin when he describes him as “another Prospero” who “uttered syllables that with their enchanted breath were to

¹³ Crosbie Smith, “Frankenstein and Natural Magic,” in *Frankenstein, Creation and Monstrosity* (London: Reaction Books, 1994) 49.

change the world, and might almost stop the stars in their course.”¹⁴ While Godwin’s initial mode of argument was very much influenced by the French philosophes, the visionary sections of *Political Justice* on longevity and mind-over-matter theory had already revealed a side of Godwin that clashed with his outward stance as rationalist radical.

In *Sepulchres*, Godwin becomes a metaphorical necromancer when he stresses his wish “to live in intercourse with the illustrious dead of all ages” and calls to “let them live, as my friends, my philosophers, my instructors, and my guides” (*ES* 78). Necromancy, as understood in Godwin’s *Lives of the Necromancers* (1834), is the magical art of foretelling the future by communication with the dead. While Godwin dismisses actual magical practice, for him, as for the Illuminati or Rosicrucians, illustrious men such as Socrates, Plato, or Chaucer can be recalled to life since they “are still with us in their stories, in their words, in their writings, in the consequences that do not cease to flow fresh from what they did” (*ES* 83). In the same essay, Godwin also expresses his realisation that “whatever is wholly new, is sure to be pronounced by the mass of mankind to be impracticable.”¹⁵ Not unlike Hazlitt’s portrait of him in *The Spirit of the Age*, he explains that he is “more inclined to the opinion of the immaterialists, than of the materialists” (*ES* 5-6). While Godwin is speaking here ten years after the publication of *St Leon* and even longer since the first edition of *Political Justice*, this portrait illustrates to some extent the visionary utopian nature of his thought which seems to rely on the possibility of the individual mind to initially imagine a utopia, to envision perfection before a rational attempt can be made to achieve it.

When, in 1971, Murray Bookchin speaks of “the non-repressive utopia envisioned by anarchism,” which can replace what he deems, like Godwin, “the most irrational, indeed the most artificial, society in history,” he is in fact continuing the visionary anarchist tradition that Godwin had initiated in certain parts of *Political Justice* (Bookchin 14). According to Bookchin,

an anarchist or anarcho-communist society presupposes the abolition of private property, the distribution of goods according to individual needs, the complete dissolution of commodity relationships, the rotation of work, and a decisive reduction in the time devoted to labor (Bookchin 19).

Bookchin’s vision of an anarchic utopia and his sense that the remaking of society needs to be realised through the remaking of the psyche, closely echoes Godwin’s thought in the 1790s and how it developed in the early nineteenth century. The continuity between the anarchist thought of Godwin and Bookchin can help explain Godwin’s interest in the political power of the individual imagination and the presence and effect of the irrational and seemingly supernatural in culture. Marshall explains that Bookchin, writing at a time when the irrational was being championed by a thriving counter-culture, “unabashedly places himself in the utopian tradition,” and that for him “utopia is not a dreamy vision, but rather a matter of foresight” (Marshall, *Impossible* 604). Similarly, *Political Justice* does not

¹⁴ P.P. Howe, ed., *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, Vol. XI (London: Dent, 1932) 16.

¹⁵ William Godwin, *Essay on Sepulchres* (London: W. Miller, 1809) vii.

champion the return to or emulation of a more civilized past; it expounds future possibilities of utopia in which what is now deemed impossible will become commonplace.

Like Bookchin, Godwin believes that “those things are to be cherished, which tend to elevate us above our ordinary sphere, and to abstract us from common and everyday concerns” (*ES* 29, 30). While the Hermetic philosophers of old found individual illumination through spiritual gnosis, in his visionary philosophy, Godwin replaces the Deity with individual human wisdom, a wisdom characterised not merely by reason, but also by the presence of men of powerful imagination such as Milton, whose Satan he admires for his defiance of “that extreme inequality of rank and power which the creator assumed” (*PJ* 309). Even though Godwin bases his philosophy on rational arguments, he expresses a vision of utopia that is as off-kilter with the general structure of feeling of his day as that of the alchemists was in earlier times. In this way his thought expresses continuity with both the hermetic utopian philosophers of the past, as well as the visionary utopians such as Bookchin, who would follow.

Apart from studying Hermes Trismegistus and other alchemical texts in the course of composing *St Leon*, Godwin also sympathises with the plight of the experimental scientists of his day.¹⁶ Like Bookchin, he believes that scientific enterprise can lead to positive social reform if used correctly.¹⁷ This can explain how some of the general creeds of Godwin’s philosophy show similarities between what is now perceived as alchemical thought, the kind of thinking that characterises contemporary experimental scientists such as those working according to the Gaia hypothesis. For instance, just as one of the core alchemical ideas is the belief that material changes influence mental changes and vice versa, Godwin believes that “it is in corporeal structure as in intellectual impressions” and it was “the continual tendency of the mind to modify its material engine in a particular way” (*PJ* 105). Similar to the alchemist’s belief that everything in the universe is in an integral part of a unified whole, Godwin believes that “everything in the universe is linked and united together. No event, however minute and imperceptible, is barren of a train of consequences, however comparatively evanescent those consequences may in some instances be found” (*PJ* 108). The alchemist’s macrocosm/microcosm theory, in which each individual plays his or her part in contributing to the whole, is also reflected in Godwin’s thought: “each man is but the part of a great system, and all that he has is but so much wealth to be put to the account of the general stock” (*PJ* 178). The alchemists’ idea of unity in diversity is reflected in Godwin’s belief that “among the individuals of our species, we actually find that there are not two alike,” but that yet “we are partakers of a common nature, and the same causes that contribute to the benefit of one will contribute to the benefit of another” (*PJ* 181,183). Godwin even expresses the alchemical idea that “everything in man may be said to be in a state of flux; he is a Proteus whom we know not how to detain” (*PJ* 186). Such ideas, along with others that will be discussed shortly below, distinguish Godwin’s philosophy from the enlightenment rationalism dominant in his day.

Godwin is a highly unorthodox thinker who balances rational argument and a visionary imagination. Therefore, it not a surprise to find that the last book to issue from

¹⁶ See Marie Roberts, *Gothic Immortals*, chapter 2 and Pamela Clemit’s introduction to *St Leon*.

¹⁷ See Bookchin, “Towards a Liberatory Technology,” in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, 83-140.

his pen was a history titled: *Lives of the Necromancers; or, an Account of the Most Eminent Persons in Successive Ages, Who Have Claimed for Themselves, or to Whom Has Been Imputed by Others, the Exercise of Magical Powers*. In this critical history of the effects of magic in society, Godwin dismisses the material practice of alchemy, like that of necromancy, as a product of the “lawless imaginations of man.”¹⁸ Godwin shows, however, that he is aware that the powerful imagination of mankind, probably because of its very lawlessness, has allowed individuals of great intellect (one wonders if Godwin here refers to himself) to move beyond “all that is” and to imagine “all that is not” (LN vi-ii). The extended title of his *Lives of the Necromancers*, quoted above, shows that Godwin is aware of the fact that magic is not something real, but something that individuals claim to have, or that people believe others to hold because they cannot rationally explain how they have come across their knowledge or are able to perform their scientific practice. Godwin’s final work is not so much a denunciation of magic as it is a history of the power of the individual imagination to move beyond reason into fantastic realms, as Godwin himself did when he turned from philosophy to gothic fiction. His stress throughout the book lies on the importance of recognising which ideological lens is used to view the magician and his magical practice and the effect such a perspective has on the plight of the supposedly evil magician.

While many treatises on witchcraft, alchemy and other forms of magic were written from the viewpoint of those who denounce it, in *Lives of the Necromancers* Godwin not only shows insight into the metaphorical powers of fantastic legends, but takes an oppositional perspective when he draws attention to the way in which “criminal jurisprudence and the last severities of the law have been called forth to an amazing extent to exterminate witches and witchcraft” (LN viii). Always making clear that he does not believe in magic, Godwin shows his awareness of the fact that in times when people believed in magic, the dominant order had actively sought to persecute magicians of all sorts. Godwin realised that witches and magician experienced a similar plight to the radical philosophers of his day: “to be accused was almost the same thing as to be convicted” (LN 175). Discussing the lives of the most eminent alchemists, Godwin describes how Roger Bacon “suffered much punishment for his investigations” into alchemy and was eventually “stoned to death” (LN 280-1).¹⁹ Godwin draws attention to the legends surrounding Agrippa’s magical and alchemical powers and the “great persecutions” he had to endure, adding that he was “repeatedly imprisoned” (LN 322). Significantly, Godwin draws attention to Agrippa’s “treatise on the superiority of the Female Sex,” linking an alchemical legend to revisionist gender ideology. He also shows how this legendary alchemist and scholar of the occult undermined the economic system in his day by paying his bills in counterfeit currency, and that he was forced to flee after having his reputation slandered (LN 323). From an author who denounces the unequal distribution of property in much of his writings, such an observation does not have to be taken as a condemnation of a criminal act.

Godwin’s picture of the alchemist in history is that of the esoteric outcast who rebels against authority and undermines dominant ideologies. His portrayal of Paracelsus in

¹⁸ William Godwin, *Lives of the Necromancers* (1834; New York: Gordon Press, 1976) 18.

¹⁹ Godwin’s account of Agrippa is very similar to the one painted in chapter two of this dissertation.

Lives of the Necromancers resembles the one most often told today, in which Paracelsus is depicted as a “wanderer in the world,” who practices “magic and alchemy” and who, after a short stint as a university professor, is forced to embrace an outcast nomadic state. Godwin similarly describes John Dee as an outcast who is interested in alchemy and magic, and stands in opposition to the establishment. While Godwin may reject the magical content of these alchemists’ writings, he clearly understands the predicament of these unorthodox legendary figures as individuals in possession of superior, as yet secret and politically outlawed knowledge, hounded by the establishment that fears that the widespread adoption of the alchemist’s ideas would undermine its authority. His research for *St Leon* may well have brought him to this understanding, even though he did not express it in print until 1834. It may also have fostered his self-portrait as a visionary radical in *Sepulchres*.

While Godwin scorns any belief in the supernatural, he clearly recognises magic as a cultural schema in which the individual by force of the imagination can rise above a mundane state of coercion and into utopian speculation. He writes in *Lives of the Necromancers* that

the errors of man are worthy to be recorded, not only as beacons to warn us from the shelves where our ancestors have made shipwreck, but even as something honourable to our nature, to show how high a generous ambition could soar, through forbidden paths, and in things too wonderful for us (NL 4).

Lives of the Necromancers, therefore, can be read as both a denunciation of magic as material practice and an acknowledgement that the highly unorthodox nature of his own thought has a basis in a more visionary philosophical tradition. His anarchism is founded on his belief that each individual, not coerced by institutions but guided by benevolent tutors – from beyond the grave if possible – should rise above the mass of mankind by himself through moral introspection. The enlightened individual could then bring this superior knowledge to the unenlightened by means of public discussion and non-coercive influence over others, slowly increasing the stock of enlightened individuals until all had found individual rational illumination – making government, law and other coercive social institutions superfluous and bringing about his conception of utopia. In *Political Justice*, Godwin argues, in a moment of pure visionary speculation, that mankind thus illuminated can reach a state of extreme longevity; can move beyond the need for sleep; beyond illness; and beyond the necessity of individual labour above a few hours a day (PJ 770-777).

Gary Kelly emphasises the similarity between Godwin’s plight as a radical philosopher in 1790s Britain, dominated by reactionary conservatism, and the medieval alchemist’s plight in a society dominated by Christian hegemony. He writes, “like the natural philosopher, Godwin felt himself to be in possession of great and terrible secrets – the philosophy of *Political Justice* – which he could not use for the benefit of mankind, but which on the contrary, made him an object of fear and loathing” (Kelly, *Jacobin* 209). Later he argues that “*St Leon* registers Godwin’s sense, acquired from personal experience since publishing *Things As They Are*, of the cost in social ostracism and domestic loss of being a

‘philosopher’ and ‘philanthropist’.”²⁰ Kelly emphasises Godwin’s connections to radical thinkers like Joseph Priestley, who was “especially suspect to the ignorant mob because of his scientific experiments” and whose thought and practice, like that of the alchemists, became stigmatised, when the reactionary fervour increased, as dangerous to the status quo (Kelly, *Jacobin* 214). Marie Roberts explains that some unorthodox strands of scientific thought of the 1790s, in their radicalism, indeed address scientific goals congruent with alchemical ideals: “the expectation that immortality would materialize into a scientific reality was in circulation when Godwin started writing *St Leon*.” She argues that even such enlightened thinkers as Descartes, Bacon, Franklin, and Condorcet were all “committed to the view that material immortality was a distinct possibility.” Godwin’s friend Holcroft was also “an advocate of the mind over matter doctrine” (M. Roberts 28). Ellis also argues that “enlightenment science had its own politics, explicitly identified with its cultural context in society, urban life and the city, and implicitly allied with radical political philosophy elsewhere concerned with anti-clericism, utopianism and human perfectibility” (Ellis 121-1). This cultural context in which radical political reform, experimental science and the existence of secret societies all merge to become a single esoteric and magically endowed threat to the dominant order, handed Godwin the schema of alchemy as a useful metaphorical vehicle with which to construct a gothic novel that had as its purpose not to show the innate evil of magical schemers, but to show the plight of the radical reformer, feared and persecuted by the dominant order for his professed superior knowledge that had the potential to alter the status quo. Rather than inhibiting the exposition of radical ideas in fiction, the figure of the alchemist and the genre of the gothic novel, through its ability to take seriously the supernatural, the irrational, and the visionary imagination, became the literary vehicles that best suited Godwin’s radical enterprise.

Godwin’s alchemical magico-political tale, *St Leon*, is set in the middle of the sixteenth century. On one level, it is a narrative in which a disgraced and poverty-stricken aristocrat confesses how he is duped into becoming the pupil of a world-weary alchemist, who is looking for an heir to whom he can pass on his magical powers, so he can finally find peace in death. These magical powers destroy Reginald de St Leon’s family and doom him, in turn, to immortal solitary wandering across the globe. St Leon’s continuous tone of lament cajoles the reader into interpreting the period of rural domestic family life and gentile poverty he experienced just before the intrusion of the alchemist as the ideal state of society. From St Leon’s perspective, his wife Marguerite, who dies protecting her family, becomes a martyr in the cause of an idyllic domesticity. Maggie Kilgour argues that, amongst other concerns, *St Leon* “included portraits of [Godwin’s] wife and of marriage as an ideal” (Kilgour 96). St Leon’s confessional narrative, if read as a vessel for Godwin’s voice, suggests that the radical philosopher moved away from his critique of domesticity and marriage in the first edition of *Political Justice* and now vindicates the family and human feelings and emotions in his novel. Kate Ferguson Ellis also aligns herself to what can be defined as the privileged reading of *St Leon* – a gothic novel that eulogises eighteenth-century domesticity – when she interprets the relationship between the aristocrat and his wife as “perfect in every respect.” She finds it “the more surprising,” therefore, “that St

²⁰ Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830* (London: Longman, 1989) 37.

Leon ever strays from this ideal.”²¹ While St Leon’s confessional style and tone of lament evoke emotions of sympathy for his plight and make his praise of the family seem a genuine defence for domestic ideology, the reader does not necessarily have to take St Leon’s version of his story as the central message of this gothic novel.

A.A. Markley sums up Godwin’s theory expressed in the *Enquirer* essay “On Choice of Reading” (1797), that “the moral tendency of a work may often be diametrically opposite to the moral end; that is, from the one pervading moral which seems to be the intended result of the fiction.”²² St Leon is the narrator throughout the novel. His voice, however, while it is the dominant voice in the novel, does not necessarily represent the definitive moral tenor, or the single possible interpretation of his tale of woe. Sinfield argues that “all stories comprise within themselves the ghosts of the alternative stories they are trying to exclude” (Sinfield, *Faultlines* 47). By paying attention to the discrepancy between St Leon’s confessional narrative, his tone of lament, and the action of the story, a dissident reading can be made that places at the centre of Godwin’s novel the story of the alchemist and his supernatural powers instead of the aristocrat St Leon and his domestic tragedy. In this reading, the focus lies not on how St Leon becomes the dupe of the alchemist, but on the alchemist’s role as unveiler of the faultlines in the domestic ideology that informed the aristocratic social structure in which St Leon, by default of his masculinity, plays the most significant role.

The alchemist, in fact, is a victim of government repression because his immortality and supernatural powers threaten the hegemony of the dominant androcentric order. Through his very abject status and social and his resistance to social and individual categorisation, the alchemist is endowed with a dissident androgynous presence and an anarchic voice that unmasks the domestic sphere, so valiantly defended to the death by Marguerite and destroyed by St Leon, as reliant on patriarchal ideology and legal institutions such as marriage and primogeniture that privilege male domination and female subordination. What this dissident reading of the role of the alchemist reveals is that St Leon’s androcentric worldview and confessional narrative have pushed Marguerite into the very position of the woman that Wollstonecraft had so maligned: “immured in their families groping in the dark” (*VRW* 67). The alchemist’s appearance in the novel, rather than handing St Leon a lifeline, works to reveal that the disgraced aristocrat can only defend his privileged status by hysterically trying to regain his sense of innate superiority as aristocratic patriarch.

In volume one, Reginald de St Leon explains how he had been raised on sixteenth-century aristocratic ideals of manhood. He had been expected to perform the role of chivalric representative of his people and warrior for his country. He grows up with vivid memories of his ancestors’ part in the wars of the Holy Land and was himself present, only five years old, at the festival at the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Such a patriarchal aristocratic spectacle ensured that Reginald became a worthy successor to his father whose

²¹ Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1989) 161.

²² A.A. Markely, “The Truth in Masquerade: Cross-Dressing in Mary Shelley’s Short Stories,” in *Mary Shelley’s Fictions: From Frankenstein to Falkner*, eds. Michael Eberle-Sinatra and Nora Cook (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000) 124.

valiant deeds had given him the title “*the father of his people*” (*StL* 3). In keeping with the hegemonic ideology of sixteenth-century Europe and its public masculine ideal, the youthful St Leon is obsessed with “the pursuit of military exercises, and the cultivation of everything that could add to the strength, agility, or grace of my body, and to the adventurousness and enterprise of my mind.” St Leon’s description of his mother’s equally androcentric point of view and interpellation into aristocratic ideology makes clear how much St Leon was raised to play the role expected of a *man* of his time: “my mother loved my honour and my fame more than she loved my person” (*StL* 4). Like Falkland, in Godwin’s earlier novel, St Leon grows up to learn that “there is nothing that I know worth living for but honour,” since a man of honour is a man of power (*StL* 10). Consequently, he revels in his “passion for the theatre of glory” and sets out to become as great a warrior as his father (*StL* 7). St Leon’s description of his family heritage and the family’s powerful status within mid-sixteenth-century France reveal their world to be androcentric, a world in which domestic mothers raise public patriarchs, fathers of their people, natural and revered rulers whose empowerment is ensured by the continual public parade of a military-style masculinity based on superior physical as well as mental strength. As such St Leon’s confession shows him to hold what in Godwin’s own time became known as the Burkean position on the natural state of men and women in society. The novel’s sixteenth-century setting emphasises Godwin’s use of the gothic past to explain how things came to be at present, showing that the hegemonic cultural norms Burke defended are not the result of civilization’s natural progress but artificial constructs.

Once St Leon’s military muscles can no longer be flexed, however, the valiant knight is easily corrupted by the decadent Parisian court culture, which is no longer able to parade a natural masculine authority through public deeds of valour and honour and becomes obsessed with the public show of material wealth to ensure its social privilege. The most significant social factor that buttresses their dominant status becomes the unequal distribution of wealth. Individual aristocrats are shown now to compete amongst each other at gambling tables for the honorary title of the most wealthy, and thus the most worthy and most powerful, individual. In order to buttress his now fragile masculinity, St Leon takes to gambling as well, but loses all: property, name, social status and with it his, once great, public authority. As a result, he has forfeited his right to be “father of his people” and comes to rely on the father of his future wife for sustenance and sympathy.

By recounting his early valiant warrior youth and subsequent aristocratic degeneration in volume one, St Leon’s confession illustrates Godwin’s concern that “wealth, by the sentiments of servility and dependence it produces, makes the rich man stand forward as the principle object of general esteem and deference.” St Leon’s Parisian debaucheries among the decadent aristocracy reveal simultaneously that “to acquire wealth and to display it is...the universal passion” among men, and that “there is nothing more pernicious to the human mind than the love of opulence” (*PJ* 727). St Leon’s confession, so far, echoes Godwin’s critique of the aristocracy and his condemnation of institutionalised inequality of property to the letter. But, as yet, the important role an ideology of gender polarization plays in buttressing his sense of self is unclear.

Importantly, St Leon confesses that it was his “encounter with that incomparable woman, who afterwards became the partner of my life, and the mother of my children” that rescued him from “two years in habits of life and a mode of expense extremely injurious to my patrimony” (*StL* 33). Crucial here is not only that St Leon recognizes that he is dependent on his patrimony for his social status, and that his life as a gambler in Paris was threatening this privileged position, but also the way in which his confession reveals how he viewed Marguerite Louise Isabeau de Damville through the androcentric lens that his upbringing had taught him to adopt. In keeping with the aristocratic ideology in which he was raised, he views Marguerite not as a woman in her own right, but as the saviour of his patrimony and as the mother of his children who by the law of primogeniture will inherit his wealth and so will continue the St Leon lineage. By stating that “at nineteen she looked five years younger than she was” and that she had a voice of childish simplicity, St Leon is conforming to what Wollstonecraft believed was the typical androcentric gaze: “flattering [women’s] fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone” (*VRW* 73). This androcentric infantilization of Marguerite buttresses St Leon’s masculinity, which has weakened due to his loss of property and consequently his loss of social status. St Leon uses dehumanising similes when he describes her step as “airy and light as that of a young fawn” (*StL* 33). While her aristocratic status had allowed her the advantage of an education, St Leon stresses that her most perfect quality was “the prudence of her judgements and the unalterable amiableness of her manners,” not her independent intellectual capabilities (*StL* 34).

St Leon’s idolization of Marguerite becomes more suspect when it is juxtaposed to his actions. St Leon apparently idealises Marguerite as his saviour. He explains that he was able to marry Marguerite because “the Marquis, who was one of the most benevolent and enlightened of mankind, had been led by my character and manners to conceive a warm friendship” (*StL* 34). From a Godwinian point of view, such a sentence can only be read ironically as his character and manners are that of a degenerate aristocrat obsessed with material splendour and public worship.²³ The story of St Leon’s friendship with the Marquis, when scrutinized more closely, becomes the story of how two aristocratic patriarchs pool their resources to insure their privileged status in times when their dominant position in society is being challenged by an emerging market economy in which the accumulation of property became open to more people than just ancient noble families. By marrying Marguerite, on the Marquis’ encouragement, St Leon not only stabilizes his patrimony, but “became a new *man*” into the bargain (*StL* 35, my emphasis). His individual integrity had relied on the privileged authority of aristocratic ideology. His timely marriage, which according to the Marquis saved St Leon from travelling “the high road to ruin,” has ensured this authority in both the public sphere, through his connection to the house of Damville, as well as in a domestic sphere, as head and patriarch of a new household (*StL* 35). While the direct voice of St Leon’s confession, with its tone of lament, idolizes Marguerite, the voice of the Marquis reveals his ulterior motive. She says, “in possessing

²³ In the novel, St Leon describes his need for “the gestures of worship and the voice of applause” and how he “maintained a considerable train of servants: my apartments were magnificent, and my furniture splendid. When we travelled, it was with an attendance little short of princely” (*StL* 42).

her, you will be blessed beyond the lot of princes" (*StL* 37). The diction here echoes the words used by Godwin in his critique of marriage and women as property in *Political Justice*. St Leon's love for Marguerite and the Marquis' benevolence, in the context of Godwin's philosophy, are shown to be underscored by a selfish will to power and illustrate Wollstonecraft's contention that "the desire for dazzling riches" is "the most certain pre-eminence that man can obtain" (*VRW* 77).

In keeping with eighteenth-century domestic ideology, readers would recognise that St Leon describes his love for Marguerite and their domestic life together as an androgynous union of souls. He says, "never does man feel himself so much alive, so truly ethereal, as when, bursting the bonds of difference, uncertainty and reserve, he pours himself entire into the bosom of the woman he adores" (*StL* 40). The novel *St Leon*, with its portraits of domestic affections and a state of "honourable poverty" after St Leon's disgrace, is read by Clemit as an "overt tribute to Wollstonecraft's thought," which, while critical of women's subordinate position in contemporary society did vindicate the domestic family set-up as a potential utopian sphere (*StL* 36, xv). Marshall also writes that the novel "celebrated the domestic affections" (Marshall, *Godwin* 198). However, once the alchemist enters their new domestic idyll amongst the picturesque scenery of the Swiss landscape, the sincerity of St Leon's domestic euphoria as a counterweight to his condemnation of aristocratic life is severely put to the test once the alchemist gives him the choice to enter into an entirely new sphere of existence as the possessor of the elixir vitae and unlimited wealth.

The entry of the alchemist into the domestic world of Reginald de St Leon, who is by now disgraced due to his gambling debts and has exiled himself out of shame, is described as follows:

It was in the evening of a summer's day...that a stranger arrived at my habitation. He was feeble, emaciated, and pale, his forehead full of wrinkles, and his hair and beard as white as snow. Care was written in his face; it was easy to perceive that he had suffered much from distress of mind; yet his eye was still quick and lively, with a strong expression of suspiciousness and anxiety. His garb, which externally consisted of nothing more than a robe of russet brown, with a girdle of the same, was coarse, threadbare and ragged. He supported his tottering steps with a staff...His wretched appearance excited my compassion, at the same time that I could easily discern, beneath all its disadvantages, that he was no common beggar or rustic...I thought I could perceive traces in his countenance of what had formerly been daring enterprise, profound meditation, and generous humanity (*StL* 124).

