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

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CHAPTER 6

THE ANARCHIC ALCHEMIST AS RADICAL REFORMER, ANDROGYNY AS GENDER UTOPIA IN *ZANONI*, *THE SCARLET LETTER* AND *PIERRE*

Within the domestic settings of *St Leon*, *Wieland*, “Morella” and “Ligeia,” the dissident androgynous presence and anarchic voice of the alchemical figures was visible and loud enough to break the androcentric lens of the narrator each story. Consequently, the domestic world that these narrators initially represented as an idyllic space in which male and female identity complemented each other to form a utopian sphere was revealed to be a space in which the only active role of women is that of facilitator of traditional patriarchal order. In *Frankenstein*, “The Birth-Mark,” “Rappaccini’s Daughter” and “The Bell-Tower,” the residual presence of alchemical science in a predominantly rationalist-scientific workplace challenged the very sanity of the hegemonic ideology to which the narrators in the stories subscribe. Through this rational-scientific lens, male and female identities were not complementary, but stood in opposition to each other. This uncomplementary polarization was given social shape by projecting male and female identity onto abstract concepts such as reason and imagination, science and magic, human and nature. These binary gender categories were policed in each story by the narrator’s adoption of an androcentric lens that defined any individual subject that mixed the two as monstrously deviant from the “rationally” and “scientifically” established norm. In this final chapter, the focus lies on how the cultural schema of alchemy in three gothic novels written in the early Victorian period addresses the need to reject ideologies founded on the polarization of socio-cultural concepts, including gender.

Some radical reformers of the early nineteenth century tried not merely to adjust the laws, customs and traditions that structured their society, but sought to break down entirely, and rebuild from scratch, the social foundations of their world. As the visionary American radical Stephen Pearl Andrews wrote, in 1848, “in all ages there have been visionaries whose visions of today have proved the substantial realities of tomorrow.”¹ Often such visions of reform involved an attempt to erase not only the clear-cut racial and class inequalities that the present social system upheld, but also the dominant bourgeois ideology’s tendency to categorise as naturally unequal the status between men and women across races and classes. This illusion of natural inequality was upheld by culturally privileging abstract concepts denoted as “masculine” – such as reason, science and action – over “feminine” concepts such as the irrational, imagination and passivity. The three novels discussed in this chapter highlight the need for a complete overthrow of an ideology of

¹ Stephen Pearl Andrews, *The Science of Society* (1848; Bombay: Libertarian Socialist Institute, 1888) 3.

gendered cultural polarization as a means of achieving social reform because their plots involve the coming together of an alchemical figure and an abject female figure whose thought and action undermine the empowered masculine elite. In Edgar Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni* (1842), an immortal herbalist reconciles his spiritual idealism with practical reform in Europe during the French Reign of Terror. He manages to do this by bringing about a metaphysical and material union between himself and his wife Viola, an opera singer and the orphaned daughter of a rebellious musician. While both die simultaneously in the hands of the revolutionaries, their union is emblematically preserved at the end of the novel by the tableaux of their child smiling as he is being rescued from his prison. In Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), the coming together of the thought and actions of an alchemical herbalist with the antinomian thought and action of his estranged wife works to challenge and eventually undermine the patriarchal traditions of a seventeenth-century Puritan social structure. In Hawthorne's novel, another child, illegitimate according to law, but representing the vital force of nature, comes to represent an anarchic force, one which the true father rejects, but which the alchemist accepts, turning her into an emblem of hope instead of fear. In Melville's *Pierre* (1852), alchemical imagery plays a significant part in uniting the young American aristocrat Pierre with his half-sister Isabel, who is in possession of strange mystical powers. Their mystical union transforms the dandified rural aesthetic poet into a dissident urban visionary reformer during the early years of the nineteenth century. As both die simultaneously in a New York prison, Pierre leaves to prosperity a book, penned by him but expressive of his mystical union with Isabel.

Edgar Bulwer Lytton's Zanoni: Dissident Alchemical Androgyny in a Revolutionary Setting

In 1826, an irritated Bulwer, writing from the comfort of his ancestral estate, complained in a letter to a friend that England was a "land of wealth and rheumatism, corruption, vulgarity, and flannel waistcoats."² Andrew Brown explains that "like many thoughtful young men in the 1830s, Bulwer was troubled by the materialist ethic scorned by Carlyle, in a memorable phrase, as 'virtue by Profit and Loss.'³ In 1831, Bulwer turned his verbal complaint into political action. He became an MP and called out for the need to completely reform the politico-economic structure of Britain, a structure he believed too much controlled by an aloof aristocracy. Allan Conrad Christensen argues that Bulwer "carefully dissected" his own class "and found" them "responsible for most of the national ills."⁴ James L. Campbell Sr. also argues that, when Bulwer entered into politics in 1831, he "belonged to Lord Durham's group of philosophical radicals, a faction of ardent political reformers on the Whig left."⁵ He stresses that Bulwer was averse to party politics and "prized his political independence, voting for the issue rather than the man or party."

² Robert Lytton, *The Life Letters and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton*, 2 vols. (London: Kegan Paul & Trench, 1883) 125.

³ Andrew Brown, "Bulwer's Reputation," in *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*, ed. Allan Conrad Christensen (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004) 30.

⁴ Allan Conrad Christensen, *Edward Bulwer-Lytton: The Fiction of New Regions* (Athens: The University of Georgia P, 1976) 7.

⁵ James L. Campbell, Sr., *Edward Bulwer-Lytton* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986) 13.

During this period, Campbell explains, Bulwer “corresponded frequently with John Stuart Mill and with the radical philosopher William Godwin” (Campbell 13). It is the combination of Bulwer’s overt political radicalism, his friendship with Godwin and the extent of his literary debt to the radical philosopher’s fictional practice that forms the context of the analysis of Bulwer’s *Zanoni* presented below. This includes especially the influence of *St Leon* as a popular gothic novel that uses the trope of alchemy to articulate the theme of radical social reform in which an ideology that prescribes polarized male and female identities and roles to individuals is rejected in favour of a genderless social model.

On the eve of Bulwer’s entrance into the political arena, June 1830, Godwin expressed his concern about the young author’s decision to enter into parliament as a radical. He warns Bulwer in a letter of the dangers of losing his independence as a thinker:

if you succeed, you can never in the same sense, be your own man again, and I have scarcely any materials to judge whether it will prove a good or an ill thing. I scarcely know anything of your political creed; I know less of what it is, being in Parliament that you propose to effect (Lytton, *Life* 300-301).