The alchemist is hiding from the clutches of the Inquisition and is "invincibly silent on every circumstance of his country, his family, and his adventures," without an occupation, past, family, or place of residence. St Leon's description of him shows how he fails to fall into any of the ideologically prescribed social positions allotted to men and women. St Leon's suggestion, "never was there a man more singular and in whom were united greater apparent contradictions," highlights the alchemist's fluid social identity (*StL* 36). In a world

structured along socio-cultural binaries, which are ordered along the concept of either/ or (rich or poor, public or private, man or woman, strong or weak, independent or submissive), the alchemist's person represents the idea of both/ and. Unlike St Leon, he has truly burst the bonds of difference. He is both a poor vagabond and a wise man with unlimited wealth; both a decrepit old man and an individual with a keen and powerful intellect able to dominate the haughty St Leon; he is nobody's master and nobody's servant, but entirely independent of any social relations for his wellbeing. He is apparently a man (he wears a beard), yet he lacks all the social gender markers that from St Leon's androcentric point of view would define him as male: a family name, property, an heir to his estate, public honour and authority over others (*StL* 142). This social identity performance gives the alchemist, in the eyes of St Leon, a dissident androgynous presence. He is an "intermediate being," to use the term coined by Maaïke Meijer to describe those individuals who refused to perform ideologically prescribed masculine and feminine gender roles. The alchemist fuses many of the ideologically polarized binary categories that define St Leon's world and which he needs to keep polarized in order to successfully police their boundaries. St Leon needs to ensure that the alchemist stays on the right side of the boundary that marks off his own sense of self, the boundary he himself draws between master and servant, head of the household and vagabond visitor in need of his charity. The alchemist, however, from his position as an outsider who "five times" has been "led to the scaffold, and with difficulty escaped a public execution," who is "hated by mankind, hunted from the face of the earth, pursued by every atrocious calumny, without a country, without a roof, without a friend," threatens the rigidly polarized binary logic that defines St Leon's domestic idyll and with it St Leon's sense of innate superiority because he defies patriarchy and the institutions that uphold it and threatens to erase the boundaries that ensure St Leon's privilege. Significantly, because the alchemist does not conform to the role St Leon expects him to perform his dissident androgynous presence cannot be contained by an effeminising strategy.

Having crossed the boundary into St Leon's world, the alchemist's voice becomes an anarchic voice. It is a voice that speaks not in the service of the dominant ideology, as St Leon's does, but a voice which appeals for its authority only to itself and therefore speaks only for itself. The alchemist takes no account of dominant custom, decorum, tradition or law, but listens only to the laws of his own esoteric system of thought and the powers with which this thought endows him.²⁴ Even though the alchemist's identity is entirely alien to anything St Leon's androcentric worldview can imagine as a valid identity, his speech is of "irresistible melody," spoken with a front "open, large, and commanding" which spoke of "conscious dignity and innocence" and immediately enchants St Leon (*StL* 127). Even though the alchemist is abjected from society, his appearance and words can definitely have an affect on the listener, St Leon.

While "the feudal spirit," which Godwin believed still survived in his day, "reduced the mass of mankind to the rank of slaves and cattle for the service of a few," the dissident

²⁴ This is an anarchic voice not dissimilar to the mystical prophetic poetic voice present in William Blake's poetry. Blake, through his art and poetry, Peter Marshall argues, raised a dissident political voice that showed many similarities to Godwin's rational anarchism. See Peter Marshall, *William Blake: Visionary Anarchist* (London: Freedom Press, 1994).

androgynous presence of the alchemist and his anarchic voice bring about a role-reversal in St Leon's domestic idyll as the alchemist slowly displaces Reginald as the central figure of the domestic scene (*PJ* 726). After the appearance of the alchemist, St Leon's failure to respond forcefully to his intrusion into the domestic scene and his clear intellectual inferiority to the alchemist's mystical lore quickly make him the servant of an old wandering beggar with magical powers in which he refused to believe at first. The "spectacle of injustice" which aristocratic ideology had fostered, according to Godwin, is now suddenly reversed as the anarchic alchemist from his abjected position on the boundaries of society (he is hiding from his persecutors in St Leon's summer house) is able to usurp St Leon's dominant position and undermine his sense of innate authority by a refusal to enact the role that St Leon's aristocratic expectations assign him, that of dependent (*PJ* 727). Weary with a world in which he has "found only disappointment" and which rejects his knowledge and identity in order to buttress its own hegemony, the alchemist wishes only to die and seems to have found a dupe in the now clearly self-deceived and insincere St Leon, who is obsessed with material wealth and the privilege it has brought him in the past, who can be tricked into taking the alchemist's abject position (*StL* 127).

By addressing St Leon's anxiety about his social status, the alchemist is able to entice him to become his pupil. The success of the alchemist's ploy to appeal to St Leon's reliance on aristocratic masculinity becomes clear when the disgraced feudal lord confesses to feeling humiliated by the presence of this mercurial figure. St Leon initially believes he has "nothing personally to fear from a man so feeble, so decrepit, so emaciated." Failing to effeminise the alchemist, the alchemist's dissident androgynous presence causes St Leon to feel effeminised himself. He is roused to use mocking words to retain what he believes is "the spirit of a man" within himself (*StL* 129,137). Clearly, St Leon can only feel superior to the alchemist by buttressing his sense of innate masculine superiority, which is fed by material wealth and public status. His one mode of retaliation against the alchemist's superior rhetoric and magical influence is to describe him as "a common beggar; a poor miserable wretch," rhetorically projecting onto him a subaltern identity, even though the reader can perceive that, in fact, St Leon has fallen under the spell of the alchemist and is losing control over his domestic situation (*StL* 136).

While the alchemist's dissident androgynous presence allows him to enchant St Leon by appealing to a simultaneous fear of and fascination with his fluid and uncategorisable individual identity, the irrepressible nature of his lawless anarchic voice allows him to use St Leon's deepest anxiety – the fear of losing his aristocratically endowed sense of innate superiority over others – to trap St Leon into a position where he can fulfil his goal. By looking at the world from a different perspective, the alchemist reveals to the self-deceived St Leon that he is in fact "the basest of all sublunary things – the puppet of a woman, the plaything of her pleasure, wasting an inglorious life in the gratification of her wishes and the performance of her commands!" (*StL* 126) Realising how much St Leon's integrity is grounded on his sense of innate masculine superiority, as the patriarch of a noble family, the alchemist mocks St Leon by reversing the ideological male-female relationship and pointing out that, in fact, St Leon's identity as patriarch is entirely reliant

on the continual subordinate performance of his wife Marguerite to buttress his masculinity and the privileges with which this identity endow him.

St Leon tells the alchemist that Marguerite should be told of the secret he offers him because “my wife is a part of myself.” He describes his family as “a family of love,” to whom he should be entirely sincere (*StL* 126,130). After the intrusion of the alchemist, however, the sincerity of St Leon’s confession can no longer be trusted because the prospect of attaining unlimited wealth leads St Leon to confess that he suffered from “a sordid love of gold,” linking the love for his wife to his love for her father’s coffers and ultimately overriding his professed sincerity (*StL* 130). The idea that St Leon actually laments his fall from aristocratic grace more than the loss of his wife is heightened because his rhetoric of love is revealed to be a love for public status and a longing for material splendour rather than a love of a rural domestic idyll. Even though he acknowledges that he is an “idiot” for valuing material possessions and public status over domestic bliss, his actions reveal that he is a hard learner. St Leon is so obsessed with regaining the aristocratic privileges that gave him his masculine identity and sense of innate moral superiority that he interprets the alchemist’s offer of “benefits...such as kings would barter their thrones to purchase,” literally rather than metaphorically (*StL* 127). Unsurprisingly, his first act after gaining alchemical powers is not to feed his family, but an attempt to “repurchase the property of my ancestors,” which shows how much he is still reliant on aristocratic ideology to buttress his own sense of self (*StL* 166). From the alchemist’s woeful life story, St Leon should have learnt that possessing powers that potentially threaten the dominant order would lead to estrangement and repression of his person by the very order he himself had fought to uphold. St Leon’s actions show, as Kilgour argues, that in Godwin’s novel “mercantile greed is not opposed to aristocratic nobility but its direct descendent” (Kilgour 101). St Leon’s mistake is that he tries to regain his dominant position in the established order by using powers that threaten the hegemony of that very order and which are consequently outlawed as dangerous pseudo-science.

Within his now fragile domestic world, St Leon’s anxieties about his status as head of the household cause him to project onto his wife Marguerite the ideologically prescribed role of homemaker and supporter of his newly fired will to power. Once the alchemist has entered St Leon’s family domain and threatens the integrity of his domestic world, St Leon’s earlier androgynous idealism is shown up to be founded on an ideology of male/ female complementarity in which the wife and mother’s function is defined by the masculine will:

her attachment to her children was exemplary, and her vigilance uninterrupted; and, for myself, she was accustomed, in all that related to our mutual love, to enter into my sentiments and inclinations with so just a tone of equality and kindness, that we seemed to be two bodies animated by a single soul (*StL* 133).

St Leon’s words here can only be read as articulating the dominant conception of marriage at the time of the novel’s creation. While at the outset of the novel such an account of

Marguerite could have been judged as sincere, after the appearance of the alchemist, it needs to be read in light of St Leon's simultaneous hunger for a return of material wealth and public splendour that he thinks will reinstate him into the authoritative position he once held within society as aristocrat and patriarch. St Leon's domestic idyll and marriage represent an androgynous ideal only rhetorically not actually. When looked at more closely it articulates the incorporation of Marguerite's identity and her domestic virtues into St Leon's identity, a form of androgyny that Hoeveler refers to as the cannibalisation of the feminine. Their marriage, in fact, had transferred Marguerite's fortune into St Leon's purse. The eighteenth-century legal scholar William Blackstone's writings on marriage show that St Leon's sixteenth-century domestic ideal was still the law in the eighteenth century. Blackstone explains that "by marriage...the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being, or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband" (quoted in Hill 196). In fact, once the alchemist has undermined St Leon's dominant position in the household, St Leon becomes increasingly hysterical in defending his sense of innate superiority. He does this initially by lamenting how "to other men the domestic scene is the relaxation of their cares; when they enter it, they dismiss the business of the day, and call another cause. I only have concentrated in it the whole of my existence. By this means I have extinguished in myself the true energy of the human character" (*StL* 138). Wishing now that he had never embraced the life of noble poverty and domestic harmony, he sacrifices his family and enters once again an aristocratic culture in which masculine privilege is dependent on the outward show of wealth. In doing so, St Leon simultaneously places Marguerite once again on a proverbial pedestal from which she can be worshiped by those who subscribe to his ideals of womanhood but from which she cannot get down. St Leon professes, "I know no creature on the face of the earth that can enter into competition with you" (*StL* 176). St Leon becomes the active male patriarch and Marguerite a mere emblem of domestic virtue, re-enforcing his reliance on polarized gender roles to ensure the upkeep of the aristocratic status to which he aspires. St Leon reinforces his entrenchment within aristocratic masculinity by echoing the Marquis de Damville's mercantile diction in speaking of male-female relationships: "I would die with joy to purchase your ease and satisfaction. I can never repay the benefits you have conferred on me" (*StL* 176).

Once in possession of alchemical magic, the deluded St Leon mistakenly feels his manhood secured by his newly acquired material wealth. Consequently, he regains confidence in his ability to function as the head of the household. When officers of the law come to arrest him on what turns out to be suspicion of "robbery and murder" he answers his daughter, who tries to hold onto him: "I know best what is proper, and you must not think to control me" (*StL* 247,215). His defence against accusations from the law regarding suspected criminal activity, he relies on his re-instated sense of innate privilege and claims to be innocent because he is "descended from a race of heroes, knights of the cross, and champions of France; and their blood has not degenerated in my veins. I feel myself animated by the soul of honour and incapable of crime" (*StL* 221). After his eventual imprisonment, St Leon immediately attempts to use his powers to bribe his jailors. Failing to bribe the black servant, St Leon manages to bribe the warden and is able to escape to

Italy. In Italy he suffers from “the malignant effects of popular rumour” and superstition, is branded “a wizard, a necromancer, a dealer in the black art” and is chased from his abode by a rampant mob who burn down his house thinking it the den of an evil sorcerer (*StL* 270,283). Up to this point in the novel, St Leon has only used the powers of alchemy to regain his aristocratic privilege, which make him a vessel for Godwin’s idea that “at present, there is no more certain road to the general deference of mankind than the exhibition of wealth” (*PJ* 706). But alchemy has a further purpose, apart from revealing St Leon’s obsession with aristocratic masculine privilege. It also reveals the plight of women under such a gender ideology.

By simply picking up where he had left off after his disgrace as a gambler, St Leon projects onto Marguerite the role of domestic guardian in order to buttress his damaged masculinity. As Kilgour stresses, Godwin’s novel illustrates that “from the female point of view, the male quest for glory is a base materialistic enterprise, opposed to the interests of the family” (Kilgour 103). The alchemist’s story of woe should have made clear to St Leon that public glory and a return to aristocratic status is not the purpose for which his alchemical powers should be used. Marguerite at one point in the novel expresses that, unlike her husband, she has realised that this is the case. While she laments that their misfortune had allowed the alchemist to interpose in their affairs and cajole St Leon into adopting his powers, she also tells St Leon that “it is your fault to make indiscreet use of it,” which reveals to St Leon that he had in fact a choice to use his new-found magical powers more wisely and to the benefit of others, rather than as a means to regain his aristocratic masculine privilege (*StL* 209).

Kilgour argues that St Leon’s “inability to share his knowledge with his wife creates an unbridgeable gap between them, and she finally pines away” (Kilgour 105). Marguerite’s suffering, however, is not merely brought about by St Leon’s inability to share his magic knowledge. It is brought about mainly, as she herself claims, by his decision to use his knowledge for selfish purposes. In fact, it is through the alchemist’s intervention in their relationship that Marguerite is able to recognise what has driven St Leon all along: an obsession with public status and material wealth. Only after the alchemist has undermined St Leon’s authority and has triggered his hysterical reaction in which he obsessively tries to regain his aristocratic privilege, Marguerite offers a counter-voice to St Leon’s sense of innate superiority: “I found in you many good qualities,” she confesses, “imagination decorated you in the virtues you had not; but you have removed the veil” (*StL* 210). It is St Leon’s abuse of his new-found alchemical powers that allows Marguerite to realise that she has had to enter into his sentiments ever since they had been married. The picture of domestic androgynous union St Leon had painted is revealed by Marguerite’s reaction to be grounded in the necessity of her conformity to his ideals. Ferguson Ellis points out that the deteriorating relationship between St Leon and Marguerite shows that “the feminine power of influence, the only power allowed to women in the paradigm of separate spheres, is at best minimal and at worst can make life worse for men rather than better” (K.F. Ellis 161). Marguerite’s slow withering away during the time that St Leon thinks he is slowly regaining his old identity as aristocratic patriarch is evidence of her realisation that in St Leon’s androcentric world she has no active role to play, and serves primarily as a means to an

end. Domesticity is not an idyll, then, but disguised masculine tyranny exposed by a dissident androgynous figure in the shape of the anarchic alchemist, whose powers have freed him from the ideological shackles that bind St Leon to aristocratic masculinity.

It is only when St Leon fails to successfully regain what he thinks is his natural identity as aristocratic patriarch, and is no longer bound by the shackles of patriarchal ideology by being branded a wanted criminal, that the novel articulates the utopian potential of alchemy. Kilgour argues that in *St Leon*, “alchemy is no fraud,” but “a scientific power, in which base matter is turned into gold, which is then turned to high purposes” (Kilgour 103). She writes that, whatever his delusions, “the alchemist saw himself as involved in ‘a work of redemption: he was healing the corruption and chaos of matter’” (Kilgour 101). While Kilgour’s reading of the alchemist as a positive figure with utopian intentions foreshadows my own theory of the figure of the alchemist, in her reading of *St Leon*, she uses the alchemical metaphor of the chemical wedding, to read *St Leon* as a novel that supports “the emerging bourgeois conventions Wollstonecraft had attacked in her *Vindication*” (Kilgour 97). In Kilgour’s reading, the utopian potential of the alchemist and his philosophy is suppressed because in her eyes “alchemy is an ambivalent enterprise, divided between the opposites of high and low, male and female, it claimed to reconcile” (Kilgour 103). What Kilgour seems to ignore is that this view of alchemy as an ambivalent enterprise is St Leon’s point of view. The anarchic alchemist who infiltrates St Leon’s world informs St Leon of the actual utopian potential of his art. He says, “God had given it for the best and highest purposes.” The alchemist equally warns St Leon that “the vessel in which it was deposited must be purified from the alloy of human frailty” (*SL* 135). If this is not the case, the alchemist warns St Leon, alchemical powers

might be abused and applied to the most atrocious designs. It might blind the understanding of the wisest, and corrupt the integrity of the noblest. It might overturn kingdoms, and change the whole order of human society into anarchy and barbarism. It might render its possessor the universal plague or the universal tyrant of mankind (*SL* 135).

St Leon’s dire attempt to reinstate himself as the public aristocratic figure he once was illustrates the nature of the human frailty to which the alchemist refers. For St Leon, raised on aristocratic masculine ideology, “habit has a resistless empire over the mind” (*SL* 300). Even when St Leon realises that with his new-found powers he could “assign to every individual the task he pleases” (Godwin’s ideal of employment), that he “can improve agriculture, and establish manufactures, can found schools, and hospitals, and infirmaries, and universities” (as in the alchemical legend of Nicolas Flamel and his wife Perennelle), his actions prove that his dependence on aristocratic habit leads him to act in the opposite manner until he has destroyed everything around him (*SL* 162).

St Leon’s engagement with alchemy in volumes two and three highlights the repressive forces of an institutionalised and ideologically disseminated masculinity, which relies on the polarization into fixed unequal statuses of men and women in order to ensure its hegemonic position. The presence of the schema of alchemy disrupts the public world

of wealth and status through which men are able to assume their dominant position. It shows the domestic sphere to be inextricably intertwined with a public sphere defined through the masculine appropriation of wealth and the upkeep of unequal property distribution. Contrary to the ideological rhetoric that pictures the domestic sphere as a haven, the novel shows how such a private world clearly cannot stand by itself as an idyll. Contrary to what Kilgour argues, what becomes clear in this reading of *St Leon*, is that the use of the schema of alchemy shows how masculinity is a political as well as a social gender performance that needs a complementary and clearly submissive and domestic femininity to ensure its dominant position. As such, the schema of alchemy does not vindicate bourgeois domestic ideology, but works to reveal its faultlines. It highlights the need to separate the construction of individual identity from the acquisition of socio-political power and property. The intrusion of alchemical forces into *St Leon*'s aristocratic world shows that it is not the alchemist but *St Leon*'s hysterical reaction to his anarchic voice and androgynous presence that destroys all those who within this hegemonic culture have the status of dependents, including his wife and children. Marguerite, however virtuous in her innocence, is impotent to affect any positive change as long as her femininity is defined against *St Leon*'s aristocratic masculinity. She is never an independent woman.

Clemit argues that in his fiction "Godwin is...interested in what happens when individuals break out of their prescribed social roles" (Clemit 55). While some scholars criticize Godwin's addition of a fourth volume to an already ponderous and stretched out narrative, the final volume is significant in allowing *St Leon*, if only momentarily, to adopt the viewpoint of the anarchic alchemist whose magical powers and abject position erased the ideological boundaries that had structured *St Leon*'s world. The secrets of alchemy, because they make him immortal and give him unbounded wealth, show him eventually that he no longer has to rely on the ideological institutions that initially gave him his sense of self: marriage, primogeniture and family. By gaining the secrets of alchemy, *St Leon* is himself abjected by society, which projects onto him the dissident androgynous presence and anarchic voice that had initially undermined his aristocratic masculinity. As a consequence he becomes a threat to the very world that his earlier identity had represented and is unsurprisingly imprisoned by the Inquisition, whose fanaticism his infinite wealth cannot bribe.

By presenting *St Leon* in the position of the alchemist in volume four, the novel reveals not the evils of magic but "the wretchedness that has flowed from hereditary honours, riches and monarchy," to use Wollstonecraft's words (*IRW* 77). Only from his viewpoint as abjected and hunted alchemist is *St Leon* able to become genuinely benevolent and sincere in his intentions. His new social status forces him to take an alternative point of view and he is able to sympathise with the oppressed people of war-torn Hungary and sets out to "pour the entire stream of [his] riches, like a mighty river, to fertilise these wasted plains, and revive their fainting inhabitants" (*StL* 369). Kilgour points out that once the aristocrat looks at the world from the alchemist's abject position "St Leon imagines himself, as his descendent Victor Frankenstein will later, as the source of immense good in the world, who will use base means to effect high purposes" (Kilgour 103). Unfortunately, as Godwin knew too well, standing outside of the dominant ideology

brings with it ridicule and at worst reactionary violence. As a social outcast, St Leon is able to view the injustice perpetuated by the very social system he had defended and for which he had fought. From outside the social boundaries, he observes how his daughters are refused marriage because the nature of their wealth is suspect, to the aristocratic families who rely on the accumulation of hereditary wealth for the stability of their dominant social position, and how the father of the lover of one of his daughters goes so far as to imprison his own son to ensure he does not marry a St Leon, which turns out to be repressive move that kills the son (*StL* 362).

The evil force in society, St Leon's confessions reveal, is not the presence of alchemists in possession of magical powers with which they can make gold and become immortal. His acquisition of these very powers and the consequences this has brought to his position in society allow St Leon to realise that the actual evil is the "self-importance of man," about which he reveals: "upon how slight a basis do thy gigantic erections repose!" (*StL* 367). Having initially fought in the European wars for the honour of his country, its monarch, and the luxury and pride it brought him, he now realises that such wars "are the evils nations willingly plunge into, or are compelled to endure, to pamper the senseless luxury or pride of a Ferdinand and a Solyman" (*StL* 372). Using his powers to benefit a starving and repressed people, he realises that his benevolent intentions bring him no friends because his unlimited wealth cannot be traced to either aristocratic lineage or profit made from trade. As such his benevolence merely alienates him further from the mass of mankind and brings down upon him the fury of the ruling elite, whose power is undermined by his magical practice. In an almost autobiographical manner, Godwin has St Leon confess that

I had looked for happiness as the result of the benevolence and philanthropy I was exerting; I found only anxiety and a well grounded fear even for my personal safety. Let no man build on the expected gratitude of those he spends his strength to serve! Let him be beneficent if he will; but let him not depend for his happiness on the conviction of his rectitude and virtue that is to be impressed on the minds of others! (*StL* 382).

St Leon, having now fully adopted the alchemist's abject perspective, if only for a moment, shows the world to which he belonged as structured on the inequality of property and a masculine will to power in which women and dependents play no active role. This masculine will to power is embodied in the archetypal gothic villain Bethlem Gabor, a ruthless warrior who imprisons St Leon and forces him to use his powers to increase his wealth and military power.

Ironically, St Leon is eventually freed by his own son, who has become the aristocratic warrior that Reginald himself once was. Significantly, not St Leon, but his son Charles says that "magic dissolves the whole principle and arrangement of human action, subverts all generous enthusiasm and dignity, and renders life itself loathsome and intolerable." Charles, having grown up in poverty, has caught his father's one-time obsession with material wealth and the status it endows on those who flaunt it in public.

Early on in the narrative, Charles had renounced his father and with it the name of St Leon: “you have extinguished abruptly an illustrious house” (*StL* 193). At the conclusion of the novel, Charles, now called Damville after his mother’s still noble family, tells his father that “all the anguish I ever felt, has derived its source from alchymy and magic” (*StL* 474). By the end of the novel, the first-person narrator, St Leon, has in the eyes of his own son become the anarchic alchemist, a threatening force to those occupying a privileged position. As a gallant aristocratic warrior, fighting to protect his king, his kingdom and his religion, Charles says to the anarchic alchemist: “I here bind myself by all that is sacred to pursue you to death,” which places him on the same level with the Inquisition that had sought to do the same in volume three (*StL* 474).

By the end of the novel, St Leon, now a solitary wandering alchemist, has become a monster in the eyes of the establishment, just as Godwin by expounding his radical philosophy and utopian vision of the future had become a monster in the public eye in the course of the 1790s: “a ghoul or a bloodless vampire, or the monster created by Frankenstein” to use Thomas De Quincy’s words (quoted in Locke 157). What is significant is that it is not only Charles but also St Leon who views himself as “a monster that did not deserve to exist,” a portrait Godwin would not have painted of himself (*StL* 363). St Leon’s tone of lament is not only generated by despair over losing his wife and their apparent domestic bliss, but is equally generated by the fact that he still believes that his new identity as alchemist and not his original identity as aristocratic patriarch “was all a lie” (*StL* 448). Significantly, on the final page of the novel, St Leon no longer holds the same perspective as the anarchic alchemist that he had shown in much of the final volume of the novel. Instead, St Leon reveals that he cannot quit the habit of a lifetime and has readopted his androcentric world view by using his alchemical powers in the service of the aristocratic establishment. Having experienced the dire consequences of using alchemical magic for monetary aims, he once again turns to such a ploy when he gives the unfortunate Pandora the dowry she needs to become a worthy bride to his son Charles, who has taken up the masculine role St Leon and St Leon’s father had performed at the outset of the novel: “the great bulwark of the Christian frontier” (*StL* 476). St Leon’s celebration of “the faithful attachment of a noble-minded and accomplished woman” is therefore a celebration of aristocratic, patriarchal domestic ideology, rather than a vision of a society in which gender statuses are eroded and in which men and women live on equal terms.

St Leon’s final words in the novel reinforce the very patriarchal ideology that the anarchic alchemist’s dissident androgynous presence and anarchic voice had initially undermined. As Kelly states, “Godwin’s conclusion is a pessimistic one: the alchemist or ‘old philosopher,’ like the English Jacobin, or ‘new philosopher,’ is fated to be misunderstood by his fellow man, denied the social usefulness he craves, and driven forth to be a lonely exile” (Kelly, *Jacobin* 209). However, even if the anarchic alchemist remains misunderstood by Reginald de St Leon, the disgraced aristocrat’s initial hysterical reaction to his dissident androgynous presence and anarchic voice, as well as his misuse of alchemical powers throughout the novel, show that the hegemonic patriarchal society relies for its stability on the upkeep of an androcentric worldview and a perpetual defence of the gender boundaries drawn by the socio-political alliance between the institutions of

property, marriage and the domestic family. St Leon's moments of identification with the anarchic alchemist, if ultimately overshadowed by his re-adoption of an aristocratic, androcentric point of view, show that alternatives do exist to the hegemonic ideology. So even though *St Leon* does not subvert or overthrow the type of coercive governmental system with its supporting ideology of gender polarization that Godwin himself sought to challenge with his anarchist philosophy, the anarchic alchemist's presence in the novel functions to reveal possible alternatives, showing both St Leon's aristocratic masculinity and Marguerite's domestic femininity to be ideologically prescribed gender performances that only support the patriarchal institutions of marriage, the family and primogeniture, which can be rejected if the androcentric lens is exchanged for a dissident perspective that acknowledges individual integrity unfettered by ideologically polarized gender roles.

Brown's Wieland: the Anarchic Alchemist and the Paranoid Landlord

According to Randall A. Clack, "Hermetic and alchemical lore arrived in America with the first settlers from England and continental Europe, who also brought along with them a belief in astrology and witchcraft." He points out that the alchemists who came to America were of a utopian mindset and writes that "some alchemists with a mystical inclination even suggested that the earth could be restored to its original edenic splendor, an idea that recalls the Puritan typology of America as the New Jerusalem." Clack points out that American from the outset, American authors utilized this utopian imagery inherent in the alchemical metaphors. He explains that "Hector de Crèvecoeur would use the alchemical metallurgical image the melting pot to suggest that America was a land of transformation" (Clack 6). According to Clack "in seventeenth-century America, alchemy was confined (for the most part) to the areas of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, and connected with many of the Puritan alchemists was Connecticut Governor John Winthrop, Jr. (1606-1676)," of whom Cotton Mather wrote that he was "the 'Hermes Christianus' of America" (Clack 6-7). Mather's intellectual nickname for Winthrop makes clear that alchemy, within Puritan culture, became a Christian spiritual experience. Another significant figure in the dissemination of alchemy in early America is the president of Yale University, Ezra Stiles, who Mark Stavish calls "the most distinguished supporter of alchemy" in eighteenth-century America.²⁵ According to Herbert Leventhal, "alchemy in eighteenth-century America...appears to have been an esoteric science, practiced by a few, although its language was probably recognisable by many" (Leventhal, 136). The fact that an eighteenth-century university president still supported alchemical endeavours suggests further that for a long time alchemy was taken seriously as an intellectual, spiritual as well as scientific pursuit on the North-American continent. I will argue that Charles Brockden Brown, like Godwin, added the still culturally pervasive schema of alchemy to his literary repertoire in order to articulate a philosophical vision of America's future.

Wil Verhoeven explains that while "the impact of *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams* on Brown's thinking and writing is clearly beyond doubt," "the jury is still out as to

²⁵ Mark Stavish, "The History of Alchemy in America," in *Alchemy Journal* 3:3 (May/ June 2002), 6 July 2004 <www.alchemylab.com/AJ3-3.htm>

whether Brown's fiction can be called 'radical' in the first place."²⁶ Verhoeven points out, as the preceding discussion of Godwin's radicalism and writing has also shown, that there is not one Godwin. In the following analysis of the cultural schemata that inform his fictions *Wieland* and "Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist," the focus will lie not on proving that Brown copied Godwin's techniques and anarchist philosophy, but on showing how Brown, unbeknown to himself, but much like Godwin, was fusing reason with mysticism, rational enlightenment philosophy with residual elements in his culture that harked back to alchemical magic and hermetic philosophy. What will become clear is that by walking the line between reason and imagination, science and magic, and often erasing the boundary between these categories, Brown, like Godwin, was making possible the articulation of a dissident androgynous ideal, with regards to the construction of gender identity in post-revolutionary America.

By the time Charles Brockden Brown died in 1816 he had by most biographical accounts become a Federalist. In 1795, however, he stood far from the political orthodoxy of his time. Peter Kafer explains that at that moment Brown "proclaimed himself a Godwinian" and in a letter to a friend called Political Justice "my Oracle" (Kafer 66). By 1798, Brown had published his first gothic novel, *Wieland, or the Transformation*, and was writing its prequel, "Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist" (1801-3), in which he fleshed out the history of the mercurial stranger who in *Wieland* had infiltrated into a rural domestic community during the French and Indian War. Like the alchemist in *St Leon*, Carwin occupies an abject position in the rural Pennsylvania community not only because of his apparent complete self-sufficiency, lack of occupation, fixed residence, or traceable history, but also because the lack of all these social qualifiers makes him an intermediate being, an identity that gives him a dissident androgynous presence: he is not a patriarch, not a domestic servant, clearly not a wife, mother, or even a patriot. He exists necessarily on the margins of the society that makes up the world of the novel, the isolated rural community of Mettingen of which Theodore Wieland is the landlord. His intrusion into this world threatens the hegemonic ideologies that shape it. A significant difference from *St Leon* is that, in Brown's novel, the first-person narrator is not Theodore, whose antagonistic position towards Carwin resembles that of *St Leon* towards the alchemist, but a young woman, Clara Wieland, Theodore's apparently independent, but equally androcentric sister. Like *St Leon*'s story, Clara's narrative is a confessional narrative dominated by a tone of lament for a lost domestic idyll after the intrusion of a mercurial stranger. This difference in the gender of the narrator, however, does not have an effect on the reading of Carwin as a figure who challenges androcentricism and patriarchal ideology. Clara's confession shows that women can equally adopt an androcentric lens and support patriarchal ideology. In fact, one of the surest ways to perpetuate it is to ensure that all individuals adopt the roles patriarchal ideology prescribes to them and wear the same ideological glasses. Carwin's appearance and actions at Mettingen, the rural family estate of the Wielands, serves to make this very point.

²⁶ W.M. Verhoeven, "This blissful period of intellectual liberty': Transatlantic Radicalism and Enlightenment Conservatism in Brown's Early Writings," in *Revising Charles Brockden Brown: Culture, Politics, Sexuality*, eds. Philip Barnard, Mark L. Kamrath and Stephen Shapiro (Knoxville, U of Tennessee P, 2004) 8-9.

While the figure of Carwin is linked to the schema of alchemy in many ways, the esoteric instrument with which Carwin undermines the ideologies that underscore the Mettingen community is not the obvious alchemical power of making gold or the ability to make the elixir life, but an equally pseudo-scientific and esoteric act: bilquism, the power to mimic and project voices. Christopher Looby argues that Carwin's power to mimic individual voices and project them into spaces where he is not underscores the idea that "the language we speak is not ours simply but rather a public institution."²⁷ By showing that "the very individuality of a voice depends necessarily on socially and historically given structures," Carwin's secret powers highlight the ideological nature of gender roles in the novel (Looby 171).

Carwin's dissident androgynous presence and his anarchic voice, from the androcentric perspective of the Wieland family, is able to reveal that what seems to be the natural order of things is in fact informed by a man-made patriarchal gender ideology that ensures the empowerment only of the masculine family members. As in *St Leon*, the hermetic stranger destroys the illusion that marriage and the family are institutions in which men and women are valued equally. His presence offers the narrator, Clara Wieland, a chance to imagine a world unfettered by the ideology of separate gender spheres. Before I analyse the figure of Carwin and his role in *Wieland* in detail, I will first investigate the socio-cultural schemata that informed the young Brown's literary repertoire and that stood at the basis of the construction of the figure of Carwin in *Wieland*.

Social custom cajoled the youthful Brown into taking up the study of law. Steven Watts writes that Brown's "engagement with the law was a reluctant one." To the aspiring author, "legal practice appeared merely a means to wealth."²⁸ Under the influence of Hamiltonian economics, according to Watts, "the pursuit of self-interest became the centrepiece of...emerging liberal ideology" (Watts 6). The rise of individualistic commercial capitalism in America was buttressed by a gender ideology that prescribed American men a specific gender role. Watts explains that the self-made entrepreneur and political celebrity Benjamin Franklin "became in the 1790s the prototype of the American citizen" (Watts 3). This public masculine role, a gender role Brown resists as a youth, is characterised by an independent outlook, a utilitarian approach and commercial mindset. Importantly, this late eighteenth-century prototype of the American citizen is also a well educated Christian man of Anglo-European ancestry.

Brown responds critically to the increasingly commercial society of the 1790s by stating, "our intellectual ore is apparently of no value but as it is capable of being transmuted into gold." While positive that in Britain a legal career could lead to "glory," Brown complained in a letter to a friend in 1792 that in America "learning and eloquence are desirable only as the means of more expeditiously filling our coffers."²⁹ Brown here uses the cultural schema of alchemy as a metaphorical vehicle for voicing critique of dominant economic ideology and how it homogenised society by linking public men of business with puffers, the type of alchemists who out of greed try to turn the dross of earth

²⁷ Christopher Looby, *Voicing America* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996) 170.

²⁸ Steven Watts, *The Romance of Real Life* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994) 32.

²⁹ Brown's letter is quoted in David Lee Clark, *Charles Brockden Brown* (Durham: Duke UP, 1952) 33.

into material gold. Brown is not alone in using this imagery to describe what he believes is the dominant culture of feeling at the time. The physician Dr. Benjamin Rush, a contemporary of Brown, defines a type of madness in late eighteenth-century American society which he calls “the Alchemical Mania.” He diagnoses this form of madness as an individual’s obsession with making gold and finding the elixir of life. Although he records a drop in the cases of this mania “over the past thirty years,” due to discoveries made in science and chemistry, he still finds it worthy of notice in his paper “The Different Species of Mania.”³⁰ Brown equates this form of materialistic alchemy with a market economy in which each individual was striving for profit. Watts argues that Brown, as a consequence of this public pressure to transmute knowledge into capital and capital into profit, becomes increasingly aware that the individual in late eighteenth-century American society relies on the donning of public masks in order to come out ahead in their dealings with others. In his fictional letter exchange, “The Henrietta Letters,” Brown expresses an anxiety he shares with Godwin when he writes, “of all the virtues mankind is most universally deficient in sincerity” (in Clark 102). His eventual refusal to enter into public office as a lawyer or to take up any profession but that of professional man of letters – an all but non-existent profession at the time – shows that he is clearly uneasy about performing the ideologically prescribed masculine role the early republic expected him to don. According to Watts, Brown’s youthful experiences with the pressures to conform to a public masculinity lead him “to question the entire structure of gender relationships in the society of the Atlantic world” (Watts 58). If Brown is clearly uneasy about the prescribed masculine role, how does he respond to the ideologically prescribed feminine role?

Francis D. Cogliano writes that during the late eighteenth century “American women were excluded from the political life by custom and practice which confined their activities to the ‘domestic sphere’ of home-making, child-bearing, and feeding and clothing their families.”³¹ He explains that for a short while, in the time leading up to and during the revolution, women’s domestic role took on active political significance. Kerber also argues that “the revolution shook old assumptions about women’s place and suggested new possibilities.”³² This political activity became symbolised in part through the social myth of the Daughters of Liberty, whose domestic industry helped to make possible a successful revolutionary campaign. “Viewed in legal, economic, and political terms,” Cogliano argues, “American women in the generation after the Revolution remained in a subordinate position within a patriarchal social order” (Cogliano 211). While the revolutionary moment had given women by force of necessity a pseudo-political voice, the Constitution that would form the political basis of the United States would once again exclude women from the public sphere of politics and market economics.

The 1787 Constitution, drawn up in secret by the bourgeois male Federalist elite, speaks of “persons” when referring to its citizens. The word “persons,” however, in the context of the document, signifies only white male property owners. All others, the

³⁰ Benjamin Rush, “On the Different Species of Mania,” in *The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush*, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947) 212-219.

³¹ Francis D. Cogliano, *Revolutionary America, 1763-1815: A Political History* (London: Routledge, 2000) 101.

³² Linda K. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” in *No More Separate Spheres*, eds. Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher (Durham: Duke UP, 2002) 40.

majority of the population of the eastern Atlantic seaboard, do not as yet, and would not for a long time, constitute an officially recognized voice within the politics that constructed the republic. In his farewell Address of 1796, with all its emphasis on union and a federalist-republican government in service of its people, George Washington addresses his “brethren” or “countrymen,” those masculine individuals empowered by their status as white, male property owners, who can take an active role in the formation of new governments.³³

Linda K. Kerber has argued that “in the years of the early republic a consensus developed around the idea that a mother, committed to the service of her family and to the state, might serve a political purpose.”³⁴ During the revolutionary period, the notion of Republican Motherhood, while giving women the illusion of public participation in constructing the republic, in fact helped to confine their participation within strict domestic limits. As Shirley Samuels points out, “the displacement of the danger of the politically (and sexually) active woman onto the figure of the mother who will raise political children meant that women were at once implicitly granted political effectiveness and explicitly denied it.”³⁵ Samuels shows that public political rhetoric supported this ideology as John Adams asserted in 1778 that “the ‘foundation of national morality must be laid in private families’” (quoted in Samuels 15). By emphasising the centrality of the private nuclear family as a locus for raising future public figures, Adams is expounding the Burkean idea that the family is in fact a microcosm of the state that mirrors its structure in miniature. Samuels points out, however, that this apparently complementary relationship is actually “unstable” with “permeable and unfixed boundaries” (Samuels 15). Dissent at the fireside can lead to dissent in the public sphere of politics. This ideology of public domesticity burdens the female citizens with the double pressures of raising a family and preparing the young male citizens of the nation for active participation in the construction of the American nation. Kerber points out that “the most persistent [point made against women’s involvement in the public political debate] was the argument that linked female political autonomy to an unflattering masculinity” (Kerber, *Republic* 279). The public sphere of politics was still very much conceived as the natural domain of men. In the new republic, female empowerment threatened the integrity of androcentric ideology and became as suspect as a royalist coup or suspected infiltration by radical secret orders.

Because the language of the Constitution constantly utilizes the non-descriptive term “persons,” instead of “men” when referring to the inhabitants of the fledgling United States, and because the domestic sphere lies within the boundaries of the public sphere rather than outside of it, there exists a discursive space for the vast group of *others* within the country to raise their voice, if only they can find a way to cross the boundary from private to public, from social invisibility to public presence. Only by entering the public debate can they be recognized as constituents of the larger group of citizens that the Constitution addresses. Brown’s early philosophy and fiction, with its female narrative voice and portrayal of hysterical masculinity, paranoid at having its authorial position

³³ George Washington, “Farewell Address” (1796), 3 January 2003 <<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/washing.htm>>

³⁴ Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1980) 283.

³⁵ Shirley Samuels, *Romances of the Republic* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996) 15.

undermined, can be read as an attempt to bring some of these disenfranchised voices into the political debate. While Brown, before *Arthur Mervyn* (1800) does not engage with the issues of race – portraying Native Americans as bloody savages and ignoring the issue of slavery altogether – his early writings, which focus on the link between the private family and public politics, show his concern with the disenfranchisement of women. Cathy N. Davidson argues that *Alcuin*, Brown’s dialogue on the plight of women in the early republic, remains “one of the most important feminist tracts of the 1790s,” regardless of Brown’s eventual conclusion about the role of women in American politics and society.³⁶

Fuelled by the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft and the notorious passages from *Political Justice* on marriage, property, and longevity, Brown’s first publication *Alcuin* (1798) clearly enters into the debate about the public role of women in American society. Watts explains that Brown’s non-conformist Quaker background allowed him to be “swept up in a strong current of challenges to traditional authority” (Watts 51). Brown’s father refused to take up arms during the revolution and was exiled to Virginia with other pacifist Quakers. One of his father’s commonplace books reveals that he, too, after the revolution, found Godwin ideas – which equally urged for gradual non-violent reform – worthy of copying. Apart from his interest in Godwinian radicalism, Brown’s father also copied extracts from Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Moral and Historical View of the French Revolution* (1795). He even presented his son Elijah jr. with the first volume of Wollstonecraft’s book, from which he had transcribed the preface and sections of the first chapter (Kafer 46).

That this staunch Quaker expressed interest in British radical philosophy is no coincidence. Kafer explains that *Political Justice* is in fact “a very Quaker-like performance” in its “critique of the historical institutions of ‘coercion’ designed by human beings for purposes of power and order” (Kafer 69). Godwin’s own education at a dissenting academy could have helped to imbibe his otherwise rational philosophy with a more individualistic, visionary and immaterial character, like that of the Quakers. Where the Quakers seek “authentic personal revelation...nurtured and monitored and corrected within the context of a proper, all embracing spiritual communion,” Godwin’s philosophy of rational individual enlightenment rests on the belief in the moral nature of the individual, who by exercising his personal judgement can improve his wisdom. Significantly, while based on different foundations – Christian spiritualism and atheist rationalism – there are similarities between these two philosophies and Kafer argues that both systems of thought work “within a framework where the individual conscience remained, supposedly, uncoerced” (Kafer 22).

Kafer argues that to take a Godwinian stance in 1790s America is politically “to take a perspective outside American Whiggism and therefore outside of the first party struggle between Republicans and Federalists.” Godwin argued strongly against party formation because this would force people into opposition instead of cooperation and would underscore the binary logic of the dominant ideology he challenged in his philosophy. Godwin envisioned as a replacement for state government a type of small community meeting not dissimilar to the Quaker practice. Like Godwin, the Quakers felt an aversion to political extremism, seeking always to remain independent and unfettered to party-

³⁶ Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word* (New York: Oxford UP, 1986) 252.

political ideologies. Kafer explains that, in 1790s America, “a true Godwinian, as a true Quaker, could be neither,” a Federalist – hoping to create a government made up of a socio-political elite who rule through a Hobbesian style of enlightened despotism – nor a Jeffersonian Republican – emphasising the rights of the people and calling for a national government with limited powers (Kafer 71).³⁷

Apart from the philosophical affinities between Quakerism and Godwinian anarchism, there exist more direct political affinities between the two creeds. Both are systems of thought stand outside the boundaries of the enlightenment rationalist ideology subscribed to, not so much by the populous at large (whose worldview was often also directly informed by a Christian spiritualism), but by some of the most significant founding fathers of the nation: Franklin, Hamilton and Jefferson. In a political climate characterised by party polarisation – Whigs v. Tories, Republicans v. Federalists – both Godwinian anarchism and the Quaker faith occupy a dissident politico-philosophical as well as religious space that resists coercion by the dominant ideological creeds struggling for power. Robert Levine’s words add extra weight to the idea that the young Brown, as a Godwinian Quaker, occupied this dissident non-party politico-philosophical space. He writes that “at least through the 1790s, Brown’s commitment to exploring and testing a range of ideas far outweighed his limited interest in party politics.”³⁸ Brown’s friend and biographer William Dunlap equally professed that

Mr. Brown, notwithstanding the denunciations which party writers have thundered against individuals who refuse to enlist under party banners, and who determine to think, speak and act according to the dictates of their own judgment, had boldly asserted that he belongs to no party.³⁹

In *Alcuin, a Dialogue*, the figure of Mrs. Carter is Brown’s fictionalisation of this non-partisan critical voice. She is aware of the fact that “we are surrounded by men and politicians” and expresses Godwinian and Wollstonecraftian ideas in presenting the system of marriage as based on material inequality and legal servitude.⁴⁰ In fact, Godwin’s and Wollstonecraft’s ideas on marriage offered Brown another similarity between Quakerism and Godwinism, since the form in which Quaker marriages were conducted did not conform to the established laws on marriage in the early republic either.⁴¹ Kerber discusses Mary Maples Dunn’s argument that “the spiritual equality that Quaker theology offered women was confirmed and authenticated by the device of separate women’s meetings,” which “enabled women to control their own agenda, to allocate their own funds, and to exercise disciplinary control over their members, especially by validating marriages” (Kerber, *Spheres* 50). Like Godwin, Mrs Carter expresses a belief in the possible sanctity of

³⁷ For a brief discussion of the differences between Federalist and Republican political ideology see: Rod W Horton and Herbert W Edwards, *Backgrounds of American Literary Thought*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974) 80-111.

³⁸ Robert S. Levine, *Conspiracy and Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 25.

³⁹ William Dunlap, *The Life of Charles Brockden Brown*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: James P Parke, 1815) 74.

⁴⁰ Charles Brockden Brown, *Alcuin: a Dialogue and Stephen Calvert*, ed. Sydney J. Krause (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1987) 7.

⁴¹ See Edward Grubb, *What is Quakerism?* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1929) 88-9.

the institution, should the laws on which it is based be altered. It is because “marriage is law and the worst of all laws” that Godwin initially rejects the institution. He marries Wollstonecraft despite his objections to marriage because they realised that their children would suffer social stigmatization otherwise. Since Godwin believes marriage to “fall under the same system as any species of friendship,” the existing laws do not apply to his own ideal (*AW* 83). The dialogue of *Alcuin* also calls for a radical transformation of the laws on which institutions such as marriage, property ownership, and government are based in Brown’s time. It tries to achieve this in true Godwinian fashion, not by rewriting the law, but by altering the way men and women think about the relationship between their gender identity and particular role within society.

A central idea in *Alcuin*, as in *Political Justice* and *The Rights of Woman*, is the need to erase institutionalised inequality between individual men and women. Mrs. Carter reveals in her conversations with Alcuin that he is a representative of the group of “persons” addressed by the Constitution. He is a prosperous white man anxious to have the silent hostess of a masculine club affirm her role so that his own individual integrity is confirmed. As a consequence of Mrs Carter’s refusal to publicly affirm her role as hostess, the dialogue unfolds into an attempt to re-conceptualize the idea of *a person* from meaning a white male property-owning citizen to meaning *all persons* regardless of class, race or gender.

Alcuin links the appropriation of binary gender identity with political and especially Federalist ideology. Alcuin is mocked by a silent smile from Mrs. Carter, after his initial question to her: “Pray, are you a federalist,” which Alcuin confesses is the only way he can begin a conversation (*A* 7). By immediately giving an affirmative patriotic answer to Alcuin’s initial question, Mrs Carter would silence her own voice and kill off their debate about the ideological nature of gender roles. Her refusal to answer Alcuin’s question affirmatively, however, allows her to transgress the boundaries set by the ideology of Republican Motherhood and to make her voice heard: “I am a woman. As such I cannot celebrate the equity of that scheme of government which classes me with dogs and swine” (*A* 25). Mrs. Carter, in fact, uses Godwinian and Wollstonecraftian rhetoric when she critiques the status of women and the ideological institutions that make sure their status remains inferior to that of men. She cannot be a federalist, she says, because she is “conscious of being an intelligent and moral being” and sees herself

denied, in so many cases, the exercise of my own discretion, incapable of separate property; subject, in all periods of my life to the will of another, on whose bounty [she is] made to depend for food, raiment, and shelter: when [she sees herself], in [her] relation to society, regarded merely as a beast, or an insect, passed over, in the distribution of public duties, as absolutely nothing, by those who disdain to assign the least apology for their injustice (*A* 22-23).

These are also Wollstonecraft’s sentiments regarding the position of women and it is likely that her work, which Brown’s father had copied and distributed amongst his family, lies at the basis of Mrs Carter’s ideas. Mrs Carter also echoes the Godwinian idea that education is

merely a coercive force if it is not founded on a natural desire to learn. Mrs Carter argues that if women believe themselves inferior to men, it is because “they merely repeat what they have been taught, and their teachers have been men” (A 33).

Clemit argues that “Brown’s mixed allegiance to Godwin,” his apparent enthusiasm for his theories, but scepticism about their pragmatic potential, “should be seen in the light of American conservative reaction against revolutionary ideas” and that his “first published work reflects a divided response to the early optimism of British radicals” (Clemit 113, 118). According to Clemit, *Alcuin* shows that Brown was already “aware of the disjunction between the ideal theories and practical achievement of the progressive thinker” (Clemit 119). However, Mrs Carter, no matter what Brown’s own judgement on the matter is, embraces radical idealism when she asks, “what avails it to be told by any one that he is an advocate for liberty? We must first know what he means by the word. We shall generally find that he intends only freedom to himself and subjection to all others” (A 23-4). No matter what Brown’s own conclusions on the role of women in the public sphere are, he makes a radical voice audible through his early work and it is up to the reader to either listen to or reject this voice. The autonomous American male voice, like St Leon’s, becomes a hysterical, paranoid, and always coercive voice, against an increasingly powerful, independent and educated female voice that threatens to usurp the political initiative, opening a channel for the revision of yet dichotomous gender roles, towards a genderless society, rather than one founded in ideologically polarized male and female roles.