Significantly, in the same letter, Godwin stresses that his doubts about Bulwer’s political ambitions will not stand in the way of their friendship. While Godwin tells Bulwer that he wishes to have met him “five years sooner,” so as to have been able to tutor him, he respects the young radical’s independence of thought and wishes him “smooth seas, favouring gales, and a prosperous voyage.” He even softens his criticism by adding in a postscript that he feels he has “expressed [him]self too coldly” on his doubts about Bulwer’s political plans (Lytton, *Life* 301-2). Four months later, Godwin expresses his delight with the progress Bulwer has made as a political radical, with the words, “I am your convert.” True to his own radical doctrine of disinterested benevolence, he urges Bulwer to embrace fully his new role as an advocate of “the real interests of mankind” even if such preoccupations will mean the dissolution of their friendship (Lytton, *Life* 303). These letters suggest that the old-aged Godwin saw in the independent radical aristocrat someone who could carry the flag for his own brand of individualist, intellectual and gradualist, yet radical reform. Like Godwin, Heather Worthington points out that, “motivated by a spirit of rebellion,” Bulwer was “in both his politics and his writings...against the law,” meaning that, like Godwin, he fervently opposed the political and legal establishment of his day.⁶ While Bulwer never adopted the proto-anarchist doctrine of Godwin, they both shared a sense that society needed to be built anew from scratch, rather than through legislative reform, because those very persons in power to reform the law, were those who had created it in the first place and so would always defend their hegemony above any true reform aimed at social equality.

In 1833, Godwin could only have been pleased with the publication of Bulwer’s treatise *England and the English* (1833). In this sociological enquiry into the nation’s ills and

⁶ Heather Worthington, “Against the Law: Bulwer’s Fictions of Crime,” in *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer Lytton*, 54.

suggestions about how to cure them, the eccentric aristocrat expresses his sympathetic stance and benevolent intentions towards those strands of English society that had suffered most under the old aristocratic regime and expresses his distrust of the positive outcome of mere legal reforms. One of Bulwer's main criticisms of English society during the 1830s is his belief that an ideology of separate spheres was erasing a genuine sense of community amongst the country's citizens. Within the present social structure, he argues, "all amongst us, save those of the highest ranks, live very much alone. Our crowded parties are not society; we assemble all our acquaintance for the pleasure of saying nothing to them."⁷ A primary cause of this social isolation, Bulwer believes, is the powerful influence of the sentimentalists who idolized the home above any other social sphere. For Bulwer, "the unsocial" is "the milder epithet of the Domestic." The ideology of separate spheres, vindicated by what he believes is the cultural dominance of a sentimental worldview, articulated through sentimental culture, imprisons individuals within the family home, which necessarily distances them from the wider community, increasing a selfish outlook on life and decreasing the possibility for community-wide sympathy and benevolence, the necessary ingredients for the improvement of society.

Bulwer believes that commercial developments underscore this unsocial English behaviour, since the daily pressures of the public world of commerce leave the individual wishing not for social amusement but for the tranquillity of the family home (see *EE* 24). The development of free-market capitalism, Bulwer believes, while underscoring an ideology of separate spheres, also strengthens rather than weakens the traditional class divisions and hierarchy. According to Bulwer, "wealth is the greatest leveller of all." Therefore, most of the property will remain in the hands of the aristocracy, since "the highest of the English nobles [will] willingly repair the fortunes of hereditary extravagance by intermarriage with the families of the banker, the lawyer, and the merchant." For Bulwer, the intermingling of aristocracy and a capitalist elite, the "money spiders, who would sell England for Is.6d.," as he calls them, is detrimental to the cause of socio-political equality, because it "tends to extend the roots of their influence among the middle classes, who, in other countries, are the natural barrier of the aristocracy"⁸ A Burkean reverence for aristocratic lineage has instilled into the British middle-classes a natural desire to belong to this class, creating what Disraeli would eventually describe as the "two nations."

In *England and the English* Bulwer expresses his concern that one of the greatest barriers towards universal sympathy and benevolence between equal individuals is this perpetuation of a social system founded on a reverence for the aristocracy, rather than a genuine belief in democratic law. Proof of this continuing tradition, Bulwer argues, is found in the fact that "the highest offices have been open by law to any man, no matter what his pedigree or his quarterings; but, influences, stronger than laws, have determined that it is only through the aid of one portion or the other of the aristocracy that those offices can be obtained" (*EE* 26). Like Godwin, Bulwer does not think that the mere construction of a republic with new laws to govern its people will dissolve the tradition of aristocratic rule. He believes that it is not the monarchy alone, but in fact the wider aristocracy – the landed

⁷ Edgar Bulwer Lytton, *England and the English* (London: Routledge, 1876) 23.

⁸ The Earl of Lytton, *Bulwer-Lytton* (London: Home and Van Thal, 1948) 63, and *EE* 30.

gentry – that rules the land: “the heads of that aristocratic party which is the most powerful *must* come into office, whether the king like it or not” (EE 28). Changing the political structure will not change the way people think, leaving the same group of people in power, if only under a different public moniker.

Having styled himself as an independent intellectual, Bulwer’s greatest lament, unsurprisingly, is that the social and economic developments of the early nineteenth century have made it such that “the rank gained by intellect, or by interest, is open but to a few, [while] the rank that may be obtained by fashion seems delusively to be open to all.” This creates a society ruled by “that eternal vying with each other; that spirit of show; that lust of imitation which characterize our countrymen and countrywomen” (EE 31). Money gives you the power to buy what the rich own; to own what the rich own is to buy into power, since those who have the money can buy themselves into the traditional social ranks that hold political power and create the laws under which it operates. Following Godwin’s argument in the 1790s, Bulwer believes that such socio-political developments have moral consequences: the meaning of England’s favourite word, “respectability,” Bulwer argues polemically, under influence of a social structure founded on the inequality of property, excludes the concept of virtue, “but never a decent sufficiency of wealth” (EE 34). Consequently, “to be rich becomes a merit; to be poor, an offence” (EE 33).

Like Godwin, Bulwer is aware that the immorality of the present social structure, founded on the inequality of property, is perpetuated by a legal system that supports it: “poverty being associated in men’s minds with something disreputable, they have had little scruple in making laws unfavourable to the poor!” (EE 34). Socio-political reform, then, cannot be achieved by substituting a monarchy for a republic, reforming existent laws, or by developing a free-market capitalist economy that creates the illusion of fair competition in which anyone has the chance to win and climb the social ladder. Like Godwin’s brand of intellectual anti-revolutionary radicalism, Bulwer believes that reform needs to be effected gradually, by initially reforming the minds of the people by un-coercive intellectual influence. Only by ensuring that each individual thinks differently and independently about his or her place and role in the community and wider society is it possible for them to discuss their individual ideas in public, and the social structures that define that community and society will gradually, but inevitably, alter as the most persuasive and intelligent arguments are increasingly communicated between individuals and shared among all classes. All these criticisms about the coercive effect on the individual mind of aristocratic tradition, the institution of property and the nature of commerce, Bulwer would later include in the benevolent mysticism of *Zanoni*.