Fritz Fleischmann has argued that Mrs. Carter’s “cool and systematic destruction of [Alcuin’s] position [in part II of *Alcuin*] should overcome any remaining suspicions that Brown did not know what he was talking about.”⁴² In the “Henrietta Letters” – Brown’s early attempt at writing a philosophical dialogue, using a masculine and feminine voice – Brown, while echoing the dominant ideology in assigning women to the domestic sphere, also writes that “the pen as well as the needle may safely be entrusted to your beauteous hands.” His persona in the “Letters” asks Henrietta: “when shall I reach the elevation to which you have soared?” (in Clark 104) Even if Brown, the author, “expresses deep dissatisfaction with their original radical tendency,” as Clemit argues, the radical ideas of Wollstonecraft and Godwin find a strong voice in Mrs Carter that cannot be silenced by an appeal to authorial intention (Clemit 121). It is she who speaks in the dialogue, not Brown.

Even if Brown is highly sceptical of the utopian optimism in Godwin’s work, the fantastic climax of *Alcuin*, in which Alcuin is taken by flight of the imagination into a fantastic androgynous utopia based on radical ideas on gender equality, is reminiscent Godwin’s visionary schemes at the conclusion of *Political Justice*. It is Mrs Carter’s earlier radical critique of Alcuin’s federalism that allows Alcuin to imagine that “the universe consists of individuals” (A 39). Only Mrs Carter’s initial radicalism leads him to a realisation that in his own world the sexes are artificially distinguished by “exterior differences” such as “dress” which by becoming “custom” underscore gender polarization and become markers of class since “the chief difference consists in degrees of expensiveness” rather than utility; where, apart from “on the stage,” it is impossible for an individual to cross-dress. Imagining an androgynous utopia that expresses dissidence

⁴²Fritz Fleischmann, *A Right View of the Subject* (Erlangen: Palm and Enke, 1983) 25.

towards the ideology of gender polarization dominant in the early republic allows him to state, “why beings of the same nature, inhabiting the same spot, and accessible to the same influences, should exhibit such preposterous differences is wonderful” (A 41-42). It is his imagined utopia that his philosophical guide (a fictionalised version of Godwin) tells him that in their world, where marriage does not exist, there is no gendered division of labour, that “a certain proportion of labour will supply the needs for all. This portion then must be divided among all” (A 47).

Mrs Carter recognizes in Alcuin’s imagined utopia the visionary radicalism of the “class of reasoners...who aim at the deepest foundations of civil society” (A 52). While she professes not to share their radicalism, she validates their ideas by saying that even though she finds their notions of “common property absurd and pernicious” they are “better than poverty and dependence to which the present system subjects the female” (A 56). While she holds marriage sacred, she disapproves of it in the current circumstances because “it renders the female a slave to the man” and “enforces submission on her part to the will of the husband” (A 54). Kafer argues that “with *Alcuin: a Dialogue*, Brown entered explicitly into the 1790s women’s rights debate” (Kafer 95). Fleischmann has pointed out that “the cause Brown makes for women’s rights” does not end with *Alcuin*, but “extends to all his novels” (Fleischmann 39). In *Wieland* Brown expands on Mrs. Carter’s dissident voice to construct a gothic narrative that re-enacts and foreshadows the way in which the individual would be constituted increasingly through identification with a preconceived and ideologically upheld gender identity. If Brown never truly became “the Godwin of America,” a title given to him by the author John Neal, Mrs Carter can be read as the fictional Wollstonecraft of America. Just as *Political Justice* informed Godwin’s gothic novels, *Alcuin* is the philosophical foundation on which Brown built his gothic novel *Wieland*, in which a dissident androgynous presence and anarchic voice are given to the mercurial figure of Carwin, the bilquist.

Dunlap has written that the young Brown “was an avowed admirer of Godwin’s style,” which Dunlap felt, “may be discerned in many of his early compositions” (Dunlap 15). Godwin’s style in *Political Justice* had been rational, proving his points through deductive reasoning and an appeal to the immutability of the truth his reasoning illuminated, but his philosophy was grounded in visionary utopianism. In fact, Godwin rationally argued his way to a world in which all people would be self-educated philosophically-illuminated, benevolent individuals, working for the good of all, needing no government, laws, or ideological institution, but only their innate moral judgement. Unsurprisingly, Don Locke argues that the first edition of *Political Justice* was in fact “a flight of intellectual fantasy” rather than a rational philosophical treatise (Locke 93). Godwin himself realised later on in his career that his outward rationality had indeed been underscored by a visionary imagination that allowed him to look into the future and conjecture on the deplorable effects of contemporary injustice and the utopian possibilities of his rational philosophy. It was in his gothic novels that Godwin found an outlet for the visionary imaginative side of his thought. Like Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* or *St Leon*, *Wieland*, Samuels argues, “often appears more significant as an educational tract, one that contains lessons about the contemporary disputes over religious infidelity, a strictly circumscribed

education, the chastity of women, and the status of institutions, pre-eminently the institution of the family” (Samuels 45). These are the rational elements that inform *Wieland*. However, like Godwin’s novels, *Wieland* is also a visionary tale, presenting a “what if” scenario in which Brown seems to test his fictional community’s resistance to the intrusion of an irrational, anarchic, and with regards to gender, dissident androgynous presence.

Watts describes how Brown as early as his “late adolescence...began to exhibit an attraction to the dream state as an alternative to everyday life” (Watts 41). Brown had even titled his youthful journal “the Journal of a Visionary” (Watts 23). Brown’s emphasis on the powers of the imagination not only links him stylistically to the early British Romantics, but has an impact on his sense of manhood as well. In a letter to a friend Brown describes his “poetical fervor” as “a magician” and an “enchanter” by whom he could be “seduced to a greater distance from the tract of common sense than I am at present desirous of being” (quoted in Clark 39). In *Caleb Williams*, Godwin has his romance reading protagonist question his own sense of reason once he becomes an outcast figure. Similarly, Brown’s persona in the “Henrietta Letters” is “sometimes almost in doubt whether “he that was last year a visionary has not now become a lunatic, whether the objects around me be phantoms or realities, whether my reason be not overpowered by imagination” (in Clark, 104). The imagination is here linked to a loss of reason – a defining element in the ideological make- up of the masculine American mind – and becomes a potentially anarchic force. Brown’s friend Elihu Hubbard Smith lends extra credence to this portrait of Brown as a visionary with irrational tendencies, by accusing Brown of living in “a world of [his] own creation” (quoted in Watts 47). In his biography of Godwin, Marshall recounts how Godwin, too, in his youth, “managed to escape from his unhappy and lonely situation into the world of his imagination,” taking “imaginary voyages” (Marshall, *Godwin* 21). While Brown’s fantasy world may keep him from participating fruitfully in the commercial public sphere, it simultaneously functions as a breeding ground for the articulation of alternative possibilities that would take shape in his notebooks as well as his published writings. In *Thoughts on Man* (1831) Godwin, too, would eulogise the youthful period of “human life” in which “our reveries” are “free and untrammelled.”⁴³ He pictures a solitary schoolboy, who “climbs the mountain cliff and penetrates into the depths of the woods” and “pursues his own trains of reflection and discovery, ‘exhausting worlds,’ as it appears to him, ‘and then imagining new’” (TM 170). As “he hovers on the brink of the deepest philosophy, enquiring how came I here, and to what end” the solitary wandering school boy becomes “a castle-builder, constructing imaginary colleges and states, and searching out the businesses in which they are to be employed, and the schemes by which they are to be regulated.” This schoolboy, according to Godwin “thinks what he would do, if he possessed uncontrollable strength, if he could fly, if he could make himself invisible.” It is at such crucial moments in a young person’s life, Godwin argues, that

he cons his first lessons of liberty and independence. He learns self-reverence, and says to himself, I also am an artist and a maker. He ruffles under the yoke, and feels that he suffers foul tyranny when he is driven, and

⁴³ William Godwin, *Thoughts on Man* (1831; New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969) 170.

when brute force is exercised upon him, to compel him to a certain course, or to chastise his faults, imputed or real (*TM* 171).

Brown and Godwin clearly share an interest in the untrammelled workings of the individual imagination as a way to knowledge. The individual attainment of knowledge, as in Godwin's philosophy, in Brown's thought stands wholly separate from institutional education or governmental influence, but grows only by the personal illumination of the individual's understanding as he exercises his personal judgement in society.

Emory Elliot points out that in one of his earliest published pieces titled "The Rhapsodist" (1789) Brown uses his early visionary sensibility to construct the literary persona of "a hermit-explorer who has spent many months in the wilderness, meditating on human nature."⁴⁴ Left to his own will, the rhapsodist, like the portrait Godwin drew of himself in *Sepulchres*, "would withdraw himself entirely from the commerce of the world." He "industriously avoids the numerous circle, and the frequent converse; and is always to be found the deepest recess of his garden."⁴⁵ From this sequestered position the rhapsodist

is naturally induced to solicit an acquaintance with the beings of an higher order. An entire faith in the reality of witches and apparitions may commonly be traced to its true source, in the warmth of the passions, in the strength and fertility of the fancy. The rhapsodist is an hearty convert to the most extravagant of such opinions; but his ideas upon the subject are not tinged with the melancholy gloom of superstition. He believes it derogatory to the majesty of the supreme being; nay, he holds it to be a thing utterly impossible that an evil spirit should be suffered to escape from his dungeon, or that God's own messengers should be dispatched upon errands hurtful or pernicious to the sons of men. An interview with one of those preternatural forms is conceived in idea without disquiet or uneasiness, and is actually enjoyed without trepidation or dismay (*R* 7-8).

In short, the rhapsodist is a type of hermetic philosopher, a conjuror of the spirit world, who by solitary mediation "is carried 'beyond the visible diurnal sphere': the barrier between him and the world of spirits" where "the film is removed from his eyes, and he beholds his attending genius, or guardian angel, arrayed in ambrosial weeds, and smiling with gracious benignity upon the bold attempts of the adventurous pupil" (*R* 8). Hermetic philosophers such as Agrippa had in their defence put forward similar arguments that their magical meditations only conjured benign spirits, never infernal demons.⁴⁶ The rhapsodist persona, as pictured by Brown in his essay, seems closer to this type of hermetic visionary than the common-sense philosophers or religious zealots who play an instrumental part in defining the dominant culture of feeling in the early republic.

⁴⁴ Emory Elliott, *Revolutionary Writers* (New York: Oxford UP, 1982) 220.

⁴⁵ Charles Brockden Brown, "The Rhapsodist," in *The Rhapsodist and Other Uncollected Writings*, ed. Harry S. Warfel (1789; New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1943) 7.

⁴⁶ For an exposition of Agrippa's arguments of the benign nature of his occult studies see Nauert, Chapter 9.

Brown is also influenced by the individualistic visionary creed of his family's Quaker religion that urges individuals to see with their own inward eyes the truth of God.⁴⁷ Brown writes about the attainment of knowledge very much in the manner of the Quaker belief in the Inward Light. Like his fictional creation Carwin, according to Watts, Brown sets out on "an almost frantic pursuit of knowledge" (Watts 37). For Brown, "wisdom would come only 'in proportion as I gain access to truth...in proportion as my understanding is uniformly, steadfastly, and powerfully illuminated by its beams; and in proportion as my actions conform to the deliberate judgements of my understanding'" (in Watts 37).

Elliott explains why Brown adopts such a conscious hermetic intellectualism. According to him, Brown is "disappointed by what he felt was the failure of the framers of the Constitution to remain true to the principles of the Declaration of the Independence" (Elliott 221). In the heat of a revolutionary moment, the Declaration had idealistically spoken about "dissolution," "Separation," and "Equation," in a heroic, and proto-Godwinian fight against "absolute Despotism" and "absolute Tyranny," but this idealistic rhetoric transformed into a much more conservative notion of nationhood and citizenship by the time the drafters of the Constitution had to think about the practice of running a new republic consisting of no more than a patchwork of individual states, all with their own socio-political interests, customs and creeds. While the fight for independence had been successful, the framers of the Constitution were clearly not intent on fighting the patriarchal, imperial and market-oriented, socio-political structure on which their previous colonial social structure had been based. While the head of state is no longer a monarch, he is not chosen by the newly named "American" people, but by a group of appointed electors. In fact, immediately after the expulsion of the colonial ruler, these men made up the new governing aristocracy, so to speak. The young Brown is clearly ill at ease with the pragmatic and androcentric reasoning behind American politics in the early republic. In the visionary style that fuses rational thought with a utopian imagination, he can find a potential tool with which to construct a dissident voice, not his own voice per se, but one that can become his public literary persona nonetheless, a public mask he dons through his gothic fictions.

While Brown was constructing this visionary literary persona and engaging with Godwinian radical philosophy, the American reading public was becoming increasingly fearful of the irrational tendencies that seemed to accompany radical rationalism. For several years following the Reign of Terror, the American reading public, like the British, was fed paranoid reports of the evils of radicalism. The public mood in the young republic was one of conservative reaction to the revolutionary rhetoric that had initially made Americans enthusiastic about the political upheaval in France. During John Adams' Britain-friendly presidency, the XYZ incident, in which France attempted to bribe America into cooperation with them to the detriment of Britain, Watts argues, "was just what the Federalists needed to justify their Francophobia and to cast the Francophile Republicans as enemies of the nation" (Watts 17). The undeclared sea war with France that followed this diplomatic skirmish paved the way for the Alien and Sedition Acts of the summer of 1798,

⁴⁷ For an exposition of the concept of the inward light see Grubb, chapter 2.

which made it more difficult for the vast numbers of immigrants to gain American citizenship, made it easier for the government to expel them, and curtailed the possibility for individuals to criticize the government. These political acts and skirmishes strengthened the Federalist conception of a nation in which the “persons” of the Constitution were only those they, the bourgeois white property owners, wished to recognise as such. These acts provoked a response by the Republicans who in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions attacked the Acts as unconstitutional, polarizing American politics even further.

In the midst of this Francophobia, more general xenophobia and the political polarization they fostered, there appeared yet another invisible foreign threat: the spectre of the Bavarian Illuminati. Like Britain, American society was in the grip of a popular fear of Illuminati conspiracy. According to Levine, the word Illuminati had become the dominant cultural schema through which to express political subversion and had become a household word in the United States (Levine 22). As in Britain, in 1790s America the word Illuminati became synonymous with all forms of secret political subversion, whether Jacobin, radical utopian, Masonic, or Rosicrucian. Robinson’s *Proof of a Conspiracy*, published in America in 1798, portrayed Freemasons and Bavarian Illuminati as the greatest threat to the hegemonic religious and governmental institutions of Europe. Americans clearly also felt threatened as certain anti-conspiracy theorists linked Jeffersonian Republicanism to Jacobinism, while Jeffersonians believed that the Federalists actually supported a monarchical style of government, which they had fought so hard to oppose.⁴⁸

In the midst of this political turmoil and popular conspiracy fear, Brown’s friend Dunlap writes in his diary: “read C.B. Brown’s beginning for the life of Carwin; as far as he has gone he has done well; he has taken up the schemes of the Illuminati” (in Clark 169). Dunlap’s comment is clearly telling of how powerful the illuminate myth was at the time since Brown nowhere in *Wieland* or the “Memoirs” actually mentions Adam Weishaupt’s secret order. This reading of Carwin as somehow in league with an Illuminati-style organisation has become the privileged reading of his role in Brown’s early fiction. Taking Dunlap at his word, many critics who have analysed *Wieland* and Carwin’s “Memoirs,” assume that Brown based his strange intruder on the myth of the Illuminati. However, a close analysis of the construction of the figure of Carwin shows him to be much more closely linked to Brown’s hermetic rhapsodist. An analysis of his appearance and function in *Wieland* shows him to stand in close interfigural relationship with Godwin’s anarchic alchemist in *St Leon*.

In his biography of Brown, Dunlap quotes Brown’s diary in which he speaks of “the transcendent merits of Caleb Williams.” Although a disciple of Godwin’s fictional technique, Brown could not have read Godwin’s *St Leon* when he wrote *Wieland*, since Godwin’s novel was not published until 1799 (Dunlap 107). But both authors were clearly fascinated by the impact hermetic strangers with superior, supernatural powers could have on fictional worlds that represented the ideological status quo. In this respect, they were, as Margaret Fuller has argued, “congenial Natures” (quoted in Clemit 106). In order to paint a more comprehensive picture of the way in which elements of the cultural schema of

⁴⁸ For an exposition of the increased political polarization of post-revolutionary American politics see Horton and Edwards, chapter 4.

alchemy inform Carwin in *Wieland*, it is useful to first analyse how the young American author sets about to flesh out the mercurial figure of Carwin in the “Memoirs.”

Brown’s novel fragment “Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist,” although not available to the reading public until its serialization in the *Literary Magazine* between 1803 and 1805, was most likely written simultaneously or immediately following *Wieland*. To the modern reader, they are available and afford a crucial supplement to understanding Carwin’s structural and thematic function in *Wieland* because here Carwin is the first-person narrator, not the object described by a first-person narrator. Knowing more about Carwin than the fictional characters of the novel allows the modern reader to put Carwin in a much more central position in the novel. Nancy Ruttenburg, for instance, does not identify Carwin as a mysterious political conspirator linked to the Illuminati. Instead she reads him as “the common-man protagonist.”⁴⁹ Brown is clearly enthusiastic about his mercurial hero-villain and sets out to write what may well have been the first prequel to a popular fiction.

The figure of Carwin has its genesis in Brown’s rhapsodist persona. This becomes clear from the following confession in the “Memoirs”: “I estranged myself from society and books, and devoted myself to lonely walks and mournful meditation.”⁵⁰ Like Brown’s rhapsodist and Godwin’s schoolboy, Carwin penetrates into nature untrodden by other men; he even converses with the surrounding cliffs (*WCB* 231). In creating the figure of Carwin, Brown is continuing his experiment with creating an alternative discursive space from which to observe and write about the early republic. One of the initial textual details in the “Memoirs” that complicates the identification of Carwin with an Illuminati-style secret organisation is that several intertextual signs stress his link with the Faustian myth, which Elizabeth Butler has shown had its origins in the many popular tales told of wizards and alchemists, including Agrippa and Paracelsus, whose popular legends, in turn, were instrumental in creating the figure of the alchemist in gothic fiction.⁵¹ Carwin is linked to this particular cultural schema because of his desire for secret knowledge that would set him apart from others and empower him to alter the world to suit his will, much like Godwin’s alchemist, Victor Frankenstein, or Bulwer’s Zanon.

Like all gothic alchemists, or their legendary grandfather Faust, it is Carwin’s “unconquerable...curiosity” which leads him into the realms of the supposedly supernatural (*WCB* 228). And like Brown’s rhapsodist, Carwin confesses: “my fancy teemed with visions of the future, and my attention fastened upon everything mysterious or unknown” (*WCB* 227). Carwin individually develops special powers from an early age. He identifies with the protean character of Milton’s *Comus*. This underscores his attraction to supernatural wisdom. *Comus* had also been the main source for Godwin’s early novella *Imogen*, an allegory that presented a story that was supposedly the translation from the Welch of a tale written by a benevolent druid, about a pastoral society that battled the oppression of an evil magician (read monarch), who, like Reginald de St Leon, uses his magical powers solely for personal gain.

⁴⁹ Nancy Ruttenburg, *Democratic Personality* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998) 185.

⁵⁰ Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland and Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist* (1798 and 1801-3; Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1994) 242.

⁵¹ Elizabeth M. Butler, *The Fortunes of Faust* (1952; Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998) 7.

The way in which Carwin becomes a bilquist is analogous to the way in which the solitary alchemist develops his art. The alchemist's method is one of endless repetition of privately conducted experiments in which the inextricability of mind and matter is a crucial element. It is in a sequestered natural space that Carwin "proceeded to experiment," "repeated the effort, but failed," exerts himself "with indefatigable zeal to regain what had once, though for so short a space, been in [his] power" and by such trial and error "gradually...subjected these finer and more subtle motions to the command of [his] will" (*WCB* 232). The first time Carwin uses his new skills he immediately transgresses socially constructed boundaries. To better his social standing, he intends to mimic the voice of his dead mother to order his father, who is "a confident believer in supernatural tokens," to send him away from his paternal home to live with his aunt. However, "a thousand superstitious tales were current in the family" and Carwin is himself affected by his family's credulity when at the moment he intends to dupe his father, the barn is hit by lightning and burns down (*WCB* 234). Because Carwin is intent on running away, his father lets him go. At his aunt's house, Carwin exchanges "detested labour" for "luxurious idleness" and spends "three tranquil years" in the city undertaking intellectual pursuits, as "each day added to [his] happiness, by adding to his knowledge." While Carwin confesses that his aim in cultivating his intellect "was not the happiness of others," he also states that he was "not destitute of pure intentions...delighted not in evil" and was "incapable of knowingly contributing to another's misery" (*WCB* 238). In opposition to the Illuminati or other secret societies, Carwin's purposes are highly individualistic, aimed at personal illumination and entertainment and certainly apolitical at the outset. His initiation into the secret world of the rationalist radical Ludloe, therefore, should not be read as a sign of Carwin's turn to conspirational politics.

In his biography of Brown, Dunlap comments on Brown's "love for Utopian systems" (Dunlap 169). Brown's interest in utopias, as expressed in *Alcuin* for instance, is more of an imaginary, visionary character than of a practical, political kind, as represented by Ludloe in the "Memoirs." One rational utopia that may well have influenced Brown in his creation of the figure of Ludloe is Bacon's *New Atlantis*. Several details in Carwin's "Memoirs" hint that Bacon's rationalist scientific utopia may have been a source for Ludloe's schemes to which Carwin is initially bound, but which he ultimately rejects. Ludloe's scheme of creating a secret island utopia from which the world will be invisibly guided towards a better state is similar to Bacon's idea of an island of scientific utopianists who venture out into the world to invisibly influence its progress. Ludloe's possession of secret maps locating an island in the Pacific, suggests that he is actually already a part of, or he may be looking for, Bacon's mythical island of Bensalem. Significantly, in the "Memoirs," Carwin is continually resistant to Ludloe's schemes. By the time he enters Mettingen in *Wieland*, he is in fact hunted by Ludloe.

A story fragment printed in Dunlap's biography, which has received very little critical attention, can shed more light on Brown's interests in visionary utopias rather than rational political schemes. The fragment titled "Signor Adini" shows Brown's interest once again in solitary figures with mystical ideals and hermetic leanings that enter seemingly idyllic societies to illuminate how they are in fact far from ideal. Adini is a mysterious old

man who arrives in America in 1785 with a ten-year old girl, “a bewitching child” for which “he displayed the most passionate fondness” (in Dunlap 144). Like the wandering alchemists of yore, he is socially uncharacterisable. Professing to come from Italy, “his garb and aspect were that of a foreigner, but when he spoke he discovered the accents of an Englishman” (in Dunlap 141). While there are rumours of aristocratic descent, his aspect is one of “intelligent solemnity” and the narrator speculates that he “could be a voluntary exile from a land in which his religious or political opinions might render his continuance dangerous” (in Dunlap 142). Like the alchemist, who does not participate in the market society but is never short of cash, “he had no visitants...appeared to have no pecuniary dealings with others, but was exact and liberal in his payments” (in Dunlap 143). Like the alchemist, he is never ill, and “though with some marks of age upon him, he enjoyed perfect health...his clothing was slight and varied not with the variations of temperance or seasons” and is frugal to the extent that “he was unacquainted with a bed” and sleeps on “a mat or hair sofa” (in Dunlap 144). Like a true dissolver of natural elements, to Adini “dry or wet, turbulent or calm, serene or gloomy, hot or cold, were differences with which his sensations appeared to have no concern” (in Dunlap 167). While reserved he “displayed in dubitable proofs of extensive knowledge and energies of mind” (in Dunlap 149). While refusing to speak “of every topic that might lead to the mention of his own adventures,” and angry at any mention of this topic by others, Adini talks of how “the purposes of daily life, philosophy and reason, demand a reformation,” of how “the whole mass, indeed, wants a thorough shifting.” All this leaves the narrator to conjecture that “if he possessed supernatural power, he would doubtless exercise it, to the production of natural or universal happiness” (in Dunlap 151-2).

Adini refuses to speak to the rational merchant Mr. Ellen about the latter’s adventures in the East, but agrees with him that it is curious how “Columbus...a desperate pursuer of wealth is adored as the benefactor of mankind” (in Dunlap 153). Mr. Ellen decides that Adini is merely mad and attempts to find out what ails him in order to find a cure. When his son finds a map of New Holland, however, Adini tells him: “to thee it is a realm of barren and inhospitable turbulence, populous only in the mute and scaly kind. To the better informed it is a world of intellectual beings, whose majesty is faintly reflected on the diminutive stage, and by the pigmy actors of Europe” (in Dunlap 163). When Adini finally confesses to have “visited utopia” and to see in Mr. Ellen’s adopted son a “destined heir of greatness,” the rationalist Ellen professes him truly mad (in Dunlap 164). The figure of Adini not only foreshadows much that would go into the figure of Carwin, but he is the first of a long line of hermetic utopianists in American and British gothic fiction that travel the world seeking companions with which to bring about a general reform of society.

George Lippard, who dedicated his best-seller *The Quaker City* (1845) to Brown, may well have found in this fragment the prototype for his own line of Rosicrucian schemers, who come to the shores of Pennsylvania to find a predestined leader in Paul Ardenheim, the monk of Wissahickon, in the eponymous novel of the same title. A historical detail with which Brown may have been as familiar as Lippard is that during the seventeenth-century their lived “a renowned group of ‘Saxon’ radical pietists,” lead by Johannes Kelpius, along the Wissahickon river near Philadelphia (Kafer 114). Like the

Camisards, they dabbled in the mystical doctrines of Jacob Boehme, Jewish Cabbala and Rosicrucian philosophy. Kafer's historical research suggests that Brown's great-grandparents "almost certainly came into contact with the Hermits of the Wissahickon" (Kafer 115).

The mysterious hermetic philosopher Adini can be read as a prototype of Carwin, but this figure is not the only link between Carwin and the schema of alchemy. Another significant textual detail in the "Memoirs" that links Carwin with the myth of the alchemist and Rosicrucian philosophers is his residence in Spain. In the story, Carwin is initially sent to Spain by Ludloe to be educated for some as yet unknown purpose. It is in Spain that Carwin decides to break with the fanatic rationalist (*WCB* 252). Marshall explains how "European alchemy in the Middle-Ages was...entirely founded on the Islamic legacy which in turn was mainly based on ancient Egyptian sacred science" (Marshall, *Stone* 258). He explains further that Spain had functioned as the gateway for alchemy into Europe. It is in this country that the first alchemical texts were translated from the original Arabic into Latin. Toledo became "the fountain head" of the ensuing alchemical translation activities (Marshall, *Stone* 259). The medieval capital of Castile is also the residence of the mythical *Emerald Tablet*. According to Marshall this ancient alchemical text is "the most profound single work of spiritual alchemy to emerge from the whole hermetic tradition." It carries the descriptive English title "The words of the Secret Things of Hermes Trismegistus," and, according to Marshall, "it became the bible of the medieval alchemists in Europe" (Marshall, *Stone* 250). Remarkably, Toledo is also the setting Brown chose for the final and most mysterious action of Carwin's unfortunately incomplete "Memoirs." In Spain, Carwin does not join the Illuminati; nor does he join a Jesuit training school, as Jane Tompkins strangely suggests (Tompkins 52). While Pleyel's story about Carwin in *Wieland* makes it seem as if he had been learning among Catholic scholars, Carwin's own memoirs reveal that once he entered Spain he finds a solitary cell in a convent in Castile where he studies "the treasures of Arabian literature" (*WCB* 254). Carwin's education is hardly the stuff of Jesuit scholasticism, or Illuminati political theory for that matter. It is exactly the stuff, however, of the legends of solitary wandering alchemists and Rosicrucian philosophers, seeking illumination through the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, the mythical father of alchemy, whose principal text resides at Toledo.

Significantly, Marshall observes that Rosicrucian philosophers always "live[d] according to the manners of the countries in which they lived, only making themselves known by their seal and sign 'R.C.'" (Marshall, *Stone* 362). In *Wieland*, Henry Pleyel describes Carwin as fully immersed in the customs and habit of the Spanish population. Just as in the Adini fragment the mysterious stranger Adini evokes surprise by his perfect command of English, Pleyel is surprised to find that although he had believed Carwin a native of Spain, he spoke perfect English. Carwin's curiosity to develop apparently supernatural powers, his action of entering a Castilian convent and shutting himself up to read Arabian texts, his ability to fully disguise himself as a native wherever he goes and his command of languages, all link his identity to the legends of the alchemists and Rosicrucians, rather than German Illuminati.

The final scene of the “Memoirs,” at Toledo, dramatises the rift between the more rational and political utopian Ludloe and the more visionary hermetic Carwin. The reader finds out that, against the wishes of Ludloe, Carwin has been meeting a lady in the cathedral, with whom he has exchanged mysterious emblems. It is significant that his mysterious dealings are with a woman and not another male schemer. Ludloe’s furious reaction to this event suggests that Carwin was acting contrary to the way in which he had planned his pupil’s education. During their final confrontation over this incident, Ludloe, who now takes the role of Falkland in *Caleb Williams*, asks Carwin to “recall all the incidents of that drama, and labour to conceive the means by which my sagacity had been able to reach events that took place so far off, and under so deep a covering” (*WCB* 287). Ludloe, who early on in the “Memoirs” is shown to disbelieve in the supernatural by disclaiming immortality, probably alludes to having a great network of secret brothers that survey Carwin’s every move. His accusation that Carwin may be in league with an evil spirit can in this context be read as his turn from rational utopianism to the mystical Hermetic philosophy practiced by the alchemists and Rosicrucians. On Bacon’s pacific island with its proto-freemasonry scientific utopia, the inhabitants make buildings of blue stone and call themselves the Society of Solomon’s House, linking them to Freemasonry. Solomon’s temple features heavily in Masonic lore as well, and Brown’s use of such details as blue houses and secret pacific islands in the “Memoirs” give the impression that Ludloe’s schemes are linked to this type of secret fraternity, while Carwin’s obvious opposition to Ludloe’s schemes and his refusal to reveal his secret power identifies him with their utopian antagonists: the solitary alchemists, or mystical Rosicrucian philosophers.

After fleeing from Ludloe’s angry grasp, and having entered the scene of Mettingen, one of Carwin’s first utterances to Clara’s maid is significantly: “thou knowest as well as I, though Hermes never taught thee, that though every dairy be a house, every house be not a dairy” (*WCB* 47). While the nonsensical wisdom of Carwin’s address undermines the importance of its utterance, the reader is presented with yet another key element of the cultural schema of alchemy significant in the construction of the figure of Carwin. One identity of Hermes is of course that of trickster God in classical mythology, but this Hermes is not a teacher. The other Hermes, however, the mythical father of alchemy, became the most important teacher of alchemical wisdom in the West through the Emerald Tablet. This tablet supposedly is to be found where Carwin resided: Toledo. Carwin’s reference to Hermes as his teacher, and his residence at the centre of alchemy, can imply that he has studied the Emerald Tablet. Significantly, his entrance into the world of the novel *Wieland*, as in *St Leon*, brings about the dissolution of a seemingly utopian domestic community. Continuing the investigation into ideologically prescribed gender roles, started in *Alcuin*, Carwin unmasks this community to be founded on the old-world bulwarks of patriarchy: primogeniture, intellectual male superiority and a domestic ideology that ensures women’s inferior status.

The privileged reading of Carwin in *Wieland* has been that of a figure who supplies necessary gothic mystery but is ultimately superfluous to the novel’s action and purpose. Norman S. Grabo, for example, has interpreted Carwin as “a most shabby villain,” an interpretation Allan Lloyd Smith has recently echoed. Grabo defines Carwin as “the agent

of stupid mischief rather than the engineer of evil.”⁵² Punter curiously dismisses Carwin’s significance by describing him as “a rationalist friend of the family who claims to have been trying to teach Wieland a lesson in religious credulity” (Punter 167). Bill Christopherson also finds Carwin to be “more red herring than protagonist.”⁵³ And Kafer argues that “Carwin is just a mischievous wanderer with a special talent for projecting voices.” He concludes that “while Carwin may be some sort of villain, there is nothing heroic about him” (Kafer 129). In writing about early American gothic fiction, Davidson has explained that “the struggling individual has, in the Gothic world, a remarkable potential for good but an equally powerful motivation (and opportunity) for corruption” (Davidson 215). While in Carwin’s case the interpretive stress has often lain on his potential for evil, it is equally possible to stress this potential for good. *Wieland* is still informed by the cultural schemata that informed *Alcuin*: visionary literary persona, revolutionary gender politics and utopian idealism. If we read Carwin in the light of these cultural schemata, his function in the novel can be interpreted as similar to that of the alchemist in *St Leon*: he becomes an alchemical figure whose dissident androgynous presence and an anarchic voice clash with the dominant socio-political ideologies that inform the social structure of Mettingen and the individual identities of its constituents buttressed by an ideology of gender polarization.

Jane Tompkins analysis of *Wieland* in her study *Sensational Designs* (1985) opened the door to readings of Carwin as a structural and functional element in the novel, rather than superficial gothic filler material. She argued that Carwin is a metaphorical figure, “the living embodiment of a society in which there are no markers that define and fix the self...[H]e is one of the ‘new’ men the Federalists feared, who suddenly appeared out of nowhere” (Tompkins 52). Nancy Ruttenburg’s more recent analysis of Carwin underscores Tompkins’ point. She argues that the Wielands’ failure to positively identify Carwin from their point of view makes him “no one and everyone” simultaneously, “himself and a kosmos, one and many” (Ruttenburg 185). This is also the identity of the alchemist in *St Leon*. While Ruttenburg analyses *Wieland* and Carwin in the context of radical democratic discourse, the choice of imagery Ruttenburg uses to describe Carwin can facilitate a reading of Carwin as alchemical figure with a dissident androgynous presence and anarchic voice. According to alchemical lore, individuals are microcosms of the earth, which is in turn a microcosm of the cosmos. The idea that all is one, and one is all, is one of the central esoteric maxims of alchemy. Like the alchemist in *St Leon*, Carwin’s lack of identity gives him the protean quality to fuse with others and change them from within, to change their world view. The figure of Carwin, like that of the alchemist in *St Leon*, in possession of secret knowledge with which he can alter the status quo, reveals one of the major faultlines hidden by Clara’s idyllic representation of utopian community at the eve of the American Revolution: the fact that its harmonious appearance is reliant on old-world patriarchal institutions that privilege androcentric culture above a truly utopian egalitarianism. Carwin is unclassifiable from the point of view of the Wielands and Pleyels whose rural community represents a microcosm of American Society in the post-revolutionary era, and which is

⁵²Norman S Grabo, *The Coincidental Art of Charles Brockden Brown* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1981), 10. Smith’s echo of this reading of Carwin can be found in *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*, 39.

⁵³Bill Christopherson, *The Apparition in the Glass* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1993) 34.

still founded for its integrity on the acknowledgement of European, and in Wieland's case, even noble ancestry (*WCB* 6), "the law of male primogeniture" (*WCB* 34), the institution of marriage, the rights to property, "mercantile servitude," all of which have come to overshadow the family's history in religious radicalism (*WCB* 7).

Ruttenburg argues that Carwin's "ability to speak where he is not identifies him with the specter, the itinerant, the 'individual'" (Ruttenburg 185). Her definition of Carwin as a combination of spectre and itinerant is especially useful in stressing the interfigural relationship between Carwin and Godwin's alchemist, a traveller out of time, a walking dead man, whose magic powers unmasked a seemingly domestic idyll as a site of androcentric despotism veiled by St Leon's androcentric lens and a hegemonic domestic ideology. Similarly, Carwin's secret powers reveal that the idyllic community of Mettingen relies as much as sixteenth-century Europe on patriarchal ideology and an obscuring androcentric lens to create the illusion of natural male superiority and female dependence.

Looby explains that "voice," in the early republic, figuratively denoted "political participation," strengthening the interpretation of Carwin as a locus of radical democracy in the way Ruttenburg described him. Looby argues

that the voices of Carwin should destroy the happiness of a community while bearing such extensive relations to the necessary processes of social and political community-building was Brown's way of pointing to the dangers intrinsic to American forms of political association (Looby 174).

Whether it was entirely Brown's intention or not, Carwin's special vocal powers do reveal the apparent idyllic community on the banks of the Schuylkill River to be founded on repressed animosities. As Samuels argues, "the novel emphasizes the violence within the family while ascribing that violence to the intrusion of a violent force, but that very force seems immanent rather than intrusive and the efforts to name it as 'alien' only emphasize its immanence" (Samuels 49).

In his essay on the "Influence of the American Revolution" (1789), Rush writes that "the minds of the citizens of the united states were wholly unprepared for their new situation. The excess of the passion for liberty," according to Rush brought on "a species of insanity" called "Anarchia" (Rush 333). Carwin's powers to mimic and project any voice he wishes can be said to embody this species of individualist insanity. In *Wieland*, Carwin is presented to the reader through the androcentric lens of Clara Wieland's first-person narrative. Carwin's fluid identity and ability to speak both literally and ideologically from all positions are presented as a threat to the integrity in Mettingen, but they simultaneously reveal that an alternative mode of existence is possible. Even if Carwin's machinations, from the viewpoint of the narrator, bring about the fall of the house of Wieland, this fall, in the larger scheme of things, is the first step in a longer process towards a more egalitarian future beyond Jeffersonian and Federalist partisanship, allowing the integrity of the individual subject to be constituted not by ideologically prescribed social roles, buttressed by an ideology of gender polarization, but by a more inclusive sense of self that allows for multiple possibilities of individual identity.

Structurally, Carwin's presence at Mettingen brings about several near identical male/ female confrontations in the novel. The first confrontation is significantly between Carwin himself and the narrator of the novel, Clara Wieland. In this confrontation, the seemingly independent Clara is unmasked as viewing Carwin through an androcentric lens, which supports specifically her brother Theodore's authority and in general the socio-political status quo. Her reaction to Carwin's presence, however, also reveals the artificiality of this ideological position by illustrating how Carwin's presence and words imbibe her with visions of an alternative mode of life. The second confrontation is between Clara and her lover Pleyel. Pleyel's suspicion of Clara's infidelity triggers in him a hysterical reaction as he defends what he believes is his natural right, his right to Clara's unquestionable devotion and his possession of her property. The final confrontation is between Clara and her brother Theodore, husband to Pleyel's sister Catherine and the patriarch of the family and landlord of his estate. Wieland reacts with equal hysterics to Carwin's machinations as he ultimately calls on the ultimate source of patriarchal authority, an omnipotent deity, to buttress the authority that his identity as heir and patriarch had given him, but which Carwin's presence undermines: "God is the object of my supreme passion...I have thirsted for the knowledge of his will.. I have burnt in ardour to approve my faith and my obedience" (*WCB* 151). His apparently benevolent function as enlightened landlord and head of his family is reversed, as he becomes the tyrannical Lord of the land, destroying all who fail to comply with his creed.

Just as *St Leon* opens with an account of Reginald's aristocratic upbringing and interpellation into the ideologies that underscore his family's status, *Wieland* opens with Clara's account of her family history. Clara recounts how her father came to America as a disciple of the Albigensians and tried to convert the natives; how he became increasingly insular in his faith and eventually self-combusted in his temple; how his children, having inherited his estate, were given a classical education by their uncle – they worship a bust of Cicero – and managed to construct a "normal" enlightened life for themselves, turning their father's temple into a house of culture and idealising the domestic family unit in a rural setting as the pinnacle of civilization. From their fanatical origin, this family, as Ruttenburg explains, has become "a family of complacent rationalists" (Ruttenburg 185). Significantly, Clara reveals that she views her past through an androcentric lens by writing that "we females were busy at the needle, while my brother and Pleyel were bandying quotations and syllogisms" (*WCB* 28). Clara's uncritical account of traditional gender roles underscores Lori Merish's argument that "in the binary logic of eighteenth-century Anglo-American gender formulations, women were private and consuming, not public and political, creatures."⁵⁴ Indeed, Clara views her world often from secluded private positions.

Looking through the window at Carwin's physical appearance and dress, as he lingers on the edge of their family estate, Clara writes,

there was nothing remarkable in these appearances; they were frequently to be met with on the road or in the harvest-field. I cannot tell why I gazed upon them, on this occasion, with more than ordinary attention, unless it

⁵⁴ Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000) 30.

were, that such figures were seldom seen by me except on the road or field. This lawn was only traversed by men whose views were directed to the pleasures of the walk, or the grandeur of the scenery (*WCB* 46-7).

In keeping with her comment on the gender division of leisurely pursuits, Clara identifies identity with socio-political standing. Because the landscape of Mettingen that surrounds her own house is a lawn, a landscape garden, any citizen who traverses it should naturally be a gentleman of leisure. Clara confesses here that she failed to recognize Carwin as such a gentleman. His very physical presence clashes with her expectations. Carwin, however, ignores the social customs of the day and boldly proceeds not merely to enter their genteel domain of Mettingen, but walks straight up to the house Clara occupies and which is separated from the patriarchal mansion in which Theodore and his family reside.

A striking similarity exists between Carwin's actual entrance into Clara's world and the alchemist's entrance in *St Leon*, which makes it useful to quote it at length:

On a sunny afternoon, I was standing in the door of my house, when I marked a person passing close to the edge of the bank that was in front. His pace was a careless and lingering one, and had none of that gracefulness and ease which distinguish a person with certain advantages of education from a clown. His gait was rustic and awkward. His form was ungainly and disproportioned. Shoulders broad and square, breast sunken, his head drooping, his body of uniform breadth, supported by long and lank legs, were the ingredients of his frame. His garb was not ill adapted to such a figure. A slouched hat, tarnished by the weather, a coat of thick gray cloth, cut and wrought, as it seemed, by a country tailor, blue worsted stockings, and shoes fastened by thongs, and deeply discoloured by dust, which brush had never disturbed, constituted his dress (*WCB* 46).

This portrait of Carwin is complemented by Clara's later words:

And yet his forehead, so far as shaggy locks would allow it to be seen, his eyes lustrously black, and possessing, in the midst of haggardness, a radiance inexpressibly serene and potent, and something in the rest of his features, which it would be in vain to describe, but which served to betoken a mind of the highest order, were essential ingredients in the portrait (*WCB* 49).

Like the alchemist in *St Leon*, Carwin is equally portrayed as an oxymoronic figure, an intermediate being, incorporating the seemingly irreconcilable characteristics of noble sage and wandering beggar. His very oxymoronic physical appearance undermines the ideologies that prescribe social identities in the word of the novel. Ruttenburg adds extra weight to the reading of Carwin as an intermediate, dissident androgynous being when she argues that "all binary signifying systems, such as those that deduce essence from appearance, are

undermined” when Carwin enters Clara’s world (Ruttenburg 185). Immediately after Carwin’s introduction, and Clara’s moment of mutual recognition with the hermetic stranger, her seemingly enlightened and stable world starts to disintegrate from within.

On hearing Carwin pronounce his Hermetic riddle to her maid, Clara immediately becomes infatuated with his voice, by the “degree in which force and sweetness were blended in them” (*WCB* 48). Her “heart overflowed with sympathy and [her] eyes with unbidden tears” (*WCB* 48). As her mind builds a picture around this voice she finds out, as St Leon did, that “this person was, in all visible respects, the reverse of this phantom.” Like the figure of the alchemist in *St Leon*, the coarse and grotesquely proportioned Carwin already pierces through the expectations raised by his own voice. The shock of misrecognition that leaves Clara in a state of bewildering awe about Carwin’s identity is the first obvious crack in the patriarchal ideology that underscores the social surface of Mettingen, which is shown to be upheld through a continual performance of expected role patterns. When Clara sees him she confesses that “with a confused sense of impropriety...his face was as glowingly suffused as my own” (*WCB* 49). Not bent on performing an orthodox masculine role in either public or private domains, not a gentleman but neither an ordinary field hand, Carwin’s dissident androgynous presence turns him into an empty signifier allowing both men and women to project their identity onto his fluid identity.

Carwin is attractive to Clara because he presents an alternative identity to that of the other men in her life, her supposed lover Pleyel and her brother Theodore, or even her own sense of self as an independent woman. In the course of the narrative, Carwin’s figure repels Theodore and Pleyel because the hegemonic ideology that has empowered them and with it their dominant position is threatened by Carwin’s lack of manliness, but infinitely superior and seemingly supernatural knowledge. Significantly, it is exactly the oxymoronic nature of Carwin’s identity, as a vagabond with great, almost mesmeric, intellectual presence and a “magical and thrilling” voice similar to that of the alchemist in *St Leon*, which allows Clara, standing on the threshold of her own house, to alter her ideological perspective for a moment (*WCB* 64). Just looking at this deformed vagabond and hearing him speak gives her ideas about the possible reformation of the established socio-economic structure. She reflects on “the alliance which commonly subsists between ignorance and the practice of agriculture” and she “indulged [her]self in airy speculations as to the influence of progressive knowledge in dissolving this alliance and embodying the dreams of the poets.” She “asked” herself “why the plough and the hoe might not become the trade of every human being, and how this trade might be made conducive to, or at least, consistent with acquisition of wisdom and eloquence” (*WCB* 47). While Clara’s tone of lament for the loss of the rural estate of Mettingen throughout her confession seems to underscore her androcentric worldview, she here, for a moment, becomes Mrs. Carter of *Alcuin*, and ruminates on the Godwinian ideal of shared labour which would leave all the necessary time to cultivate the intellect (*PJ* 8/ VI). The poets are likely to be the kind of utopians Brown was interested in at the time, or figures such as Brown’s Adini. The momentary nature of this vision of social utopia, however, shows how much Clara has made the gender role allotted to her by the patriarchal society of Mettingen part of her

individual identity. She writes, “weary of these reflections, I returned to the kitchen to perform some household office” (*WCB* 47). Under pressure to conform, Clara reverts to the performance of domestic duties to take her mind off Carwin and the visions his presence induce. Merish explains that “the new bourgeois ideal [of womanhood] stressed woman’s moral value, her spiritual depth rather than polite surface, and typically extolled ‘the passive virtues’ of modesty, humility, and discretion coupled with the more practical skills of frugality and industriousness” (Merish 61). Clara reverts to this prescribed role to put her mind off Carwin, whose power has already effected a momentary change in the point of view of from which she looks at herself and her position within society. What is revealed in the moment that Clara identifies with Carwin’s identity, however, is that as a woman she is restricted in her sense of self because she is reliant on her brother’s authority as landlord and family patriarch. While she seems independent at first, she occupies her own house only at the discretion of Theodore who owns the property and who occupies the paternal mansion.

Clara’s description of Pleyel’s sister, the almost literally invisible Catherine, highlights that of her much her pseudo-independent lifestyle has not altered her tendency to view women’s social position through an androcentric lens. In fact, her transparent portrait of Catherine makes visible the androcentric point of view adopted by all members of the Wieland community. She describes Pleyel’s sister as “clay, moulded by the circumstances in which she happened to be placed” (*WCB* 71). Catherine indeed only materialises in the novel as Pleyel’s sister and later as Theodore’s wife, the mother of his children and the victim of his paranoid delusions. In these socially prescribed female roles, Clara illustrates to what extent she has adopted as the natural state of being the ideology of gender polarization that through the institutions of marriage, property and primogeniture structure the community at Mettingen. The very fact that Theodore marries Catherine and Clara is supposed to marry Pleyel underscores the force of the ideology of gender polarization and the illusion of male/ female complementarity it upholds. This interfamilial exchange of wives between Theodore and Pleyel is the perfect homosocial move to ensure both their family lineage and fortune.

While Carwin’s dissident androgynous presence and anarchic voice pierce through Clara’s androcentric worldview momentarily at the outset of the story, without challenging its dominant position, they truly threaten both Pleyel and Theodore’s sense of self as naturally privileged men. In contrast to Clara’s portrait of them as rational and scientifically oriented individuals, both men react hysterically to Carwin’s presence and his use of bilquism. Somewhere between the fictional timeframe of the “Memoirs” and *Wieland*, Pleyel had met Carwin in Spain. The rationalist Pleyel is blind to the esoteric nature of Carwin’s studies. The American is visiting Spain to see the ruins of the Roman Empire, a neo-classical pilgrimage of homage to masculine valour and patriarchal power that contrasts directly to Carwin’s hermit existence and individual studies of Arabian texts in a cloister cell. Unsurprisingly, Pleyel recounts, “on topics of religion and of his own history, previous to his *transformation* into a Spaniard, [Carwin] was invariably silent.” From Pleyel’s point of view this seems indeed curious, but with the knowledge gained from Carwin’s “Memoirs,” it is clear that his professed study of the Catholic faith was a cover-up, and that

he is an American who has been able to don the mask of Irishman, Spaniard, and Brit, and has thus become invisible to his own people. Pleyel's "suspicion that his belief was counterfeited for some political purpose" fits exactly what will be revealed in the course of the novel as his hysterical masculinity, while it also unmask him as a federalist in the grip of conspiracy fears that challenge his sense of innate superiority (*WCB* 63).

Like the mysterious Adini and the alchemist in *St Leon*, Carwin "studiously avoided all mention of his past or present situation...even the place of his abode in the city," once he is again in Pleyel's company (*WCB* 66). Like Adini or Godwin's alchemist, he is a complete stranger endowed with "intellectual endowments" which are "indisputably great," a behaviour modelled on "uncommon standard" and in possession of "a mind alive to every generous and heroic feeling." In trying to place Carwin within the ideological parameters that give individuals a recognisable identity in her world, Clara confesses that, to all of the inhabitants of Mettingen, Carwin "afforded no ground on which to build even a plausible conjecture" about his identity, leaving them immediately worried whether, "his powers had been exerted to evil or to good" (*WCB* 65-66). This last phrase shows how much both she and her family are formed by world view that defines the world according to binary oppositions. They cannot accept an open verdict on his social identity and past but need to position him either on the right side or the wrong side of the laws that validate their lifestyle and social relations.

Unsurprisingly, like the alchemist in *St Leon*, Carwin is hounded by the authorities. Ludloe, Carwin's one-time mentor in the "Memoirs," but now his foe, has chased his former ward across the Atlantic and traced him to Philadelphia, where he brands him

the most incomprehensible and formidable among men; as engaged in schemes, reasonably suspected to be, in the highest degree, criminal, but such as no human intelligence is able to unravel: that his ends are pursued by means which leave it in doubt whether he be not in league with some infernal spirit: that his crimes have hitherto been perpetrated with the aid of some unknown but desperate accomplices: that he wages perpetual war against the happiness of mankind, and sets his engines of destruction at work against every object that presents itself (*WCB* 121).

Once Carwin returns to America from a mysterious sojourn in Europe, he is pictured as a superhuman villain intent on attacking all that mankind holds dear. In both *St Leon* and *Wieland* the mercurial strangers with secret magical powers stand on the wrong side of the law – from the law's perspective that is. In both novels it is the focalizing figure who supports the establishment and the stranger who challenges its hegemony. In a world ruled by rationalist creeds, any individual pertaining to know more than the law allows becomes a threat to its integrity and must be repressed. Both the alchemist in *St Leon*, and St Leon himself in volume four of Godwin's novel, as well as Carwin, occupy this abjected position.