Even before becoming a politician and social theorist, Bulwer was interested in theories of radical social reform. Leslie Mitchell explains that in 1826 the young Bulwer was “much impressed by Robert Owen’s utopian settlement at New Lanark.”⁹ Peter Marshall argues that “Godwin was the philosophical father of Robert Owen” (Marshall, *Web* 304). According to Carol A. Kolmerten, “Godwin was probably the most important influence in Owen’s life during the time he was developing his plan in the second decade of the

⁹ Leslie Mitchell, *Bulwer Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters* (London: Hambledon and London, 2003) 170.

nineteenth century.”¹⁰ Describing Owen’s utopianism, Chushuchi Tsuzuki points out that there were indeed elements of “anarchist utopia” in Owen’s ideas: no private property, no elections (since elections would be frustrating and demoralising to all), but only direct democracy.¹¹ Not the least, Tsuzuki argues, Owen had a “Godwinian belief in enlightenment reason” as the means to effect the change from irrational tyranny to a rational free and benevolent society (Tsuzuki 32). Like Godwin, Owen believed that “man was made by ‘nature and society’ and was not responsible for what he was made to be” (Tsuzuki 31). Like so many visionary reformers, Owen had “a horror of a violent revolution which would lead only to another kind of irrational rule” (Tsuzuki 15). Like Godwin and Brown, he also understood that such a utopia needed to be fully imagined before it could be realised. To imagine and put into practice this benevolent engine of change, Owen follows Godwin in putting his trust not in politicians or in a revolutionary mob, but in the hope of establishing a “benevolent leadership of the intellectuals, which would go beyond classes and parties” (Tsuzuki 31). Bulwer’s admiration for Owen’s idealistic communal enterprise is understandable when viewed in the light that Tsuzuki shines on Owen’s schemes. Only a few years after visiting Lanark, the idealistic intellectual Bulwer would present himself to the public as exactly the type of class-boundary transgressing reformer, leading the way with his own Godwinian inspired visionary schemes of how to rebuild what he felt was an ailing nation. While only a few of Owen’s ideas find their way into *Zanoni* (in the portrayal of a “natural” community of mountain people) his influence can still be traced in the strongly anti-revolutionary and visionary, almost millenarian, nature of the immortal herbalist’s metaphysical idealism.

Significantly, Godwin, Owen and Bulwer, while not rejecting the family as a social unit, all share a strong desire to reject the institution of the private nuclear family as it took shape under an ideology of separate spheres and bourgeois capitalism. According to J.F.C. Harrison, “Owen saw the family as the main bastion of private property and the guardian of all those qualities of individualism and self-interest to which he was opposed. The disharmony which Owenites deplored in competitive society they attributed largely to the institution of the family.”¹² In *England and the English*, Bulwer is happy to agree with the millenarian socialist that, “in order to render philanthropy universal... individuals of every community should live in public together” (EE 24). In this sense, Bulwer echoes Owen’s belief that “community was the alternative to the private family” (Harrison 9). Significantly, “since total group solidarity and harmony was the aim,” in Owenite communities, Eileen Yeo explains, “the culture was family-oriented [in the sense that the entire family participated in public life] and placed great emphasis on the equality and participation of women.”¹³ In contrast to conventional middle-class society, Yeo argues, “the working-class socialists opened their classes to women, encouraged women to become lecturers in the cause and admitted women on an equal footing to traditionally masculine social rituals like

¹⁰ Carol A. Kolmerton, *Women in Utopia: The Ideology of Gender in the American Owenite Communities* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), 18.

¹¹ Chushichi Tsuzuki, “Robert Owen and Revolutionary Politics,” in *Robert Owen: Prophet of the Poor*, eds. Sidney Pollard and John Salt (London: Macmillan, 1971) 32.

¹² J.F.C. Harrison, “A New View of Mr Owen,” in *Robert Owen: Prophet of the Poor*, 9.

¹³ Eileen Yeo, “Robert Owen and Radical Culture” in *Robert Owen: Prophet of the Poor*, 96.

the ceremonial dinner” (Yeo 96-7). The idea of family, then, was never a problem as such; what needed to be changed was the definition of family. Instead of denoting a private, domestic space, the boundaries of which are defined by property and blood relations, and where authority was defined by patriarchal law, the family had to be (re)defined as a communal space, founded on equality and sharing. In *Zanoni*, the immortal herbalist becomes a vessel for critique of the institution of the patriarchal privatized family.

Carol A. Kolmerten argues that “the equality that Owen accepted as a premise for a good society was an abstract one, tempered as it always was with his biases toward patriarchal power and women’s ‘innate’ inequality – both unquestioned ‘givens’ in early nineteenth-century thought for most people. Taking his cue from Godwin, Kolmerten argues, “Owen did not concern himself with inequality in society per se; instead he focused on the idea of marriage and its relationship to private property” (Kolmerten 19). Unsurprisingly, Owen’s reform ideology, by acknowledging the necessity of equal social status for men and women across class-boundaries, also espouses unorthodox theories about the institution of marriage. Owen continues Godwin’s argument that the institution of marriage in its present form is one of the worst of social evils.¹⁴ Like Godwin, Owen argues that “marriage will be solely formed to promote the happiness of the sexes; and if this end be not obtained, the object of the union is defeated” (in Morton 167). Harrison explains that the Owenites, in rejecting the institutions of the family and marriage, also believed that the dominant domestic ideology perpetuated gender inequality. The vindication of the institution of the family not merely “isolated people” from each other but also “served as an organ of tyranny by which the wife was subjected to, and in fact made the property of, her husband” (Harrison 9). In none of his writings does Bulwer address women’s issues outright – apart from advocating, like Wollstonecraft and Godwin, and later Owen, the necessity of equal education opportunities for men and women (see Mitchell 166). He does share, however, a vision with both Godwin and Owen that the dominant socio-political establishment perpetuates the unequal status of men and women by prescribing unequal male and female gender roles. In *England and the English*, Bulwer argues that within an economic system based on commercial trade, “a notorious characteristic of English society is the universal marketing of our unmarried women; - a marketing peculiar to ourselves in Europe, and only rivalled by the slave-merchants of the East.” Bulwer’s Godwinian or Owenite contempt for the existing marriage laws and customs in which women are merely the property of men is summed up by his cynical rhetorical reversal of a well-known biblical phrase: “where the heart is, *there* will the *treasure* be also!” (EE 80).¹⁵ In *Zanoni*, the bourgeois materialist Englishman Mervale would come to represent this idea.

In Bulwer’s picture of English society, female identity is confined to that of exchange commodity between insincere slave merchants, and can only be freed from this ideological stereotype through the eradication of the socio-political institution that creates it, the private domestic sphere. Bulwer also shows awareness that the dominant economic

¹⁴ See the extract from Owen’s writings on the “evil effects of the marriage system” in A.L. Morton, *The Life and Ideas of Robert Owen* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1962) 161.

¹⁵ See “St Matthew” 6:21, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,” in *The Bible*, authorized King James Version (1611; Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1997) 9.

ideology and social structure prescribes not only a female, but also a masculine stereotype (embodied by the figure Mervale in *Zanoni*). From this stereotype, Bulwer consciously distances himself. Just as Marshall argues that there was something androgynous about Godwin, and Fuller, Emerson and even Longfellow all highlighted Hawthorne's androgynous persona, Mitchell explains that Bulwer himself "refused to live like other men or dress like other men." Refusing to perform the prescribed masculine gender role, "Bulwer-Lytton was not a man's man, or at least not an Englishman's man." He "dressed extravagantly for the whole of his life" and could be found at home "smoking a pipe six or seven feet in length, or taking opium through a hookah" (Mitchell 89). According to Mitchell, Bulwer's dissident identity performance led to "charges of effeminacy," significantly from those men whom Bulwer perceives to be the defenders of the status quo (Mitchell 93). His friend and fellow Victorian radical Harriet Martineau even described Bulwer as "a woman of genius enclosed by misadventure in a man's form."¹⁶ There is a connection between Bulwer's sense of intellectual independence and a sense that his individual identity is unfettered to the ideology of gender polarization that holds the general public in its grasp. As will be seen in the analysis of the radical philosophy that informs *Zanoni*, Bulwer strongly believed in the inextricable connection between the Actual and the Ideal – mind and matter. His androgynous persona was the natural outflow of his unorthodox, if not feminist then anti-masculinist social theories.