Davidson has argued that "the early American Gothic often provided a perturbing vision of self-made men maintaining their newfound power by resorting to the same kinds of treachery that evil aristocrats of both European and early American Gothics used to

assert their own perverting authority (Davidson 218). Carwin's appearance turns the rationalist and classical scholar Pleyel into a patriarchal tyrant. Pleyel, Fritz Fleischmann rightly points out, is "a patriarch of the first order" and "is neither nice nor reasonable" (Fleischmann 46). Cunning as a Richardsonian seducer, he attempts to move into the socio-political vacuum he perceives has opened up in the Wieland family due to Theodore's hesitancy to take up his prescribed role as patriarch. Fleischmann also argues that "Pleyel's attitudes toward women accord with his monarchist and feudal inclinations" (Fleischmann 47). Pleyel, described by Clara as "the champion of intellectual liberty," who "rejected all guidance but that of his reason," is also clearly a representation of the dominant ideology in which men like Pleyel pull the strings (*WCB* 23). Pleyel, hysterically trying to ensure the stability of Mettingen for his own benefit, establishes himself in Clara's formerly independent household as her guardian. He had already urged Theodore, "by the law of primogeniture," to claim his ancestral patrimony in Germany, to ensure the stability of the Wieland family, a stability he needs to be able to marry Clara (*WCB* 34). When Theodore is unwilling to perform what Pleyel believes is his prerogative as the head of the household and when Carwin's machinations, moreover, show a fissure appearing in the patriarchal foundations of the house, Pleyel aggressively defends his supposed right to be the possessor of Clara.

Carwin's machinations are a trick aimed at Pleyel's character, as much as they are aimed at Theodore's religious credulity. It is Pleyel who Carwin knows best and who immediately condemns Clara, and not Carwin, for her supposed liaisons with the mysterious stranger. While Clara's confessional narrative and tone of lament foreground the disastrous effects of Carwin's dissident androgynous presence and anarchic voice, the actions she recounts show up the defensive posturing of the dominant male figures at Mettingen who hysterically defend their masculine privilege against Carwin's dissident intrusion.

Clara's androcentric viewpoint is also underscored by her lament that her "golden vision" of Pleyel's silent devotion to her "melted into air" (*WCB* 74). The by now hysterical Pleyel becomes the stalker of Clara and Carwin. Thinking that he has unmasked their illicit liaison, he unsurprisingly condemns her to "a ruin so complete – so unheard of..." that even he cannot express its exact nature (*WCB* 95). For Pleyel, Clara's integrity as a woman is defined by her chastity and her adherence to Theodore's patriarchal will and her reliance on Pleyel's protection who has by now taken possession of her house and wishes Clara to remain within his protective boundaries. As Samuels explains,

in *Wieland*, the family is initially presented as a retreat, or "sweet and tranquil asylum"...from the intrusions of the outside world, but the distinction between home and world, radically personified by the figure of the intruding Carwin, gets blurred as the destruction seen to lurk without is discovered within...for the family to keep its identity as an 'asylum,' the outside world must be posited as a threat (Samuels 56).

Clara's association with Carwin, who clearly stands outside of Pleyel's patriarchal powers, reveal to Pleyel the independence she is capable of, marking her in his eyes as "the most specious, and most profligate of women" (*WCB* 96). Carwin uses his biloquial powers to play at once the role of adversary and saviour, allowing Clara to find her own independent desire, loose from the shackles of social custom which would have seen her safely married off to Pleyel. That she marries Pleyel at the end of the novel, just as St Leon vindicates his son's adoption of an aristocratic masculinity, says more about her continuing reliance for individual integrity on an androcentric worldview and patriarchal ideology than about the evil nature of Carwin.

Carwin reveals himself to Clara in her room and Clara now is sure he holds "supernatural power." Carwin explains, in a solemn and earnest voice, which grows more passionate as he continues, that Clara's belief that she is in his power and on the brink of ruin are "groundless fears." Carwin expresses his idea that a sexual union between them "would sanctify my deed" and would not be the "injury" that Clara believes it would be because of her interpellation into the dominant ideology that bars women an independent sexuality. This suggests that his intention was to free Clara from perceiving herself through an androcentric lens by appealing to her inner most desires. Carwin tells Clara, however, that if "this chimera" – the significance of chastity to a woman's identity – is "still worshipped" by her (meaning that she still submits to Theodore and Pleyel's masculine will to power), he would "do nothing to pollute it" as he "cannot lift a finger to hurt" her. He says, "the power that protects you would crumble my sinews, and reduce me to a heap of ashes in a moment." This power is the coercive nature of an ideology of gender polarization that causes hysterical men like Theodore and Pleyel to aggressively protect Clara from dissident figures such as Carwin. Carwin's point seems to be that Clara needs to start to think independently, to take off her androcentric glasses and look at the world as an independent individual, with her own desires.

As with Pleyel, Carwin's indeterminate identity, which gives him a dissident androgynous presence within the patriarchal community of Mettingen triggers in Theodore a hysterical response, which in Theodore's case takes shape as an antinomian religious fanaticism greater in its delusion than his father's Albigensian faith. Clara's confession reveals that Theodore initially had republican inclinations. Clara explains that, in reaction to Pleyel's urge that he should claim his patrimony, Theodore had wondered: "was it laudable to grasp at wealth and power even when they were within our reach," and wonders: "were not these two great sources of depravity?" Theodore initially refuses to play the masculine role allotted to him by the dominant ideology and by his family tradition. His father, whose unorthodox religious creed made him refuse any authoritative posture, functioned as a model for Theodore's own unorthodox behaviour at the outset of the novel. Clara explains that Theodore believed "power and riches were chiefly to be dreaded on account of their tendency to deprave the possessor. He held them in abhorrence, not only of instruments of misery to others, but to him on whom they were conferred. Besides, riches were comparative, and was he not rich already?" (*WCB* 35).

Viewed through Clara's androcentric narrative perspective, Theodore is presented to the reader as reluctant to don the mask of either commercial businessman or feudal

aristocrat. As much as anything, it is the pressure that the more dominant Pleyel exerts on Wieland to conform to the expectations laid on him by an increasingly liberal-capitalist society that leads Theodore to increasingly rely on that other source of tyrannical masculine authority: an omnipotent deity. As Watts argues, “if crumbling patriarchal domination created a vacuum in *Wieland*, the force of religious fanaticism filled it with unfortunate effect” (Watts 83). Clearly, Carwin’s dissident androgynous presence and his anarchic voice trigger in Theodore not a move towards the very ideal social vision he seems, like Clara, to harbour, but a hysterical turn to religious fanaticism as a means to empower himself, as well as a means to try to repress Carwin’s dissident androgynous presence and more powerful yet anarchic voice.

Theodore’s brutal massacre of his whole family is clearly representative of the aggression and masculine will to power that lay hidden underneath the idealistic veil of liberal capitalist ideology with its bifurcated ideal identities of Franklinesque men and Republican mothers. As in *St Leon*, the evils Carwin’s machinations bring about lie not in his murderous intentions, but instead, as Clara by the end of her tale has to confess “owed their existence to the errors of the sufferers” (*WCB* 223). The novel’s plot, like the plot of *St Leon*, is not driven by Carwin’s apparent supernatural powers as such, but by the hysterical reactions of the figures who are confronted with the androgynous presence and anarchic voice of the mercurial figure. Just as Reginald de St Leon’s aristocratic androcentrism and reliance on patriarchal ideology destroys his family by causing him to wrongfully apply his alchemical powers, Theodore Wieland’s massacre of his family, as narrated by Clara, becomes a travesty of the type of authoritative manhood that the early American social structure vindicated because of its grounding in patriarchal ideology and reliance on an androcentric worldview. His obsession with extreme authoritarianism and his Manichean outlook on good and evil, like St Leon’s obsession with the powers invested in material wealth and the inequality of property, leads him towards a grotesque gnosis that turns him into the ultimate despotic Lord of the Land.

Even though the novel ends with the complete demise of the estate of Mettingen that Theodore had “ruled,” Brown’s novel is not so “shocking and uncharacteristically negative” as Jane Tompkins argues (Tompkins 44). When read in light of Godwin’s *St Leon*, where the anarchic alchemist functions to destroy old orders in order to make the imaginative, of not material, realisation of a new order possible, *Wieland*, through the dissident androgynous figure of Carwin, an intermediate being with an anarchic voice, can be shown to work, philosophically, in a similar manner. Even though Brown’s novel was published before *St Leon*, Brown’s adoption of a Godwinian utopian vision and fictional technique led him to introduce into the world of *Wieland* is a mercurial figure who refuses to perform the prescribed roles available to men and women, and who willingly adopts male and female voices and social positions, so as to unveil the artificiality of the hegemonic patriarchal order. Christopherson argues that “by the end of the novel America has been abandoned” (Christopherson 8). Like *St Leon*, however, in which the concept of the family and its function within the wider social structure is not abandoned but radically reshaped, in *Wieland*, America is not abandoned, so much as radically altered. The novel incorporates into a picture of revolutionary American society the potential for a utopian idealist vision

of the future, freed from coercive ideologies that prescribe individuals into bifurcated and gendered social roles. Clara, having her worldview shaken by Carwin, recovers from what she perceives to be an illness. Just as in *St Leon*, the first-person narrator, despite the tragic events, conforms to the status quo. Just as St Leon, at the close of his narrative, shows that he has readopted his aristocratic androcentric viewpoint, Clara's recovery from illness, her subsequent marriage to Pleyel and their retreat to France express the reconstitution of her androcentric point of view and the couple's reliance on a traditional patriarchal structure. Their return, like that of St Leon, is a return to the past, geographically as well as ideologically, as they once more adopt a single-voiced vision of patriarchal society. Even though Clara's voice, like St Leon's, is the dominant voice in the novel, it is Carwin who remains in Pennsylvania after the fall of the house of Wieland. Curiously, Clara does not ruminate on any further mischief he might cause but conjectures that he is "probably engaged in the harmless pursuit of agriculture" (*WCB* 219). While the novel ends, like *St Leon*, with the narrator's celebration of a patriarchal marriage and a lament for a lost idyll, Carwin's fate expresses a potential celebration of eternal fluidity and continuous change. Carwin's anarchic voice and androgynous presence, like that of the alchemist in *St Leon*, have in fact made possible an alternative vision. *Wieland* is more utopian, even, than *St Leon*, since Carwin has managed to banish the androcentric culture of Mettingen to the soil from which it arose, Europe, allowing himself and his mercurial nature to flourish in rural Pennsylvania.

Poe's "Morella" and "Ligeia": the Female Alchemist and the Hysterical Husband

Edgar Allan Poe has become well known as an aesthete, an early proponent of the art for art's sake philosophy that would become dominant during the last decades of the nineteenth century. While abstract and aesthetic in nature, some of Poe's magazine tales utilize elements from the cultural schema of alchemy that endow the alchemical figures with an androgynous presence and an anarchic voice that, as in *St Leon* and *Wieland*, clash with the ideological point of view of the narrators in the story. What is strikingly different in Poe's tales "Morella" (1835) and "Ligeia" (1838 and 1845) is that the male narrators of the tales are not confronted in their domestic space with an intruder from without, but with an intermediate being from within, whose anarchic voice and androgynous presence already resides within the walls of their isolated family home and is located in the figures these narrators present as their wives. Partly due to the fact that Poe's gothic tales almost never allude to the existence of an outside world, this trope of inner-domestic conflict heightens the potential for gender dissidence by stressing that dissidence is generated from within the very walls that should be working to protect the polarized male and female gender categories from mutual contamination.

This shift towards interior instability can be explained by discussing it in the context of antebellum gender ideology in which gender roles did not function to form national identities in opposition to a foreign influence, but worked to create the illusion of separate gendered spheres of action within the domestic economy, both on the level of home and nation. The interior threat in "Morella" and "Ligeia" is presented in the shape of

powerful indeterminate beings, who according to the androcentric narrators are their wives, but who are revealed to be independent figures with supernatural powers that given them a dissident androgynous presence and an anarchic voice. Their characterisation as such indeterminate beings highlights the artificiality of the feminine gender ideal as prescribed by the Cult of true Womanhood.⁵⁵ This ideologically constructed female identity, in the context of an increasingly powerful market economy, linked womanhood with consumption and domesticity. In her seminal study of gender in Victorian America, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg writes that in the Jacksonian Age

when work left the home, men freely followed into the agora, to counting houses and factories. Women, in contrast, found themselves confined within an increasingly isolated domesticity. The female cycle became compartmentalized into permitted and forbidden space and acts.⁵⁶

Masculinity, in this ideological context, dominated by Jacksonian optimism in a laissez-fair economy, became increasingly defined by public activity and production. Poe's use of the schema of alchemy in "Morella" and "Ligeia" highlights the faultlines of such a public ideology of gender polarization because the wives of the narrators are presented as alchemists with an androgynous presence and an anarchic voice that triggers a hysterical reaction in masculine narrators who see their sense of innate masculine superiority challenged by their own domestication and dependence on an individual who is uncategorisable from within the parameters of domestic gender ideology, and who therefore manages to crack the androcentric lens that has ensured the narrators' initial sense of superiority and their wives' subordination. Before I analyse the dissident potential with respect to gender ideology in Poe's tales, in light of Godwin's and Brown's use of the schema of alchemy, it is useful to outline shortly how antebellum gender ideology differed from the ideology of gender polarization in the 1790s and to investigate how much Poe, as professional man of letters, engaged with the genre of the magico-political gothic and the cultural schema of alchemy.

Smith-Rosenberg points out that cultural symbols and myths "exist to make the politically or socially contingent appear eternal, ahistorical, natural" (Smith-Rosenberg). The male bourgeois fabrication of the Cult of True Womanhood that came to dominate the constitution of female identity in Poe's time worked in exactly this way. It publicly expounded a femininity which was intrinsically attached to an increasingly privatised domestic space that sheltered the family, including its male head, from the demands of an increasingly competitive and aggressive public sphere. Louis Renza points out, however, that "in the United States during the early nineteenth-century, 'private' and 'public' had referred to different realms of social experience, but less as oppositional than complementary, if uneasily coexisting ones."⁵⁷ While ideologically functioning as a shelter

⁵⁵ For a detailed exposition of the concept of "the cult of true womanhood" in Poe's time see Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, chapter 2.

⁵⁶ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 86.

⁵⁷ Louis Renza, "Poe and the Issue of American Privacy," in *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 169.

and safe-haven, the domestic home was also the very engine of the public sphere, raising the sons of the father in such a way as to ensure their survival outside of the domestic walls. While the rise of separate spheres ideology created the illusion of fixed roles for men and women in stable and autonomous spheres of action, the relationship between the masculine world of politics and commerce and the feminine world of domestic nurturing and care can be more appropriately depicted as a set of concentric circles. Importantly, Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher argue that even though these separate spheres were publicly constituted as natural domains for men and women that were complementary in nature, they were in fact “intimately intertwined and mutually constitutive.”⁵⁸ The ideology of the separate spheres was never a reality but merely a social myth developed by a masculine ruling elite that, while pertaining to uphold the constitutional right to equality, in fact ensured that within the context of an emerging capitalist structure of commerce, white men figured as the first-team players and most of the substitutes, while women, African Americans, Native Americans, and any other non-propertied inhabitants were reduced to the role of water boy or cheerleader. Rather than an idealistic safe haven, a moral retreat for world-weary working husbands and fathers, the creation of an ideologically prescribed feminine domestic sphere ensured the continuing cultural dominance of Euro-American men, by creating the illusion that their very cultural hegemony was the natural outflow of essential identities rather than social forces.

The economic crises of 1819 that preceded Andrew Jackson’s move from the military battlefield to the Oval Office (1828) and that in 1837 followed his departure (1836), however, were hints of the vast conflicts that were continually playing themselves out below the smooth optimistic surface of antebellum society. This period also saw the rise of reform culture and the continual presence of non-conformist religious sects such as the Shakers, the flowering of transcendental philosophy as expressed by thinkers such as Emerson and Thoreau, the growth of utopian communities such as Brook Farm, Oneida, and New Harmony, as well as individualist efforts such as Josiah Warren’s “Time Store,” in which goods were bought by trading time rather than cash. All of these developments are proof that many citizens of any gender and colour openly offered resistance to the socio-economic ideologies that had a dominant position in the make-up of Jacksonian America.⁵⁹

Lora Romero has pointed out significantly that “the cult of domesticity may have become culturally dominant by the mid-nineteenth century, but it is important to bear in mind that, originally, it was an oppositional formulation.”⁶⁰ Especially for writers of fiction, Romero argues, “as a critique of the patriarchal family, domesticity offered authors a rich and pliable symbolism for representing power and resistance” (Romero 109). In Poe’s

⁵⁸ Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher, introduction, *No More Separate Spheres: A Next Wave American Studies Reader*, eds. Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher (Durham: Duke UP, 2002) 8.

⁵⁹ In chapter 1 and 2 of *Romanticism and the Marketplace* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985), Michael T. Gilmore investigates the anti-commercial sentiment in the Transcendentalist ideas of Emerson and Thoreau. Sterling F. Delano’s *The Harbinger and New England Transcendentalism: A Portrait of Associationism in America* (London: Associated UPs, 1983) and Robert Allerton Parker’s *A Yankee Saint: John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Community* (Philadelphia: The Porcupine Press, 1972) show to what extent reform culture flourished in the wake of the economic crises during the Jacksonian era. Josiah Warren’s *Manifesto* (1841) in the clearest expression of an individualist anarchist philosophy within the wider antebellum reform culture, dominated by the ideas of Charles Fourier as expressed in Albert Brisbane’s *Social Destiny of Man* (1840).

⁶⁰ Lora Romero, *Home Fronts* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997) 20.

work, most notably, the concept of domestic interiority becomes a space not of repression, but of role reversal, as the masculine narrators seem to lack the control over their household that the dominant gender ideology prescribes.

The dissidence inherent in the ideology of domesticity lies in its potential to make heard alternative voices than the dominant white man's, while simultaneously excluding these voices from the material public sphere because of their otherness. This discursive duplicity allows domesticity to become a potent weapon for both the exponents of the dominant ideology, and those who attempted to articulate a resistant. Kate Ferguson Ellis points out that the rise of the gothic novel was in fact related to the emergence of an ideology of separate spheres in late eighteenth-century Britain. She argues that the gothic novel by its very incorporation of the ideology of separate spheres offered its female readers "a resistance to an ideology that imprisons them even as it posits a sphere of safety for them" (F.K. Ellis x). Poe's use of domesticity in connection with alchemical lore in some of his gothic magazine tales clearly shows how the trope of domesticity in fiction has dissident potential, while at the same time retaining a popular appeal.

Davidson and Hatcher emphasise how adopting the ideology of separate spheres as an interpretive model, while stressing gender ideology, veils many other crucial cultural factors that determine the socio-political status quo: "race, sexuality, class, nation, empire, affect, region, and occupation" (Davidson and Hatcher 9). However, just as Brown's work stresses the power of gender over any other cultural identity markers because of its focus on the configuration of the nuclear family and its reliance on the institutions of marriage and primogeniture, Poe's work is characterised by an over-determined stress on gender because of its focus on domestic male/ female relationships after marriage. Poe's review of Longfellow's collected poems shows how much he shared the dominant southern perspective on race. Poe never seems to question the wrongs of slavery, but in the same review, he uses Godwinian phraseology when he addresses the institution of marriage. He refers to "the infinitely worse crime of making matrimonial merchandise – or even less legitimate merchandise – of one's daughter" (ER 763). Within the bourgeois capitalist framework the institution of marriage emphasises the social and biological difference between the sexes. Poe's tales that involve close male/ female relationships in marriage seem blind to concerns of class and race, but are clearly obsessed with how male and female identity is defined by a socially enacted role constituted by binary oppositions such as authority and subordination, knowledge and ignorance, male and female, and ultimately life and death.⁶¹ That it is not surprising that Poe, like Godwin and Brown, utilizes elements from the cultural schema of alchemy to construct these narratives can be explained by his

⁶¹ Recent scholarship has shown that some of Poe's work does address the issue of race and slavery in the United States. The stories most often read in this context are his stories involving African American stereotypes or animal such as "The Black Cat," *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, "The Man that Was Used Up," "The Gold-Bug," and "Murders in the Rue Morgue." In "Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies and Slaves," in *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*, eds. Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), Joan Dayan addresses Poe's engagement with issues of race. She argues, however, that "the tales about women, 'Morella,' 'Ligeia,' 'Berenice,' 'The Fall of the House of Usher,' and 'Eleonora,' are about men who narrate the unspeakable remembrance..." (Dayan 184). Dayan's point emphasises how much these stories stress gender over other cultural issues.

occupying a similar position to Brown, within antebellum society, as a visionary rationalist occupying a discursive space outside of the dominant structure of feeling.

Edward Wagenknecht writes that “Poe once permitted himself to declare that ‘the style of the profound thinker is never closely logical,’ but he never wished to throw out either logic or close reasoning; he merely wished to supplement them with intuition and imagination.”⁶² By emphasising Poe’s peculiar mode of thought in which reason and imagination blend into one, Wagenknecht shows that in his intellectual outlook Poe adopts a literary persona that is in some ways continuous with the rhapsodist persona cultivated earlier by Brown in which he fused Godwinian radicalism and hermetic visionary flights of fancy into a consciously prophetic voice from the margins of mainstream culture.

Positivist science, like enlightenment rationality, in Poe’s mind, as expressed in his early “Sonnet – to Science” (1829), works like the tyrannical system of tenured authority he found dominant in the literary scene in which he attempted to make his way as a professional author. Such a worldview propounds a single truth, by invoking a sense of authority that cannot be questioned and destroys his “summer dream beneath the shrubbery.”⁶³ Enlightenment rationality by emphasising the binary, either/or mode of thought, makes difficult the articulation of the alternative: both/ and. In theory, this is also what a two-party-political system and a representative government does. It works to give the impression that a chosen few can govern the many and enforces those many to choose to take sides either with or against the governing party.⁶⁴ As the populist Jackson probably understood, by keeping the masses happy and the disgruntled few silent, government could achieve an outward sense of optimism, even though, in hindsight, the Jacksonian period is better characterised as a time of great instability. Poe’s body of work, especially his criticism and his correspondence, reads like the voice of one of the disgruntled few. As an orphaned Bostonian, Poe was raised in the southern city of Richmond by his merchant uncle John Allan, with whom he fell out over financial disagreements. With his family ties severed, Poe, like Brown, sought to establish himself wherever he could as a professional man of letters. As a wandering litterateur without any specific ties to Northern or Southern political allegiances, Poe occupied a similar position in his culture to both Godwin and Brown, even though he did not share their more overt interest in visionary utopias and social egalitarianism.

In the 1790s, Godwin’s egalitarian agenda was founded in his utopian vision of a state of ultimate happiness wherein every individual would work towards the good of the community. Within society, he spoke of “the right each man possesses to the assistance of his neighbour” (*PJ* 199). Regarding poverty, Godwin had written, as late as 1820, that “the rich man therefore has no right to withhold his assistance from his brother-man in distress” (*AW* 78). Significantly, while there is no evidence to suggest that Poe was familiar with Godwin’s philosophy, the private correspondence with his uncle reveals the struggling

⁶² Edward Wagenknecht, *Edgar Allan Poe: The Man Behind the Legend* (New York: Oxford UP, 1963) 100-1.

⁶³ Edgar Allan Poe, *Poems*, ed. Thomas Oliver Mabbott (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980) 90.

⁶⁴ In *An American History*, Vol. 1 (New York: Meredith, 1972), Rebecca Brooks Gruver writes that during the Jacksonian period a “two-party system had evolved,” the Democrats and the Whigs (Gruver 383). The election of 1840, she writes, “was an election based mostly on personalities and ballyhoo,” underscoring the idea that politics became increasingly about popular opposition.

author's belief that it was Allan's duty to rescue him from financial difficulties because he had the means to do so, just as Godwin had earlier appealed to Percy Shelley's family fortune as a source for relieving his own monetary wants. The many letters in which Poe asks for financial assistance are not always addressed to his one-time guardian, but are sometimes addressed to near strangers. This shows that Poe viewed that individuals in dire straits have the right to appeal to charity from those that are affluent and that it is the duty of the affluent to provide such charity to the needy. By making such appeals to charity, Poe echoes Godwin's ideas about the distribution of wealth. It needs to be taken into account, however, is that both Godwin and Poe had good reasons to stress the duty of the affluent to provide for the needy. Both men were forever struggling to make ends meet as professional authors and would have benefited immensely by seeing such social idealism put into practice. What is significant in Poe's attitude toward the distribution of wealth is that by appealing to such "Godwinian" notions of charity, Poe was openly distancing himself from a society that Barbara Welter explains was dominated by "a new species, Economic man."⁶⁵ In a society where men were expected to be "the movers, the doers, the actors," and in which women were expected to be "the passive submissive responders," according to the dominant public gender ideology, Poe's financial dependence on others was not dissimilar to Godwin's refusal to be a materialistic utilitarian citizen. Both Godwin and Poe's intellectual stance as poor, yet independent men of letters can be interpreted as an identity performance that they consciously adopted to exert independence from the "mob" – those individuals who act out the ideologically prescribed roles and therefore uphold the hegemonic culture, its institutions, values (Welter 28). Failure to achieve intellectual independence, both men feared, would hold back mankind's development.

In an 1843 letter to his fellow poet and aspiring magazinist James Russell Lowell, Poe writes, "as for the few dollars you owe me – give yourself not one moment's concern about them. I am poor, but must be very much poorer, indeed, when I even think of demanding them."⁶⁶ By adopting such an outwardly melodramatic stance with regard to what was initially no more than a business transaction, Poe is in fact echoing Caleb Williams' outburst in the novel he so much admired:⁶⁷

Give me poverty! Shower upon me all the imaginary hardships of human life! I will receive them all with thankfulness. Turn me a prey to the wild beasts of the desert, so I be never again the victim of man dressed in the gore-dripping robes of authority! Suffer me at least to call life and the pursuits of life my own! Let me hold it at the mercy of elements, of the hunger of beasts or the revenge of barbarians, but not the cold-blooded prudence of monopolists and kings! (*CW* 300-1)

By refusing Lowell's money – money he so desperately needs – Poe stresses his solidarity with his fellow poet, who was similarly trying to establish a literary magazine of his own.

⁶⁵ Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1976) 85.

⁶⁶ John Ward Ostrom, ed., *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1948) 231.

⁶⁷ For a concise discussion of Poe's praise for *Caleb Williams* and some of Godwin's other work see page 134.

Poe attempts to create a bond in poverty and purpose between the two struggling literati. Poe's letters to fellow authors are dominated by an us-against-them feeling. "They" are the "monopolists and kings" of Caleb Williams' outburst, who are transported to the American scene and become the plutocrats of the publishing industry in a society increasingly ruled by the dollar sign, and not, as Poe idealised, solely by the truth and beauty of the words on the page.

Poe clearly refused to play the role that was expected of him in antebellum society. And his marginality, geographically, artistically and socially can articulate how in antebellum society, behind the popular appeal of Jackson's public figure and ideology, in Smith-Rosenberg's words, "conflicting economic, social, and ideological systems battled for hegemony" (Smith-Rosenberg 79). Rosenberg has pointed out how, in a society in which "recreation and work became binary opposites" along with "public and private," the author who tried to make a living through privately engaging in non-productive labour became increasingly alienated from the marketplace, which was geared more and more towards demand and supply, rather than literary merit (Smith-Rosenberg 85). As a literary critic within this fast-commercialising world, however, Poe found a public voice that had a not dissimilar effect on the literary establishment of antebellum America than that of Godwin, whose words stirred up so much commotion among the political establishment in the 1790s. Godwin, Brown, as well as Poe, were ultimately marginalized by the individual voices they found through their writings.

Poe's overt oppositional literary-critical strategy shows similarity to Godwinian ethics of writing openly against established figures of authority. Poe's refusal to treat any author positively because he bestowed a benefit on him in the past is in line with Godwin's ideas of how others should be treated according to their merits. Godwin expressed the idea that "gratitude...if by gratitude we understand a sentiment of preference, which I entertain towards another, upon the grounds of my having been the subject of his benefits, is no part either of justice or virtue..." (*PJ* 171). Justice, in Godwin's philosophy, is "no respecter of persons" (*PJ* 169). Similarly, Poe's mission as literary critic was to do justice to what he believed was literature that would raise American culture to a higher level, and not to the individuals who engaged in its creation and who happened to be able to benefit his own career. As a consequence Poe, like Godwin, was no respecter of persons. As a result of such an unorthodox critical policy, Poe found it hard to imagine why authors whose books he buried in his critiques, held a personal grudge towards him and would not aid him in his idealistic literary projects to establish an independent American literary scene that could improve the American mind.

Poe's professional dream, to set up a literary magazine would promote the importance of literature and stress its function to improve American society, was a project fuelled by a sense of duty similar to the way in which Godwin perceived it his duty to elevate the masses by producing popular fiction that had as its aim the revelation of things as they are, or how things have become to be. For Godwin, "duty is the treatment I am bound to bestow upon others; right is the treatment I am entitled to expect from them" (*PJ* 184-5). Poe felt it his duty, for the benefit of American literature, to treat his contemporaries in the way he chose fit and to set up a magazine along the lines he

proposed. He was convinced that his occupation was a virtuous task, and virtue was the only true intention for any action according to Godwin, whom Marshall describes as believing that “every man ought to feel his independence, that he can assert the principles of justice and truth without being obliged treacherously to adapt them to the peculiarities of his situation, and the errors of others” (*AW* 15). While Poe is of course no American proponent of Godwinism, he does echo Godwinian sentiment in a letter to Judge Conrad (1841). Speaking of his attempt to set up his own magazine, *The Penn*, not long after being fired from *Burton’s Gentlemen’s Magazine*, Poe writes:

I have been led to make the attempt at establishing it through an earnest yet natural desire of rendering myself independent – I mean not so much as regards money, as in respect to my literary opinions and conduct. So far I have not only labored solely for the benefit of others (receiving for myself a miserable pittance) but have been forced to model my thoughts at the will of men whose imbecility was evident to all but themselves” (*L* 154).

Poe envisions himself, as in his final tale “Hop-Frog” (1849), playing the role of the vengeful jester who opposes a despotic king and asserts his independence on both an intellectual and financial plane, while articulating his sense of duty in improving the state of American letters. Although he denies a financial motive, he clearly portrays his former employers as ignorant tyrants, who deliberately kept him poor in the next. Poe clearly felt abused by the increasingly capitalist demands of the world of magazine publishing that, as Romero points out, often catered for women’s taste, but was “almost entirely in the hands of men,” the type of men Romero argues, and Poe would have agreed, “whose imbecility was evident to all but themselves” (Romero 13).

Poe’s plan to start his own magazine can be read as his attempt to assert his independence from this world, and prove his individual integrity as a man of letters outside of the homosocial world of commercial publishing. In Poe’s own words, the magazine he would set up would “kick up dust” (*L* 119). Godwin had hoped almost half a century earlier that his *Political Justice* would revolutionize British society and with *Caleb Williams*, he had indeed kicked up much dust in late eighteenth-century British intellectual circles as well as among the popular reading audience. Poe in turn, while keeping always clear of overt political involvement and keeping himself strictly within the field of letters, holds the “ambition of serving the great cause of truth, while endeavouring to forward the literature of the country” (*L* 143). He clearly wishes to turn the limited scope of the American literary scene as one ruled by men and aimed at women, to a national treasure in the hands of those literati he believes competent in leading it and aimed at all of American society. From this perspective, it is possible to read his gothic tales as potential magico-political tales, popular fictions that utilize the fantastic as means of addressing an audience whose minds can be (re)formed by reading popular gothic fiction.

A review of Poe’s *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840) in the *Philadelphia Weekly Messenger* states:

“William Wilson” by Mr. Poe, reminds us of Godwin and Brockden Brown. The writer is a kindred spirit of theirs in his style of art. He paints with sombre Rembrandt-like tints, and there is great force and vigor of conception in whatever he produces.⁶⁸

While Poe’s gothic reading includes Radcliffe, Maturin’s *Melmoth* and Bulwer’s *Zanoni*, he does not openly praise any of these texts. Wagenknecht underscores *The Philadelphia Weekly Messenger’s* insight by pointing out that “it should surprise nobody that Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*, with its elements of ratiocination, should have interested Poe more than any other second-string English novel” (Wagenknecht 131). According to Burton R. Pollin, “Godwin represented for Poe the apex of narrative and stylistic achievement” but he believes that “Poe seems entirely to ignore Godwin’s social criticism.”⁶⁹ Pollin’s methodical search for direct references to Godwin in Poe has given him a wealth of material to make a case for Poe’s admiration of Godwin as an author of fiction. Pollin would have taken a positive review of, or an open engagement with the philosophical ideas presented in *Political Justice* as evidence of Poe’s interest in Godwin’s thought. However, as the discussion of Poe’s literary persona above shows, his praise of Godwin’s style and technique seems to be founded on a shared vision of the function of literature in society. Poe described Godwin as “a very remarkable man, not even yet thoroughly understood” (quoted in Pollin 122).

Importantly, Poe himself explains that he admires Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* because the novel not only narrates a plot of flight and pursuit, but actually “discussed” Caleb’s escapes from imprisonment. One of *Caleb Williams’* merits, according to Poe, was that “we become at once absorbed in those details which so manifestly absorb his [Caleb’s] own soul” (ER 104). In his review of Godwin’s *Lives of the Necromancers* (1835), Poe mentioned that “the author of *Caleb Williams* and *St Leon*, is, with us, a word of weight, and one which we consider a guarantee for the excellence of any composition to which it may be affixed” (ER 259). Poe even expresses the hope that “the pen which wrote *Caleb Williams*, should never for a moment be idle” (ER 260). Seven years after he first praised Godwin as an author, Poe compares Godwin and Dickens in his second review of *Barnaby Rudge*. He concedes that on a literary level: “‘*Caleb Williams*’ is a far less noble work than ‘*The Old Curiosity Shop*’.”⁷⁰ However, Poe still maintains that Dickens is a lesser writer, since he has no “positive genius for adaptation, and still less for that metaphysical art in which the souls of all *mysteries* lie” (ER 244). Poe pictures Godwin as a visionary novelist, an author who endows his fictions with metaphysical speculations. His novels do not merely portray life as it is in all its minute detail, but speculate on life how it should, could and will be. The stark social realism of *The Sketches by Boz*, and Dickens’ other magazine pieces, while functioning as a mirror of the evils of contemporary society, lack for Poe that profound visionary philosophy about mankind’s role on earth and final destiny that he did recognize in Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*. Poe may well have found in the author of *Caleb Williams* a fellow

⁶⁸ This citation has been copied from a display including Poe’s book at the exhibition “Circles and Circulations in the Revolutionary Atlantic World,” which was held at the Fales Library of New York University in October 2004.

⁶⁹ Burton R. Pollin, *Discoveries in Poe* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1970) 109 and 127.

⁷⁰ Edgar Allan Poe, *Essays and Reviews* (New York: American Library, 1984) 224.

visionary rationalist intent on fusing reason and imagination to create popular modes of writing that would aim at the improvement of the mind of the individual reader.

While stressing Poe's debt to Godwin, Pollin also argues that Poe "was deeply conscious of the peculiar genius of Charles Brockden Brown" (Pollin 108). For both Godwin and Brown, as well as for Poe, fiction was not merely a mirror reflecting reality, but a magical glass that could peer prophetically into the future and project utopian solutions, while simultaneously illustrating dystopian realities. Poe's neurotic, obsessive and paranoid male narrators, always finding themselves in a master-slave relationship with a female antagonist, are indeed the offspring of Godwinian dialectical persecution narratives involving Caleb and Falkland, or Brown's Ludloe and Carwin, or Clara and Theodore Wieland. The highly rhetorical and philosophically argumentative style of both Godwin's and Brown's gothic fictions is not dissimilar to Poe's own artificial, highly stylised prose and essayistic, dialectical, method of structuring his tales towards a specific effect. However, Poe's entrenchment within the magazine formats of the short tale cause the dissident potential of his gothic stories to be kept more consistently invisible than the more overtly socially engaged Godwinian gothic novels. Like Godwin and Brown, Poe turns to the schema of alchemy as a means to construct magical figures that stand apart from the dominant order. Whether he did so merely because of its popular appeal or with serious motives, these stories share a dissident potential with regards to gender ideology that can be located in the presence of alchemy.

Curiously, in the last five years of his life Poe presents himself to his friends and colleagues as somewhat of a metaphysical philosopher and hermit, if not an actual hermetic philosopher, in the alchemical sense. In 1844 he suggests to Lowell the idea "that the elite of our men of letters should combine secretly" in order to retain their independence from the popular magazines which would allow them to raise American culture to a higher standard (*L* 247). In the same year he writes to his friend Chivers of another literary scheme, and says: "when you feel ready to attempt the enterprise, you will find me here – at New York – where I live, at present, in strict seclusion, busied with books and ambitious thoughts, until the hour shall arrive when I may come forth with a certainty of success" (*L* 259). Poe's adoption of a tone of secrecy and his turn to solitary and secluded studies make it seem as if he feels increasingly alienated in a world that seems to care little for his idealistic schemes of a revolution in American letters. Poe even acknowledges the conscious nature of his social withdrawal to F.W. Thomas when he writes, "for the last seven or eight months I have been playing Hermit" (*L* 262). By 1848, Poe's description becomes even more like that of the solitary mystic as he writes to Jane E. Locke of "the hermit life which for the past three years I have led, buried in the woods of Fordham" (*L* 363). What is significant about Poe's self-portrait as a hermit philosopher is that many of his earlier tales feature similarly isolated yet powerful and remarkable minds, of which the most famous example is Roderick Usher, who in his ancestral mansion is surrounded by mystical works by writers such as Emanuel Swedenborg and the alchemist Robert Fludd. He also owns a copy of Campanella's utopia *The City of the Sun*.

In one of his final tales, "Von Kempelen and His Discovery" (1849), Poe uses the cultural schema of alchemy to satirize the California gold rush. According to Pollin,

however, satire was not the only use Poe had for alchemy. He argues that Poe held “a deep interest in the subject of necromancy and alchemy” (Pollin 42). References to alchemists, alchemical texts, and lore indeed litter Poe’s fiction, from the early mystical tales to the later satirical pieces, showing that the author does not use this fantastical scheme merely to mock his society’s obsession with material wealth. Poe must have been familiar with the alchemist as a stock figure in gothic fiction through his reading of novels such as *St Leon*. He would also have been aware of the staying power of this cultural schema as a seller of stories by the immense popularity in America of Bulwer’s Rosicrucian fiction *Zanoni*. In a letter to his friend George Lippard, Poe praises *The Lady Annabel* (1842), Lippard’s gothic romance involving alchemy, secret hermetic orders and revolutionary plots. As early as 1835, Poe had favourably reviewed the American edition of Godwin’s *Lives of the Necromancers* and would have gleaned from this book the alchemist’s status as an abject being. In this review, Poe even professes to be more open to the power of magic than Godwin. He writes: “there are many things, too, in the great circle of human experience, more curious than even the records of human credulity” (ER 259-60).

That the cultural schema of alchemy still had popular appeal in Poe’s time can be seen from that fact that, in 1837, a “History of the life of Dr. John Faust” appeared in *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine* (edited by Poe).⁷¹ In the April 1840 issue of *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine*, S.J. Burr used the schema of alchemy to write a tale that had as its moral, “industry is the Philosopher’s Stone.”⁷² Significantly, in this tale a German count of noble birth turns to alchemy and becomes not only the discoverer of much chemical knowledge, but also a benevolent healer of the sick in a plague-ridden Europe and eventually finds the source for the philosopher’s stone – the precious fifth element – in the soil of the American wilderness. As in Poe’s tales “Morella” and “Ligeia,” both of which preceded Burr’s effort, alchemical wisdom is represented by a female figure, a queen of a fantastic realm who initiates count Anstein into the secrets of alchemy, which in typically orthodox utilitarian fashion turn out to symbolise the virtues of hard work, rather than a mystical utopianism.

The most detailed investigation of Poe’s interest in Hermetic philosophy, alchemical symbolism and Gnostic illumination was conducted during the early 1970s by Barton Levi St. Armand. St. Armand has written several related essays on the pervasive presence of esoteric systems of thought and alchemical practice in Poe’s fiction. He argues that “The Gold-Bug,” while seemingly a straight-forward adventure story, in fact “bears out the fact of Poe’s adeptness in the philosophy of alchemy.”⁷³ With regards to “The Fall of the House of Usher,” St. Armand argues that “Poe’s metaphysic derives precisely from those very unorthodox and even heretical doctrines which were current at the beginnings of Christianity itself and then suppressed or driven underground by the actions of such dogmatic Church councils as that of Nicea.”⁷⁴ Levi St Armand perceives “The Fall of the

⁷¹ “History of the life of Dr. John Faust,” *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine* (September, 1837): 193-199.

⁷² J.S. Burr, “The Philosopher’s Stone,” *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine* 6 (April 1840): 171.

⁷³ Barton Levi St Armand, “Poe’s ‘Sober Mystification’: The Uses of Alchemy in ‘The Gold-Bug,’” *Poe Studies* 4/ 1 (June 1971), 15 April 2002 <www.eapoe.org/pstudies/ps1970/p1971101.htm>

⁷⁴ Barton Levi St Armand, “Usher Unveiled: Poe and the Metaphysics of Gnosticism,” *Poe Studies* 5/ 1 (June 1972), 15 April 2002 <www.eapoe.org/pstudies/ps1970/p1972101.htm>

House of Usher” as Poe’s most perfect fictional representation of his own metaphysic, which found full expression eventually in *Eureka* (1848), his prose-poem cosmology that stood at the basis of his final public lectures. Also, acknowledging the significance of the books in Usher’s library, Levi St Armand interprets Roderick as “master alchemist,” who in the course of the story, which is in fact an allegorical alchemical experiment, is able to achieve gnosis; “locked in the embrace of his sister-bride, according to the canons of Gnostic initiation, [Usher] has become even more than pure soul – he has become one with the hidden god.” Levi St Armand reads this alchemical allegory as “Poe’s heretical attempt to throw off not only the old manacles of Time and Space, but the chains of that newest and most threatening of the Archons, Science itself.”

Following St. Armand’s lead, it is possible to read Poe’s use of the cultural schema of alchemy as foreshadowing the use made of it by late twentieth-century cultural “heretics” such as John Todd and Theodore Roszak, who have turned to the ancient mystical science to offer a counter-philosophy to the contemporary dominance of an ideology of scientific rationalism. While Levi St Armand’s work has shown how much Poe was aware of the powerful cultural symbolism of the schema of alchemy, his minute analysis of “The Fall of the House of Usher,” with its imagery of female live burial and masculine incorporation of the feminine, does not reveal the dissident potential towards antebellum gender ideology that is present in Poe’s tales of female alchemists “Morella” and “Ligeia.” Contrary to the his tales of female alchemists, in “The Fall of the House of Usher,” the alchemically underscored dissolution and eventual union between Roderick and Madeline ends in an apocalypse that suggests a true end, rather than a new beginning. This plot structure is reinforced by the fact that the narrator who observes the alchemical psycho-drama that is taking place within the apparently living mansion, escapes from the ruins of the crumbling mansion. By analysing “Morella” and “Ligeia” in light of Poe’s interest in Godwinian style fiction, his use of the cultural schema of alchemy as a gothic trope, and his wish to reform society through literature, it is possible to highlight the dissident potential these texts contain towards an ideology of gender polarization through the dissident androgynous presence and anarchic voice of the alchemist.

The privileged reading of Poe’s tales of dead women has been one that stresses the narrator’s obsession with a suffocating grasp on an etherealised woman. Jeffrey Meyers’ account is exemplary of this reading. He writes that “the crucial point in Poe’s stories, where the woman is more attractive on the funeral bier, is to preserve her in death.”⁷⁵ Leyland S. Person emphasises that “‘killing women into art’... became almost a prerequisite for the highest form of creativity,” in the Romantic and Victorian period.⁷⁶ Hoeveler’s concept of Romantic Androgyny as a masculine cannibalisation of the feminine is a clear example of this gender aggression on the part of male authors during this era. Person draws attention to the fact that “several critics have noted that for Edgar Allan Poe the best woman seemed to be a dead woman,” making him a typical Romantic poet, as far as his attitudes toward female gender roles is concerned. Person argues that

⁷⁵ Jeffrey Meyers, *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy* (London: John Murray, 1992) 104.

⁷⁶ Leyland S. Person, *Aesthetic Headaches* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1988) 19.

a glance at Poe's best-known stories about women ("Morella," "Berenice" and "Ligeia") seems to support the notion that his women are little more than wraith-like characters – revenants, haunting and continually metamorphosing spirits, anatomized ideals – who are mirrors for men" (Person, *Headaches* 19).

According to Person, "this material impulse to escape the material world and the limits of a consciousness wedded to sensual perception helps explain [the privileged reading of] Poe's depiction of women as ideal representations of Beauty or as symbols of the idealizing imagination itself" (Person, *Headaches* 20). But as he himself professes, this privileged reading of Poe's female figures "does not explain the tendency in story after story, for example, of idealized women to metamorphose into their opposites" (Person, *Headaches* 22). In Person's analysis of Poe's gendered poetics, "even as male characters [narrators] work to transform women into aesthetic objects, female characters resist that effort." According to Person, "the mental impulse toward idealism and its preference for secondary qualities is checked and balanced by a tendency toward participation in the physical world and an indulgence of sensation – and by recognition of the need for relationship" (Person, *Headaches* 23). As such Poe's tales of women "dramatize the limitations of a radically idealistic vision" as expressed by Levi St Armand with regards to "The Fall of the House of Usher" (Person, *Headaches* 24). Berenice's body is brutalized, however, by the end of the tale and Madeline Usher is merely able to pull her brother Roderick along with her in a final scene of total dissolution. It is only "Morella" and "Ligeia" that are characterised by a struggle between masculine narrators, whose androcentric lens projects the feminine into an enclosed idealistic sphere of home and hearth, and a female alchemist whose mystical education and revenant qualities express dissidence towards the ideology of gender polarization that informs the patriarchal world.

Joan Dayan points out that in relation to antebellum American society, "in a time when many argued for sharper categorizations and more hierarchy, when ladies, slaves, and men endured even more difficult trials of definitions, Poe managed to confound and denaturalise the natural order of things" (Dayan 189). Dayan believes that the gothic tropes in Poe fictions "possession, multiple hauntings and identity dissolutions," work to "suspend gender differences as a component of identity" (Dayan 184). That there is also a social component to such denaturalisation of gender Dayan points out by stating that "in Poe's tales about women, marriage turns what was cherished into what is scorned" (Dayan 202). Welter explains that, for woman in Poe's day, "the more she used her heart rather than her mind the more feminine she was" (Welter 71). Morella and Ligeia are characterised by their tendency to stress mind over heart. Significantly, with regard to the status of Morella and Ligeia as anarchic alchemists, Kerber writes that "recent studies of witchcraft have suggested that women at risk for accusation included those who pressed at the boundaries of expected women's behaviour" (Kerber, *Spheres* 40). Poe's two tales involving female alchemists can be read in this light, as tales presenting the predominantly female audience with stories about women with magical powers who are able to usurp the ideologically constituted masculine prerogative because they use their minds.

In “Morella,” a tale which Arthur Hobson Quinn calls “a preliminary study for ‘Ligeia,’” a role-reversal takes place. The male narrator is domesticated, while the learned Morella comes to exert a dissident androgynous presence and an anarchic voice, which the narrator is unable to repress and must acknowledge. This reversal undermines his own identity as family patriarch because it is Morella’s point of view that wins out.⁷⁷ Morella’s superior powers bar the male narrator from confining her role within the domestic space to that of dependent. Morella’s mystical powers ensure that her voice is not repressed by her physical mortality as they make possible the transfer of her physical identity and wisdom to her daughter, who the narrator cannot help but address as Morella.

The tale opens with an epigraph from Plato’s *Symposium*. Poe uses Coleridge’s translation in an early version of the story but the published epigraph was his own translation: “itself – alone by itself – eternally one and single.”⁷⁸ The idea of eternity is significant here because it fits the alchemical sense of eternal cycles of death and rebirth. What is also significant is that Poe uses a phrase from an ancient Greek text that expresses one of the most influential androgynous myths in western history: Aristophanes’ speech on the three genders of the eight-limbed, two-headed primordial humans, who were cut in half by the Gods in order to weaken them and make them more useful in larger numbers. Poe’s epigraph, however, does not come from Aristophanes’ speech, which ultimately vindicates male superiority by privileging the male-male primal being over the female-female or the hermaphrodite. The quotation actually comes from Socrates’ speech that recounts how Diotima functions as a female tutor and teaches him of the love of divine beauty.⁷⁹ This divine beauty, or the Eros of the philosophers, “ultimately can be aroused from any type of love, heterosexual and homosexual (both male and female)” and is thus fully androgynous by vindicating all possible genders and sexual gender relationships.⁸⁰ Poe’s epigraph is significant in the context of his interest in the schema of alchemy because the kind of divine beauty that Socrates describes is akin to the essence of the alchemical experiment, the fifth element which never changes during the experiment and is one and all and everlasting, both male and female, but simultaneously neither one nor the other. Socrates’ speech does not overtly refer to Greek Hermetic lore, but the words signify the same metaphysical process of illumination towards a philosophical ideal, allowing the epigraph to reinforce, if rather esoterically, the magical elements on which the story is built. It also reinforces what Dayan calls the tendency in Poe’s tales to denaturalise the gender component in the formation of individual identities.

There are numerous further indirect references to the schema of alchemy in the text. The name of the female figure in the tale, Morella, is connected with the cultural schema of alchemy because it alludes to the legend of a Spanish learned woman. In his notations to the tale, Thomas Ollive Mabbott cites as a source an article in the September 1834 issue of *The Lady’s Book* on “Women Celebrated in Spain for their Extraordinary

⁷⁷ Arthur Hobson Quinn, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography* (1941; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998) 269.

⁷⁸ Edgar Allan Poe, *Tales and Sketches, Volume 1: 1831-1842*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2000) 229.

⁷⁹ Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. Walter Hamilton (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1951) 79-95.

⁸⁰ Mark P.O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 135.

Powers of Mind.” Lady Juliana Morell was educated by her father, a wandering criminal, to such a high level that she became highly learned in “philosophy, divinity, music, law and philology, and could speak or read fourteen languages” (*PTS* 222). The discussion of the figure of Carwin has made it clear that in the popular mind medieval Spain was the centre of alchemical study in Europe. Morella’s father was apparently a wise man as well as a wandering criminal –he had been a suspected accomplice in a murder case – which fits the legend of the alchemist as an outcast suspected of practicing black magic and other unlawful activities. By invoking the legend of Juliana Morell, Poe was tapping into the legends of highly learned female scientists and spiritualists who influenced the myth of alchemy outlined in chapter two. The legend of Juliana Morell continues the tradition of the presence of powerful spiritual as well as scientific female minds that started with the female alchemists of Egypt, according to St. Armand influenced Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher.” By emphasising that it is the wife of the narrator who has the intellectual capacity to indulge in scientific and metaphysical investigations beyond his comprehension, the narrator undermines the expectations that the dominant gender ideology raises with respect to male/ female domestic relations.