Bulwer's determination to become "an artist in words" is a significant aspect of his visionary reformism.¹⁷ Godwin had warned him that politics would endanger the independent nature of his thought. Like Godwin, Bulwer felt his combined artistic and intellectual capabilities had raised him above the masses. Mitchell explains that the young author "claimed a superiority because the artist was superior to his fellows, and the great artist had the right and duty to live by his own rules. The conventions and gender stereotypes of those around him were not relevant. Originality of mind never made for a team player" (Mitchell 90). As with Godwin and Percy Shelley, or Poe even, Bulwer's unorthodox often radical views on socio-political issues, his sense of the literary author as a cultural prophet writing from the social margins, and the adoption of an androgynous identity were inextricably intertwined. Contrary to the masculine stereotype, Mitchell explains that in many of his novels Bulwer "argued that fine features, delicacy of feeling and artistic sensibility were entirely compatible with the manly qualities of courage and resolution" (Mitchell 93). Even though Bulwer in his unfortunate marriage, and through the influence of his aristocratic lineage, would find himself performing stereotypical masculine behaviour (to the extent of playing a real-life gothic villain by ordering his estranged wife to be confined to an insane asylum), he clearly deemed a public androgynous male persona to be the obvious physical embodiment of an imaginative mind that consciously set itself apart from the dominant socio-political ideology.

¹⁶ This description of Bulwer by Martineau appears as a quotation in Vera Wheatley's *The Life and Work of Harriet Martineau* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1957) 133.

¹⁷ Edgar Bulwer Lytton, dedicatory epistle to John Gibson (first prefixed to the 1845 edition of *Zanoni*), *A Strange Story* and *Zanoni* (1862 and 1842; Chicago: Hooper, Clarke, & Co., n.d.) vi.

Mitchell explains that Bulwer, like Godwin, believed in “the inevitability of major change” (Mitchell 171). For positive change to come about, Bulwer argues at the end of *England and the English*:

once learn to detach respectability from acres and rent-rolls – once learn indifference for fashion and fine people; for the whereabouts of lords and ladies; for the orations of men boasting of the virtue of making money; once learn to prize at their full worth – a high integrity, and a lofty intellect – once find yourselves running to gaze, not on foreign Princes and Lord Mayors’ coaches, but on those who elevate, benefit, and instruct you, and you will behold a new influence pushing its leaves and blossoms from amidst the dead corruption of the old (*EE* 336).

Like Godwin, Brown, and even Hawthorne, Bulwer is convinced that those who live too much within the ideological boundaries will not be able to effect the necessary reform since “society is crowded with the insipid and beset with the insincere (*EE* 81). In a public world dominated by a masculine materialist creed, Bulwer, like Godwin, believes that “it is the property of moral philosophy to keep alive the refining and unworldly springs of thought and action; a counter attraction to the mire and clay of earth, and drawing us insensibly upward to a higher and purer air of Intellectual Being” (*EE* 192). It is through this belief in the power of words to transform social structures that he tried to create his commune of authors, and continued writing popular fictions of socio-philosophical purpose even after his utopian schemes had failed to materialise.

Significantly, Bulwer’s early novels taught (and still teach) their readers how the identities and actions of individuals are formed and generated for the most part by their adherence to social customs and traditions. During the early nineteenth century, Bulwer’s public persona showed his reader that it was possible to consciously refuse to act out the prescribed masculine role, to criticise the dominant ideology, and still be successful all at once. Early literary success, especially with *Pelham* (1828) and *Paul Clifford* (1830) must have confirmed what Brown called Bulwer’s “contention that the novel [was] the most popular and powerful mode of communicating ideas” and therefore “should play a key role in countering” the materialist ethic that dominated society, as well as, I would add, the way in which this ideology affected the construction of individual identity within that society (Brown 31). According to his son, *Paul Clifford*

did much to stimulate public opinion in favour of carrying Criminal Law Reform beyond the point at which it had been left by the labours of Romilly; and the book itself was an incident in my father’s constant course of endeavour to improve the condition of that large portion of the population which is most tempted to crime through poverty and ignorance, - not by proclamation of utopian promises, or recourse to violent constitutional changes, but through a better intellectual training facilitated by timely administrative reforms (Lytton, *Life* 244).

Unsurprisingly, Godwin, having tried to warn Bulwer away from politics, praised the novel. He tells Bulwer in a letter that “there are parts of the book I read with transport. There are many parts of it so divinely written that my first impulse was to throw my implements of writing into the fire, and to wish that I could consign all I have published in the province of fiction to the same pyre” (Lytton, *Life* 258). Campbell explains that next to his enthusiasm for the style of *Paul Clifford*, Godwin must have found in it a strong social message with which he could agree. He argues that the novel “parallels William Godwin’s argument in *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) ... that the law is an instrument of class control” (Campbell 40). Like Godwin, Bulwer believed that “government sponsored violence could never be a solution” to the socio-political problems England faced and argues, as Hawthorne once dreamed, that “artists were the harbingers of change” (Mitchell 174). As with *Caleb Williams*, the public reaction to *Paul Clifford* showed Bulwer that the visionary popular novelist had the potential to become a more successful practical reformer than the politician. In *England and the English*, Bulwer continued his argument that “fiction, with its graphic delineation and appeals to the familiar emotions, is adapted to the crowd,” adding that, in fact, popular fiction “is the oratory of literature” (EE 261). In his novels of the 1830s, Lawrence Poston argues, Bulwer is paralleling “a tendency already present in Godwin’s and [Mary] Shelley’s novels: to shift the focus from legislatively enacted political reform to personal self redefinition.”¹⁸ The novel, with its potential mass appeal, could alter the way each individual thought about his or her place and role in society, bringing about a natural change in the social system.

After the success of his early novels, Bulwer founded the *Monthly Chronicle* in 1838. In setting up this magazine Bulwer was acting on principles similar to those that had urged Poe to attempt to start up his own magazine. Mitchell explains that Bulwer “aimed to supplant politically biased journals and raise the standards of reviewing” (Mitchell 119). Like Poe, Bulwer, from a sense of intellectual independence, a belief in the positive influence of reading on the individual, and a duty to educate the public, battled fiercely with his reviewers and fellow authors, defending both his own unusual novelistic and often harsh critical practice. Such battles, as with Poe, led to “alienation from his kind.” As Mitchell explains, his own outcast status led Bulwer to become the champion of the unrecognised literari (Mitchell 123). Like Poe, Bulwer campaigned to set up a guild of authors whose work could raise the minds of the public. Bulwer and his friend and rival Charles Dickens, Mitchell explains, “were prime movers in the setting up of the Guild of Literature and Art” (Mitchell 124). Bulwer even proposed a utopian scheme in which cottages were to be built on the grounds of Knebworth “where writers could live free of charge and devote themselves to literature” (Mitchell 125). In *Zanoni*, the immortal visionary herbalist, working alone but always with the intention to benefit the masses comes close to embodying the role Bulwer envisaged for the author in contemporary English society. The fact that his life-story becomes the subject of a manuscript written by another mystic and handed down to the public for their instruction suggests that the story of *Zanoni* is itself a fictional account of Bulwer’s theory of the novel of purpose.

¹⁸ Lawrence Poston, “Bulwer’s Godwinian Myth,” in *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer Lytton*, 79.

Zanoni, published only a year after *Night and Morning* and preceding his controversial crime novel *Lucretia* by four years is usually not grouped with Bulwer's Godwinian style political reform novels. John Coates even argues that *Zanoni* "marks a definitive turning away from the philosophical radicalism Bulwer-Lytton had shared with his wife," who was an active feminist.¹⁹ According to Coates, "the realms of human improvement" in *Zanoni* "are not political or institutional at all. The bettering of man's condition comes through the actions of the gifted few on the intellects, opinions and morals of the many." Coates is right here, but as the discussion of Bulwer's type of radicalism above has shown, like figures such as Godwin and Owen, he never put his faith in political reform, but from the outset had embraced the concept of reform through intellectual influence. In *Zanoni*, Coates believes, "the real way to change men's lives is not by changing the mechanism of the state but by acting on their minds" (Coates 228). Again, Coates is right, but this only shows how close Bulwer still is to a Godwinian vision of how to improve society. To underscore his interpretation of what he believes are the "highly conservative consequences" of *Zanoni*'s type of reform, he quotes the following words spoken by the immortal herbalist *Zanoni* to the English artist Glyndon in the novel: "level all conditions today, and you only smooth away all obstacles to tyranny tomorrow. The nation that aspires to *equality* is unfit for *freedom*." Acknowledging that *Zanoni* does allow for material equality, Coates points out that the mystic argues that "as for removing 'disparities of the intellectual and moral (life) never! Universal equality of intelligence, of mind, of genius, of virtue! No teacher left to the world, no men wiser, better than others – were it not an impossible condition, *what a hopeless prospect for humanity!*'" (Coates 228). What Coates oversees in his analysis, however, is that *Zanoni* argues from a belief in the immutable laws of nature, and that "the few in every age improve the many; the many may now be as wise as the few were; but improvement is at a standstill, if you tell me that the many now are as wise as the few *are*" (Z 92-3) *Zanoni* stresses that his philosophy of human improvement "is not a harsh but a loving law – the real law of improvement; the wiser the few in one generation, the wiser will be the multitude the next" (Z 102). Rather than reading into *Zanoni*'s words a conservative ideology of the necessity of an elite few to rule over the ignorant masses, his ideas in fact reflect the Godwinian, and Owenite, idea that the world is not benefited by social systems in which political authority is founded on economic prosperity or traditional privileges, but on intellectual capacity and benevolent intentions to instruct mankind. Godwin stressed the necessity for such gradual reform, especially because he had witnessed the disastrous consequences of popular revolutions fronted by men too much caught up in a struggle for political power. *Zanoni*, significantly, is trying to re-educate Clarence Glyndon – a young wealthy British artist with visionary potential but elitist pretensions – to adopt his mystical reform ways, just as the Reign of Terror in France is coming to a climax. Through *Zanoni*'s figure, his plight, his words and his actions, Bulwer does not so much construct a fantastic figure embodying conservative politics, but continues a tradition in gothic fiction in which the figure of the immortal and wise alchemist becomes a vessel for visionary radical reform that transcends party politics and

¹⁹ John Coates, "Zanoni by Bulwer-Lytton: A Discussion of its 'Philosophy' and its possible influences," *The Durham University Journal* 76/ n.s. 45 (1983-1984): 225.

embraces a more anarchic creed, in the positive sense of the term: striving towards a society founded on the belief in the individual's recognition that it is his or her duty to act always towards the benefit of the entire community. The idea of benevolent intellectuals, who through un-coercive influence would slowly but surely raise individual minds to such a belief, is a key concept in Godwin's anarchist philosophy. Zanon's fear of institutionalised equality as expressed in the novel, is not grounded in a fear of losing intellectual superiority and with it his power over others; it is grounded in a typical post-Reign of Terror fear of mob rule, an illusion of equality, founded on an appeal to the lowest common denominator, rather than the highest possible human achievement. It is for this reason that Bulwer chose to set his climax within the prison walls and on the guillotine scaffold of Revolutionary Paris.

Godwin's turn to the schema of alchemy in *St Leon* was not generated by a rejection of his political radicalism or a heightened interest in aesthetic and sentimental literary schemata. Godwin actually retained much of his radical ideas in *St Leon*, but fine-tuned them to fit his new insight into the need to recognise the positive powers inherent in irrational states of mind, including the visionary imagination. He was forced to acknowledge the establishment's success at stifling the rational argument for radical reform he had articulated in *Political Justice* and became increasingly a marginal figure in the English literary scene, the target even of public reactionary ridicule. As a result, Godwin exchanged his literary repertoire of social realism and psychological characterisation for a literary repertoire equally commercial (he was still attempting to earn a living by writing alone), but less overtly radical in its implications, the gothic romance: a literary genre still popular with a reading public that was increasingly weary of open radicalism in philosophy and fiction. Mitchell explains that, like Godwin, after and probably because of his initial success, "the figure of Lytton in society was an increasingly isolated one." A large part of the social abjection he suffered was due to the incongruity between his aristocratic upbringing, and the visionary nature of his political radicalism that found its most popular form in his early sociological crime fictions, as well as his androgynous persona, as one of the intellectual elite whose duty it was, in an Owenite/ Godwinian sense, to be the benevolent guide and instructor of his fellow human beings. Mitchell explains that at one time, "every aspect of his personality was matter for ridicule." Just as Godwin had become an easy target for anti-Jacobin satire in the wake of the Reign of Terror, in an age increasingly dominated by the forces of materialism and commerce, Bulwer's intellectualist aloofness and visionary idealism played a large part in making him a favourite butt of the early Victorian establishment's satire. "Inevitably," Mitchell argues, "he was driven to seek the company of those who, like him, found themselves on the margin" (Mitchell 107).

Poston argues, significantly, that "Bulwer's connection with Godwin explains why in *Zanoni* politics and the occult are thoroughly interwoven."²⁰ While *Zanoni*, according to Poston, ultimately presents Bulwer's "revised definition of the spiritual life," it also "is a reworking of many of the motifs not only of Bulwer's previous novels," the overtly didactic and philosophically radical crime fictions of the 1830s, but also of "the post-Jacobin

²⁰ Lawrence Poston, "Beyond the Occult: The Godwinian Nexus of Bulwer's *Zanoni*," *Studies in Romanticism* 37:2 (Summer 1998): 146.

reformism of William Godwin and others in the Shelley circle” (Poston, *Beyond* 131). In the anti-Jacobin mind occultism and radicalism were closely linked, and Godwin’s portrayal of the fate of the alchemist in *St Leon* worked to strengthen this link. Contrary to his initial extreme rationalism, in his later philosophy Godwin increasingly acknowledged the power of the imagination as a force that could bring about reform. Bulwer, as a child of the early nineteenth century, would have been more acquainted with the figure Godwin presented as the author of *Essay on Sepulchres* (1809), *Thoughts on Man* (1831) and *Lives of the Necromancers* (1834). Poston points out that, in certain parts, *Zanoni* is “an implicit critique of Godwinian rationalism” (Poston, *Beyond* 151). Godwin himself had critiqued extreme rationalism in his later work and Poston rightly adds that

in affirming a proto-Christian ideal of self-abnegation, Bulwer also remains close to the later Godwin if not the earlier one, even as he transcendentalizes Godwin and elevates Gothic convention so that Zanoni, the all-seer, capable of mysterious disappearance and reappearance, is also the beneficent, not the vengeful, Deity, the Christian hero rather than the Gothic villain (Poston, *Beyond* 160).