The narrator, who meets this remarkable mysterious woman by accident, confesses that although his “soul burned with fires it had never before known,” these fires “were not of Eros.” Their relationship is not built on the customary attraction and although the narrator confesses that “fate bound us together at the altar,” they “never spoke of passion, nor thought of love.” Although they are legally married, their relationship seems not to be founded on mutual affection, and this undermines the public ideal of marriage as a complementary union of man and wife in domestic bliss. In fact, their “marriage” seems purely platonic, suggesting that their relationship is like that of the alchemical Adept and Soror, working together to search for the fifth element which would transmute their corporeal being into an androgynous spiritual state. In the traditional legends, such as that of Flamel and Perenelle, the male alchemist is the adept and the female alchemist is the Soror, but in Poe’s story these roles are clearly reversed. Morella is the one whose “powers of mind were gigantic.” Among the “many matters” in which he “became her pupil” were “mystical writings,” which were part of her “Pressburg education.” Pressburg is the medieval Eastern- European city that not only featured as a backdrop to the last actions in Godwin’s *St Leon*, but which also has a reputation, according to Mabbott, as “the home of black magic” (*PTS* 229).

Morella’s learning is apparently forbidden within the legal parameters of the world of the story, which links her up with figures such as the alchemist in *St Leon* and the mercurial figure of Carwin. The former was sought by the Inquisition because of his occult learning and the latter’s guardian became his nemesis after refusing to reveal his secrets to him. Other links between Morella and the magical knowledge of the alchemist is that the narrator confesses that “the mystery of my wife’s manner oppressed me like a spell.” In *St Leon* and *Wieland*, the influence of the alchemical figure is one of enchanting charisma brought about by powerfully piercing eyes and irresistibly musical voices. Morella also possesses a voice of “unearthly tones” and powerful “melancholy eyes” that clearly work to entrance the male narrator into a position of dependence (*PTS* 230-1). It is this overt role

reversal that takes place that gives the female mystic her androgynous presence. The narrator cannot acknowledge her as his beloved wife, because her intellectual capacity and dominant position within his house do not conform to the gender role prescribed to her by the dominant ideology. Confessing that he “abandoned [him]self implicitly to the guidance of [his] wife, and entered with an unflinching heart into the intricacies of her studies...poring over forbidden pages,” the narrator also reveals at the onset of her illness that he “longed with an earnest and consuming desire for the moment of Morella’s decease” (*PTS1* 230,232). His hysterical reactions to Morella’s overpowering presence and knowledge reveal his need to uphold an androcentric point of view. As his “tortured nerves obtained the mastery over [his] mind” the narrator grows “furious through delay, and, with the heart of a fiend, cursed the days, and the hours, and the bitter moments, which seemed to lengthen and lengthen as her gentle life declined – like shadows in the dying of the day” (*PTS1* 232). The male narrator’s only defence against the overpowering presence of Morella is a hysterical will to see her in her grave.

However, Morella’s dissident androgynous presence, with which she is able to overpower the narrator, is complemented with an anarchic voice that similarly defies categorisation and coercion. Even as the narrator thinks she “pines away” it is Morella, the narrator reveals, who “called me to her bedside” (*PTS1* 232). Morella had refused her husband specific types of secret knowledge which had led the narrator to speak of “the gradual alienation of his regard” for her (*PTS1* 231). Morella’s language reveals, however, that she is in fact still in control. She says, “it is a fair day for the sons of earth and life” she, but “more fair for the daughters of heaven and death!...I am dying yet shall I live” (*PTS1* 232). As in the epigraph, Morella stresses the eternal cycles of life and death, of which she is aware, as an alchemical scholar, unlike the narrator. Morella’s dissident androgynous presence allows her to usurp the male narrator’s dominant position in the tale because it makes it impossible for him to pigeonhole her into her prescribed role as a domestic angel. The narrator’s reliance on an innate sense of masculine superiority, in turn, causes him to react to his failure to dominate with a show of hysterical femicidal tendencies. On what the narrator perceives to be her deathbed, Morella uses her superior insight into the situation and her magical powers to openly defy his patriarchal prerogative – the prolongation of his family line – as well as his femicidal tendencies. She speaks of what the narrator believes is her dying day as if it is not just a fair day for the men of earth and life, but in fact a more opportune day for female celebration in death. Her last words are an esoteric statement of defiance against oppression, in the knowledge that she will live again, rather than an acknowledgement of her fate as the domesticated wife of the narrator.

The “dim mist over all the earth, and a warm glow upon waters” as well as the appearance of a “rainbow” on Morella’s dying day suggest that in fact this day, which from the narrator’s perspective was a day of mourning, is in fact a day of celebration as it heralds the appearance of the female stage of the alchemical experiment. The colours of the rainbow and the appearance of the mist are signs of how the dew has successfully purified the base matter, making possible the eventual rebirth of the adept into a higher state, a fully

androgynous being, neither male nor female and simultaneously both.⁸¹ The female alchemist Morella, at the moment of her death, as in the alchemical myth of the homunculus, gives birth to a child who “grew strangely in stature and intellect, and was the perfect resemblance of her who had departed” (*PTS1* 233). Significantly, the homunculus here is not a little man as critics of the gender symbolism in alchemy have professed, but turns out to be the perfect reincarnation of the female alchemist Morella herself, one of those “children of the mind” brought about by the mystical philosopher Morella.⁸²

From this moment in the tale, a battle ensues between the male narrator’s attempt to hold onto his patriarchal prerogative, in which he represses the identity of the new Morella and the lingering memory of this first Morella, physically present through the magical daughter to which she gave birth without his help and who as yet carries no name. Cynthia S. Jordan defines the forgetfulness that characterises several of the narrators of Poe’s tales as “wilful, self-interested acts of aggression, paranoid attempts to repress the threat of feminine otherness, to kill out of consciousness any rival claims to masculine authority.”⁸³ One of the strategies through which such hysterical masculine repression of the feminine takes place, Jordan argues is by a process of “naming.” Yet, in Poe’s tales it is the memory of the sublimated Morella that wins this battle for consciousness and forces the hysterical husband, who seeks to endow the child with his own name in order to buttress his own sense of self, to acknowledge his wife’s successful act of rebirth. In the end, Morella’s irrepressible voice takes possession of the narrator as he cannot help but pronounce the name “Morella,” forcing himself to recognize his wife’s individuality above his own patriarchal interests. By the end of tale the male narrator is fully imprisoned in a world in which independent and intellectually powerful women rule their own fate and in which he has had to replace his androcentric lens for the looking-glass of an impotent spectator to a magical rebirth.

“Ligeia” (1838 and 1845) is identical to “Morella” in plot, theme and structure, portraying a powerfully intelligent woman imputed to hold alchemical powers with which she is able to defy the repressive strategies of a masculine narrator in making a successful return to life. Person points out how, like Morella, “Ligeia reverses the power imbalance between husband and wife,” which is so central in constructing gender identity antebellum America.⁸⁴ Person emphasises that “the qualities that constitute Ligeia’s authority and power subvert more than they reinforce domestic values” (Person, *Gender* 135). Ligeia, like Morella, holds immense learning of a type not taught in the etiquette books of the day (*PTS1* 315). Person argues that Ligeia is in this respect close to the kind of female identity represented in antebellum society by Margaret Fuller.⁸⁵ While Ligeia is certainly not a

⁸¹ See Abraham’s *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* for interpretations of dew and rainbow as alchemical symbols. Interestingly, Marshall (in *The Philosophers’ Stone*) chose as the title for his chapter on the Isis myth, “The Lady of the Dew.”

⁸² For a brief discussion how Socrates’ speech in the *Symposium* addresses the possibilities of producing children of the mind see Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 133-136.

⁸³ Cynthia S. Jordan, *Second Stories* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1989) 134.

⁸⁴ Leyland S. Person, “Poe and Nineteenth-Century Gender Constructions,” in *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 135. Person here follows ideas expressed earlier by Michael Kimmel.

⁸⁵ Significantly, Randall A. Clack has drawn attention to the significance of alchemical idealism in Fuller’s work. He explains that, Fuller, “explored the connection between alchemy and regeneration.” As in his work

portrait of a radical feminist, her overt links with the schema of alchemy make it possible to read her as an alchemist whose androgynous presence and anarchic voice challenge the androcentric viewpoint of the hysterical male narrator.

Like Morella's knowledge, Ligeia's learning does not only comprise of the masculine subjects of science or philosophy, but is of a mystical and occult kind. Mabbott argues that "Ligeia in the story is a magician or alchemist" (*PTS1* 331). Scott's *Ivanhoe* has been acknowledged as a source for Poe's tale. In Scott's novel, Rebecca is accused of witchcraft. Poe's tale can be read as a story of a witch's revenge on an androcentric society that was intent on stifling women's intellectual development. Ligeia's mystical and occult learning, of which the narrator says, "it was immense – such as I have never known in woman," and "more than else adapted to deaden the impressions of the outward world," gives her the power to control the narrator, who unveils his submission (*PTS1* 315, 310). He is able initially to use Ligeia's learning to bolster his own confidence by narrating how his own knowledge allowed him to recognize that "in the classical tongues was she deeply proficient, and as far as my own acquaintance extended in regard to the modern dialects of Europe, I have never known her at fault." He confesses that "indeed upon any theme of the most admired, because simply the most abstruse of the boasted erudition of the academy, have I *ever* found Ligeia at fault." While showing how his own vast intellect allowed him to recognise the extent of Ligeia's erudition, the narrator reveals his unease with his former wife's learning. He writes, "how singularly – how thrillingly, this one point [her immense learning] in the nature of my wife has forced itself, at this late period only, upon my attention!" (*PTS1* 315) As in "Morella," the narrator has to acknowledge his wife's supremacy in a usually male dominated sphere of education and academic erudition. Ligeia, as Jordan argues, "usurps the traditional male prerogative" (Jordan 137). Barred from the traditional university, however, it becomes clear that Ligeia has gained her knowledge somewhere else. Even though he is himself clearly a man of learning, the narrator is forced to yield to Ligeia's "infinite supremacy" and resigns himself "with a child-like confidence, to her guidance through the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation" without which he would be "but as a child groping benighted" (*PTS1* 316).

In *St Leon*, Godwin had utilized the schema of alchemy to investigate a similar relationship between knowledge, power and gender identity within a domestic setting. In *Wieland*, it was Carwin's secretly acquired mystical knowledge that allowed him to undermine the stability of a rural idyll founded on patriarchal ideology. Ligeia's quest and attainment of a "forbidden" knowledge and the power it gives her over the male narrator reflect this same struggle for power between men and women whose social position is defined to a large extent on ideological gender polarization. Ligeia, the alchemist in *St Leon* and Carwin unmask this ideology as mere myth and so manage to pierce through this façade of naturally polarized gender identities. Dayan argues that, in "Ligeia," "freed from marriage, domesticity, and any possible relation to property the beloved is reduced to a haunting remnant" (Dayan 185). The acquisition of knowledge leads them to the truth of

on Hawthorne, however, Clack argues that for Fuller alchemical symbolism worked to express "a mystical union of male and female that would effect a marriage of heaven and earth" (Clack 114). This union, according to Clack, is a "process of inner, self-transmutation" (Clack 117).

how human identities are constructed. In gaining this knowledge, they manage to reverse the power imbalance upheld by the hegemony of an androcentric ideology of gender polarization, in the route towards intellectual learning is only open to men. As a consequence, they become socially transparent figures haunting and being haunted by society. Ligeia, like Morella, begets a dissident androgynous presence in the tale because the male narrator, who relies on an androcentric lens to ensure his own individual integrity, is unable to categorise her into the feminine role. He even states that her “presence, her readings alone, rendered vividly luminous the many mysteries of the transcendentalism in which we were immersed” (*PTS1* 316). As an indefinite social being, her very studies of forbidden lore affect an alteration in her physical identity, which in turn conveys this mysticism to the narrator. Like Morella, Ligeia is able to have a will of her own and is able to raise an anarchic voice that challenges the dominant perspective of the first-person narrators who, Jordan argues, are “obsessed with defending their own authority” (Jordan 134).

Poe’s story stresses the importance of the human will in quotation repeated four times that Poe attributes to Joseph Glanville (the seventeenth-century English enthusiast of witchcraft and the occult) but which he probably made up himself (since no scholar has yet been able to trace the epigraph to any of Glanville’s writings). It reads in part, “Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his own will” (*PTS1* 310). While Cynthia Jordan’s reading of gender in Ligeia focuses on the oppressive will of the narrator in his attempt to erase Ligeia’s identity, it is Ligeia’s power of will, her anarchic voice – symbolised in the inset poem “The Conqueror Worm” – and her refusal to embrace a prescribed femininity that allow her to gain the upper hand over the narrator, and to resurrect herself through the conventional female figure of Rowena.

Speaking of the poem that Poe inserted into the 1845 edition of the tale, Jordan argues that “Ligeia had authored her own text and not the type of narrative that her husband writes, but a poem, which suggests the possibility of other, alternative forms of discourse” (Jordan 137). Such an approach to “The Conqueror Worm” can be extended by arguing that Poe’s inclusion of the poem as Ligeia’s words not only reverses the nature of its authorship – it is now a female-penned allegory rather than Poe’s own poem – but actually works to strengthen Ligeia’s anarchic voice within her role as female alchemist. Just as the alchemist in *St Leon* told a tale of human oppression even as he tried to trick the disgraced Reginald into adopting his alchemical powers, Ligeia, Jordan argues, “attempts to tell the story of culturally sanctioned oppression as best it can under the circumstances” (Jordan 138). The narrator confesses, “I have no power to portray – no utterance capable of expressing” the desires expressed by Ligeia, and this confession of verbal impotence gives Ligeia the chance to make him speak her words by having him recount her writing (*PTS1* 318). As the conqueror worm in the poem “with vermin fangs / in human gore imbued” becomes the hero in “the tragedy, ‘Man,’” it is Ligeia whose voice remains defiant: “shall these things be undeviantly so,” she asks. In typically hermetic language she asks, “are we not part and parcel in Thee,” and questions the finality of the tragic outcome of the human drama by exclaiming: “man doth not yield him to the angels, *not to death utterly*,

save only through the weakness of his feeble will (*PTS1* 319). As in “Morella,” at the moment of apparent death, when the male narrator can only exclaim that “she must die,” the female alchemist raises a voice of defiance (*PTS1* 316). In refusing to play her part in the drama of man and through her “wild desire for life, - for life – *but* for life,” she raises an anarchic voice by defying the laws of science and challenges not only death to a duel, but with it, a Christian patriarchal tradition in which the life of the husband is metaphorically passed on to the offspring through the process of naming and the law of primogeniture (*PTS1* 317).

The narrator’s very dependence on Ligeia’s person becomes apparent when, as in *St Leon*, the narrator reveals that it was his marriage to his now dead wife that had given him “no lack of what the world calls wealth.” Like *St Leon*, the narrator reveals through his paranoid narrative and hysterical masculine drive to control the identity of his wives, that he has been entrenched since childhood within a gender ideology in which masculinity is constituted by the outward show of material wealth and he immediately sets out to use it by restoring, lavishly furnishing and decorating “with more than regal magnificence” an old abbey in England (*PTS1* 320). It is to this new aristocratic domestic setting that he brings his new wife, “the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine” whom he has been able to marry because of her family’s “thirst for gold” (*PTS1* 321). A significant difference between his new and former wife, noted by several critics of the tale, is that the latter has a family name and lineage, while Ligeia in his memory is merely Ligeia. His second marriage is the kind of marriage Poe had implicitly condemned in his critique of Longfellow’s poems when he spoke of the crime of “making matrimonial merchandise – or even less legitimate merchandise – of one’s daughter.”

Person points out that “Ligeia and Rowena cooperate to confuse the categories (Dark and Light) into which Poe’s male imagination consigns women” (Person, *Gender* 146). He writes that “in coming back to life Ligeia resists ‘objectification, death, and denial’ by the narrator and thus demonstrates the failure of this particular male effort to control the ‘dehumanising imaginative process’ by which a woman is reduced to the status of a harmless object,” making it possible to read the story as a representation of “the domestic Angel’s revenge” (Person, *Gender* 145). However, more than just a representation of an oppressed woman’s revenge on a patriarchal tyrant, Ligeia’s status as alchemist suggests that Rowena represents the second stage of a circular alchemical process towards resurrection in a higher form. The light of Rowena is the stage of development through which Ligeia, initially presented in terms of darkness and death, can be resurrected. This alludes to the complete insignificance of the male narrator in the ongoing drama of her alchemical transformation.

More so than “Morella,” the story of Ligeia is littered with alchemical imagery. The narrator states that “if ever that spirit which is entitled *Romance* – if ever she, the wan and the misty-winged *Ashtophet* of idolatrous Egypt, presided, as they tell, over marriages ill-omened, then most surely she presided over mine” (*PTS1* 311). In his annotations to “Ligeia,” Stephen Peithman explains that this goddess was worshipped by the Egyptians as a fertility goddess, and has also been identified with Isis, whom in turn has been identified

with the Greek Aphrodite.⁸⁶ One of the myths surrounding Isis (in the allegory *Isis the Prophetess to Her Son Horus*), Marshall explains, is that she is believed to have gained the secrets of alchemy from the angel Amnael. Curiously, Amnael is likened to the Wandering Jew of Gothic fiction with “a strange sign on his head” (Marshall, *Stone* 180). He makes her swear oath not to reveal the secrets to any one but her son Horus. To contemporary readers of “Ligeia,” benefiting from a surge of interest in Egyptian mythology after the discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799, the name Ashtophet may have been a significant detail in offering an explanation of the method of Ligeia’s metempsychosis that follows the narrator’s invocation of the Egyptian Goddess.⁸⁷ One of the alchemical secrets that Isis learned from Amnael is the purification of the body through fire, which plays a small part in the story of the eventual resurrection of Osiris. Isis meets Astarte (a synonym also for Ashtophet, which may have caused the confusion between the two) who offers her son to her. Isis purifies the child’s body in fire, to the horror of Astarte, who is appeased only after Isis has revealed her true identity and stated the purpose of her visit (her search for the coffin of Osiris). Marshall explains how this purification ritual would take the alchemical shape of the fire below the vessel that made possible the calcination process in making the powdered elixirs that would initiate the process of rebirth (see Marshall, *Stone* part 4).

By the nineteenth century, the form of alchemy that concerned itself solely with the transforming base metals into gold and creating a material elixir vitae – had been superseded by the rise of modern science and was most often used as a metaphor for a spiritual idealism that sought, in E.J. Holmyard’s words, “the transmission of sinful man into a perfect being through prayer and submission.”⁸⁸ Poe intricately intertwined the material and spiritual versions of the alchemical myth in his description of Ligeia, whose eyes above all are significant to his purpose as they were “far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race,” and allow her to enchant the narrator. Like the alchemist in *St Leon* and Carwin in *Wieland*, the alien and paradoxical physical appearance of the alchemists is significant in setting them apart from the narrators who look at them through an androcentric lens. Ligeia’s physical appearance is paradoxical because she is described as immensely beautiful – a positive female identity trait – but this beauty does not conform to the prescribed nineteenth-century standards. While the narrator’s descriptions of her suggest that she has a strong physical presence, her beauty is that of “beings either above or apart from the earth” (*PTS1* 313). Since the narrator fails to identify the strangeness of her countenance with any material property of her person, he attributes it finally to her expression, confessing at the same time that this is really a “word of no meaning! behind

⁸⁶ Stephen Peithman, ed., *The Annotated Tales of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Avel Books, 1986) 47.

⁸⁷ In his essay “The Mysteries of Edgar Poe: The Quest for a Monomyth in Gothic Literature” in *The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism*, ed. G.R. Thompson (Pullman: Washington State UP, 1974), Barton Levi St Armand has explained that interest in Egyptian culture showed itself in the architecture of Poe’s time where “prison buildings, cemetery gates and entrances were done in a pylonic form copied from Nile temples” He also argued that Poe used “the mysteries of Isis and Osiris” to write “The Fall of the House of Usher.” This magical rite, Marshall has shown, plays a significant part in the origins of alchemy and has special resonance in “Ligeia” because it draws attention to the presence of female alchemists in Egyptian culture. While Toth (Hermes) is the father of alchemy, Isis, Marshall has explained, is “the supreme magician” and can be said to be the mother of alchemy (Marshall, *Stone* 169).

⁸⁸ E.J. Holmyard, *Alchemy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) 16.

whose vast latitude of mere sound we intrench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual” (*PTS1* 313). Expression in Poe’s tale has become an empty signifier through man’s ignorance of the spiritual. Poe here alludes, not unlike William Blake, to the existence of another world beyond our material universe. In this world beyond signifier and signified are bound by their infinite mutual opposition and active interrelation. Singer explains how alchemical philosophy attempted to put an end to “the continuing war of inner opposites” (Singer 105). She argues that analogous to alchemy was a view on gender that proposed the following:

woman must be, and has every right to be the person she is, and a man in working out the problem of the contra sexual opposites must learn to stop projecting his own confused and unrecognised contra sexual qualities upon women (Singer 103).

This act of masculine self-projection is exactly what the androcentric male narrator initially undertakes in “Ligeia” when he attempts to forget Ligeia to repress the threat her dissident androgynous presence and her anarchic voice posed to the stability of his own identity. However, Ligeia’s imminent return is foreshadowed, not merely by the Egyptian, Druidical and other occult paraphernalia that occupy the bridal chamber, but also by the mysterious happenings in the narrator’s newly constructed domestic abode. Peithman alludes to the possibility that the mysterious liquid that is dropped into Rowena’s glass by the mysterious ghostly shadow is in fact the elixir of life. Curiously, he dismisses this interpretation because contemporary scientific knowledge points towards arsenic poisoning. However, as the discussion of Poe’s engagement with alchemy has shown, “Ligeia” was not the first and would not be the last of his stories to utilize elements from this still popular magical cultural schema. Together with the allusions to the Egyptian gods and legends that stood at the basis of the myth of alchemy, the possibility that the red liquid is in fact the elixir of life cannot be eliminated simply because contemporary scientific knowledge makes this an unlikely choice. Mabbott also stresses that the red drops are the elixir of life. The addition of “the red tincture” is the preliminary stage of the alchemical experiment that brings about the resurrection of the dead matter in a perfected state, highlighting not merely Ligeia’s triumph over the narrator’s femicidal tendencies, but also the triumph of the material female body over the ideological forces that were intent on spiritualizing it out of existence.

Rowena, the female stereotype of the domestic angel, was never allowed a voice but only a whisper in the entire tale and is soon taken ill. After recovering, “a second more violent disorder again threw her upon a bed of suffering, and from this attack, her frame, at all times feeble, never altogether recovered” (*PTS1* 324). It is at this moment that the opium-laden narrator speaks of invisible presences casting shadows and of hearing invisible footsteps. While the narrator may well have suffered from hallucinations due to opium, part of the fantastic lore that makes up the schema of alchemy is the power of invisibility. Has Ligeia not died at all, but because of her dissident androgynous presence and magical powers simply become invisible to the narrator? Has she achieved the alchemical feat of separating her spirit from her earthly form? In fusing with Rowena, is she able to bring

about a chemical wedding between their spirits that will bring about an initial dissolution but eventual material resurrection? Such an interpretation suggests a feminization of the alchemical myth in which the hysterical husband, as in *Morella*, is marginalised to the position of ignorant spectator, a mere recorder of facts he cannot interpret. The narrator's increasing reliance on opium already suggests his inability to deal with a situation that his reliance on an androcentric lens cannot control.

The narrator's helplessness is foregrounded by the fact that his medical knowledge fails to resurrect Rowena. Her apparent struggles with death bring about a "wild change in the personal appearance of the corpse" (*PTS1* 329). Rowena, both literally and metaphorically buried alive by the narrator's will in his domestic fortress, is the vessel through which Ligeia is able to resurrect herself and to physically confront the male narrator with his failure to control her nature through a process of domestication and spiritualization. As the narrator becomes increasingly hysterical about the possibility that his wife may come back to life, his mind struggles to project onto the corpse the features of Rowena, but the body is taller and the hair is "blacker than the wings of the midnight" and they "the wild eyes" enforce onto the husband's retina the physical presence of his lost love. As in *Morella*, the physical presence and mental enchantment of the female alchemist enforces the hysterical husband to speak the female alchemist's name: "Ligeia."

As in *St Leon* and *Wieland*, the anarchic alchemists in "Morella" and "Ligeia," intermediate beings with occult powers, work to highlight a significant faultline in the ideology of gender polarization: in this case the fact that the antebellum concept of the domestic angel was founded on the erasure of women from society all together. While Poe's stories are not feminist tracts, the dissident androgynous presence of these female alchemists within the domestic world of the stories undermines patriarchal traditions such as privileged masculine education and female spiritualization that endow the male narrators with a sense of natural mastery of the house and their wives. The magical and mystical learning of both female alchemists cracks the narrator's androcentric lens and shows their superiority to rely on custom rather than natural foundations. This points out that the domestic image of women these narrators rely upon to buttress their own sense of manhood is based on androcentric wish fulfilment. It also shows that only an alternative and in this case forbidden education can lead to the disintegration of unequal gender relations in the home. As such Poe's tales echo much of the concerns present in *St Leon* and *Wieland* and can be classed as magico-political tales that through their use of the cultural schema of alchemy harbour the potential for gender dissidence.