The figure of Zanoni, according to Poston, is in many ways “a ‘successful’ St Leon” (Poston, *Beyond* 156). Poston specifically draws attention to the way in which the figure of Zanoni relinquishes his position within a secret brotherhood of immortal sages and chooses to become once again part of humanity. This aligns Bulwer’s novel with Godwinian utopianism, Poston argues, “as in Godwin’s *St Leon* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, so in *Zanoni* the affirmation of the essential need for human sympathy transcends occultism in a moral fable exploring those human virtues necessary for the creation of a just society” (Poston, *Beyond* 161). Recently, Poston has added to this the idea that Bulwer’s novels share with Godwin’s idea that “the reparation of shattered domestic relationships is only a preface to a more effective reintegration of private and public lives” (Poston, *Godwinian* 88). In *Zanoni*, the immortal herbalist’s peculiar form of alchemical mysticism which leads to his insight into the necessity of human sympathy, the positive influence of familial bonds, unfettered to patriarchal ideology, is strongly contrasted to Mejnour’s form of occultism, overtly linked to the cold reasoning of objective rationalism that Godwin himself came to reject in the early nineteenth century. In *Zanoni*, then, Bulwer, like Godwin, turned to the myth of the alchemist, since it was a cultural schema that allowed him to articulate his increasingly eccentric ideas about an androgynous intellectual elite, whose knowledge and identity set them outside the masculinist cultural mainstream, and worked invisibly, through the “magic” of popular fiction, to educate the mind of the individual about the right way to achieve the creation of a just society.

In the post-Romantic era, Bulwer was an outsider in developing an authorial persona that stressed the power of the imagination as the human characteristic most likely to improve the human mind and society. Mitchell explains that unlike the increasingly dominant utilitarian reformist creed, Bulwer came to believe that “Europeans had relied too heavily on” reason. “The Egyptians and other ancient peoples knew better,” he

thought (Mitchell 131).²¹ Like Charles Brocken Brown, the rhapsodist, Bulwer believed that “the artist had to be a visionary whose eyes allowed him to see things other men could not” (Mitchell 133). His later essay “On the Normal Clairvoyance of the Imagination,” originally published in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in 1862, Bulwer still theorises about this special visionary power of the human imagination. He writes that, in opposition to the clairvoyance of the somnambulist or mesmeric medium, “the clairvoyance of wakeful intellect has originated all the manifold knowledge we now possess.”²² As in Godwin’s later visionary radicalism, Bulwer believes social utopia has to be imagined before it could be brought about. Mankind’s visionary imagination, rather than empirical scientific developments are the primary engine of invention and change. Echoing Poe’s argument in *Eureka* (1848), Bulwer writes: “men disciplined in the study of severest science, only through reason discover what through imagination they prewise” (CA 39). By valuing the imagination above deductive rationalism, Bulwer is raising the status of the popular novelist. “Nothing is more frequent among novelists,” he argues, “even third-rate and fourth-rate, than ‘to see through other organs than their eyes.’ Clairvoyance is the badge of all their tribe,” a tribe Bulwer called “the masonry of fiction” (CA 38).

Unsurprisingly, Bulwer, due to his open dabbling in spiritualism, mesmerism, alchemy and other occult phenomena, became himself the subject of an occult myth in the course of his career. Occasionally signing his letter with “Magus,” Mitchell recounts that Bulwer was believed by some to be a member of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood and even to have the power of invisibility (see Campbell 109; Mitchell 140). Whatever the truth about Bulwer’s Rosicrucianism, Campbell explains, the fact remains that “for nearly forty years Bulwer sustained a fascination for all things occult.” According to Campbell, Bulwer “assiduously read most of the classic texts written about the occult” including works by the famous alchemists, Paracelsus, Agrippa and Van Helmont (Campbell 110). Mitchell seconds this, explaining that apart from works by individual authors he also “read extensively in astrology and in the history of mystical, secret societies like Rosicrucians” (Mitchell 135). Bulwer remained sceptical of the supernatural powers attributed to such figures. Bulwer was probably fascinated by the alchemists of old because of the similar plight they suffered as unorthodox intellectual visionaries who used their imagination as much their power of reasoning in conjuring up designs towards radical social reform.

According to Robert Lee Wolff, of all the genres to which Bulwer had turned his pen, he “did his best work, the work that lay closest to his heart,” when he turned to “the fiction of the occult.”²³ Marie Roberts also calls attention to the significance of *Zanoni* in Bulwer’s oeuvre, arguing that “Bulwer’s reputation may be redeemed by a reappraisal of his Rosicrucian novels, *Zanoni* and *A Strange Story*,” which she argues represent Bulwer’s engagement with German idealism, his attempt at working towards a dialectical synthesis of

²¹ In chapter one of *Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Germany*, Richard A. Zipser draws attention to Bulwer’s relation to the [Frankfurt] Rosicrucians, his interest in Germans normally associated with the occult – Albertus Magnus, Johannes Trithemius, Agrippa von Nettesheim, Paracelsus, and Johann Valentin Andreaë” (Zipser, 22). The focus in this chapter, however, will lie on the connection between Bulwer’s interest in the occult and social utopianism, not with his interest in German occult philosophy.

²² Edgar Bulwer Lytton, *Caxtoniana: A Series of Essays on Life, Literature, and Manners* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1864) 36.

²³ Robert Lee Wolff, *Strange Stories and Other Explorations in Victorian Fiction* (Boston: Gambit, 1971) 148.

the actual and the ideal (M. Roberts 156). In the analysis of *Zanoni* that follows, it is not so much Bulwer's engagement with German idealist philosophy, or the contemporary occult fads such as spiritualism that are the focus of enquiry. Instead, the analysis will focus on how Bulwer's turn to the subgenre of alchemical gothic, as in the work of Godwin, Brown, Poe, Hawthorne and Melville, worked not only as a fantastic literary schema through which the increasingly socially marginalised, but persistently popular author continued to express his radical reformist vision and also drew attention to the need to reject an ideology of gender polarization for a social androgynous ideal – a genderless society in the sense that gender is no longer a power-tool and a marker of social status – through which male and female genders, while remaining valid categories for constructing individual identity, are stripped of their unequal social statuses.

The first occult fiction Bulwer published was *Zicci* (1838), an account of a dream he had had of “a sage who had learned to make and use the elixir of life that rendered him immortal from all human illness” (Wolff 159). This story is basically the first draft of what would become book two of *Zanoni*. Wolf argues that in this novel an immortal and mystical herbalist, one of two remaining members of mystical brotherhood of immortal herbalists much older than the Rosicrucian myths, “abandons the Ideal for the Real” after he learns that it is not through isolated intellectual mysticism, and a wish to become one with the spirit of a supernatural power, but through sympathy with the plight of ordinary humans in their daily struggles that he can find a benevolent purpose to his life (Wolff 178). Wolff explains “at times the magic of the herbalist seems to be the only occult science worthy of praise, as astrology and cabalism and alchemy are apparently scorned.” Wolff links this interest in magical herbalism to Bulwer's fascination with the figure and writings of the German romantic Goethe, who believed that “botany offered the best clues to a universal understanding of nature” and in his botanical writings developed the concept of the *Urpflanze* as “a mystical botanical equivalent for the alchemical process” (Wolff 176). For *Zanoni*, as for St Leon, Frankenstein, Carwin, or Rappaccini, his apparently magical powers are in fact “supernatural only to the ignorant: the supernatural is only law as yet undiscovered” (Wolff 180). While Wolff focuses on the way in which the Platonic plot structure of the novel reveals how *Zanoni* finds true illumination through love, the novel also incorporates into its mystical scheme a more practical reformist message. Instead of forsaking the ideal and embracing the real, *Zanoni* seeks to fuse the two. Significantly, the realm of the ideal in the novel, based on Bulwer's own picture of contemporary society, is presented as too rational, still too much in the grip of a social structure founded in aristocratic hierarchy, and still thoroughly patriarchal in its foundations. In this real context, *Zanoni* becomes an anarchic alchemist, attempting to bring about the radical reform of a social structure in which masculine authority and social status through property are presumed as natural identity markers, and in which the bifurcation of male and female gender identities is shown to be an ideological tool that ensures the continuation of this property-based masculine authority. His brand of metaphysical idealism, with its purpose of effecting practical social reform, becomes also an androgynous ideal, since it seeks to strip the intertwined concepts of knowledge and power from their ideologically prescribed

masculine identity and to recast them as un-gendered concepts, owned by none and available to all.

According to Mitchell “*Zanoni* remained for Lytton a kind of personal manifesto” (Mitchell 135). In 1853 Bulwer confessed in a new preface to the novel that “as a work of imagination, *Zanoni* ranks, perhaps, amongst the highest of my prose fictions” (Z vii). For Bulwer, *Zanoni* was not just another sensational gothic fiction with which he could extend his run of commercial successes. Already in the “Dedicatory Epistle” to the 1845 edition Bulwer explained that the novel articulated his own theory about the nature and purpose of art. He explains that *Zanoni*, despite its popularity, “has been little understood, and superficially judged by the common herd,” who probably enjoyed it only as a sensational gothic story (Z vi). Bulwer told the sculptor John Gibson that he dedicated *Zanoni* to him because he felt that “it is in the still, the lonely, and more sacred life, which, for some hours, under every sun, the student lives, - his stolen retreat from the Agora to the Cave, - that I feel there is between us the bond of that secret sympathy, that magnetic chain, which unites the Everlasting Brotherhood, of whose being *Zanoni* is the type” (Z vi). In Bulwer’s eyes, he and Gibson, as artists – one in marble, the other in words – share a vision and a calling. Gibson is judged by Bulwer to be the ideal artist because his fame is “unsullied by one desire for gold” (Z v). Gibson has “escaped the two worst perils that beset the Artist in our time and land, – the debasing tendencies of Commerce, and the angry rivalries of Competition” (Z v). By linking the alchemical figure of *Zanoni* to that of Gibson and by then linking his own sense of self as artist-in-words to his idealised portrait of the sculptor, Bulwer, who did in fact engage in an angry war of words with his fellow authors, and whose novels were often very successful in a commercial literary market, is constructing an identity as an philosophical idealist: “our true nature is in our thoughts” he tells Gibson, “not our deeds” (Z vi). By putting his thoughts on paper, however, and shaping them so that the willing reader could be illuminated by them, Bulwer is also setting himself up as a practical reformer. That he indeed wished to influence the reader through his story-telling becomes evident in the 1853 preface to *Zanoni*. Frustrated that his novel has not been understood properly, Bulwer feels the need to express explicitly the nature of his idealist philosophy, as embodied in *Zanoni*. The novel deals with “that harmony between the external events which are all that the superficial behold on the surface of human affairs, and the subtle and intellectual agencies which in reality influence the conduct of individuals, and shape out the destinies of the World” (Z vii).

The novel’s artificial narrative structure and its figures that function allegorically or as types, according to Bulwer, suggests that, in writing *Zanoni*, Bulwer was less intent than in his earlier fictions, to write a sociological novel that explained how individual characters were formed by the customs and traditions of their immediate social surroundings and their education. Instead he was intent on writing a story that would articulate his own brand of visionary idealism to a reading audience that would usually shun works of heady philosophy. Thomas Carlyle shared Bulwer’s enthusiasm for Goethe, whom he classed a mystic, his distrust of mob-rule democracy, and disgust for the social inequality brought about by laissez-faire economics. The eminent Victorian thinker recognised the potential in *Zanoni* to be a philosophically illuminating prose fiction. He wrote in his usual hyperbolic

style that “it will be a liberating voice...for much that lay dumb imprisoned in many human souls; ...it will shake old deep-set errors looser in their rootings, and thro’ such chinks as are possible let in light on dark places very greatly in need of light!” (Christensen 80). While Bulwer’s later work comes increasingly to express Carlyle’s trust in the intelligent few to govern the ignorant many, the figure of Zanoni fuses Bulwer’s visionary philosophical outlook with a drive for benevolent practical social reform.

While Bulwer argues in the note appended to the end of the novel that his novel indeed was not aimed only at the consumers of sensational fare, but at readers “who think it worth while to dive into the subtler meanings they believe it intended to convey,” the story itself uses all the recognisable gothic narrative techniques, tropes and schemes to ensure its popularity (Z 421). The novel is presented to the public as a manuscript in cipher that an editor translates to reveal a confessional narrative of a superhuman being. It is set both in decadent Italian cities with splendid palaces inhabited by scheming noblemen and wild but idealised landscapes inhabited by benevolent peasants and Robin Hood type bandits. Stock gothic figures people the novel: a wildly avant-gardistic musician and his strangely beautiful, mystically musical and powerfully independent daughter; two rivalling immortal mystics, an artistic but ignorant aristocratic dandy, cruel politicians, vile materialists and ghastly spectres from beyond the boundaries of the real. As such, the novel is immediately recognisable as a gothic pot-boiler. However, even more obviously than in *St Leon* – where characters, setting and the powers of alchemy all worked to articulate Godwin’s philosophical insights into the coercive nature of domestic ideology under an aristocratic social structure – Bulwer turns to these stock gothic devices, to construct what is essentially a thinly disguised allegory about the need to adopt an anti-materialist and anti-rationalist (but not irrational) viewpoint in order to truly improve human society – a society in which the individual’s position and potential is limited because of the predominance of an androcentric ideology that defines its culture through seemingly complementary, but ultimately irreconcilable, binary concepts that ensure its own hegemony. Bulwer’s hopes must have been that by reading *Zanoni* and understanding the idealistic yet socially engaged philosophy that the plot and the individual figures represented, the reader’s mind would be transformed for the better making it possible for them to improve society.

The most obvious evidence of Bulwer’s didactic philosophical aims in *Zanoni* is presented in the note appended to the end of the novel, in which the author explains that in fact “Zanoni is not, as some have supposed, an allegory; but beneath the narrative it relates [i.e. the gothic adventure tale], typical meanings are concealed.” According to Bulwer, *Zanoni* is not an allegory because “an Allegory is a personation of distinct and definite things – Virtues or Qualities – and the key can be given easily; but a writer who conveys typical meanings may express them in myriads” (Z 421). In *Zanoni*, there are indeed no characters called Benevolence, Science, or Terror. Bulwer points out that, his work is also open to various and conflicting interpretations, since, as he explains himself, “what is treasure to the geologist may be rubbish to the miner” (Z 422). This is of course true for all texts, including allegories, but Bulwer argues that it is the reason why he included “no key to mysteries, be they trivial or important, which may be found in the secret chambers by those who lift the tapestry from the wall.” As in a parable, Bulwer

explains that his intention is not to convince, “but to suggest” (Z 422-3). True to his own doctrine of uncoercive intellectual influence, Bulwer refuses to tell the reader how to interpret his novel, giving those in search for mere entertainment an enigmatic gothic story and those with the desire to be instructed a metaphysical tale of individual illumination.

The boundary between allegory and type is not so clear cut, however, as Bulwer presents it in his note. Many allegories exist that do not make use of personification of abstract ideas. It is unclear whether by type, Bulwer meant Biblical typology, or simply type, in the sense that E.M. Foster theorised it in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), where a type is a “flat” character, “constructed around a single idea or quality” and “easily recognised whenever they come in,” and “easily remembered by the reader afterwards.”²⁴ Like Dickens’s *Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), Bulwer’s novel is a popular adventure structured around what can be best described as a set of tableaux with the potential to become allegorical representation of contemporary social ills. Harriet Martineau’s response to *Zanoni* underscores such a reading. R.K. Webb writes that Martineau, “finding her friends mystified over something that seemed so obvious to her as that a map of Norfolk was not intended to show Cornwall, she drew up a scheme for their guidance.”²⁵ Webb explains, that, even though he initially refused to call *Zanoni* an allegory, Bulwer “evidently felt it sufficiently accurate and helpful to be appended to the 1845 edition and to all subsequent editions of the novel” (Webb 199). This appendix, eventually titled “Zanoni Explained,” became for many readers *the* key to the meanings of each figure in Bulwer’s fantastic story, turning Bulwer’s characters into figures incorporating philosophical concepts, into more easily interpretable allegorical figures representing social or individual ills. Significantly, it is by working out Martineau’s influential explanation of the meaning of the figures in *Zanoni* that its dissident potential towards the hegemonic ideology of gender polarization can be shown to take shape through an alchemically informed androgynous idealism. In order to highlight the way in which Martineau’s allegorical interpretation foregrounds the androgynous idealism latent in Bulwer’s story it is useful to analyse the novel book by book, tableaux by tableaux. Such an analysis reveals how much *Zanoni* is a fiction consciously constructed to convey a specific philosophical idea – a message Martineau felt the need to foreground in order to ensure the success of *Zanoni* not only as a sensational gothic novel, but also as a magico-political tale.

The introduction reveals that *Zanoni* is the deciphered manuscript that its eventual decipherer (and editor) is handed by a figure he calls “the Sage,” a solitary mysterious mystic who spends “the chief part of his time...in acts of quiet and unostentatious goodness.” The editor explains that “he was an enthusiast in the duties of the Samaritan; and as his virtues were softened by the gentlest of charity, so his hopes were based upon the devoutest belief” (Z xv). While for the devourer of the gothic fantastic, such an introduction is a recognisable feature of the gothic tradition in fiction and a solid foundation stone for the erection of a sensational gothic fantasy, from the character of the sage who is introduced, it can be deduced that the manuscript will have as its message similar benevolent aims to the ones harboured by the mysterious figure who wrote it.

²⁴ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel and Related Writings* (1927; London: Edward Arnold, 1974) 46-48.

²⁵ R.K. Webb, *Harriet Martineau, A Radical Victorian* (London: Heinemann, 1960) 199.

The manuscript itself consists of seven books. Book one introduces each of the central characters including the central androgynous female figure of Viola, the daughter of an Italian musician whose wild and haggard physique reflects his original, wild and above all seemingly lawless compositions that shock the high society of Naples. This foregrounds from the outset the philosophical concept of the harmony between the material and spiritual realm, and the idea that art is not merely an aesthetic medium, but is imbued with potential political power. Significantly, Pisani's daughter is a woman of "a very uncommon beauty, – a combination, a harmony of opposite attributes" and a woman whose wisdom "seized on nature and truth intuitively" (Z 6, 8). True to Bulwer's philosophy and his own public persona, her androgynous identity is underscored by her actions. Against the wishes of the establishment she insists on performing her late father's repressed musical masterpiece *The Siren*. In doing so she is fusing artistic idealism and public action (the performance shocks the nobles) and is "uniting her father's triumph with her own" (Z 29). In Martineau's interpretation, the androgynous Viola is "human instinct... simultaneously fighting and succumbing to the forces of superstition and ignorance that define the Actual" (Z 423). Fusing the ideal and the real in her life and art, she suffers from the constant pressure of social forces that are trying to pull these two realms apart, as various men seek her as a trophy in marriage, while she feels lured to align herself with Zanoni's idealism. Typologically, in the sense of biblical criticism, the union between father and daughter and her father's resurrection in the performance of his masterpiece, parallels the eventual union of Zanoni and Viola in death and their simultaneous resurrection through the knowing smile of their child as it is rescued from the Revolutionary prisons. The opening book not only presents the reader with the primary thesis in Bulwer's idealistic philosophy: the material and spiritual realms exist in harmony; through this characterisation, it also expresses that these concepts are defined according to an ideology of gender polarization in the actual world, and defined by an androgynous fusion in the ideal world to which all artists should strive. Viola, the intuitive female artist, and Zanoni, the immortal herbalist, are the feminine and masculine types of this potentially androgynous ideal. The purpose of the entire plot is to bring them together.

Zanoni is introduced as a Carwinesque stranger, believed by the nobles of Naples to be a sorcerer, an alchemist, and a devil worshiper. According to Martineau, Zanoni represents philosophical idealism: "always necessarily sympathetic...the potent Interpreter and Prophet of the Real" whose "powers," much like Viola's artistry, "are impaired in proportion to their exposure to human passion" (Z 423). One of the Italian noblemen states: "I cannot yet find anyone who knows aught of his birthplace, his parentage, or what is more important, his estates!" (Z 23) This description of Zanoni makes clear that the late-eighteenth-century society of Italy (and later France and England) depicted in the novel is a materialistic society structured, like St Leon's world, on patriarchal concepts of aristocratic privilege defined by the possession of property and family tradition. The actual world, in Bulwer's scheme, is presented as governed by traditional masculine types presented unequivocally as destructive to human society. The noblemen are portrayed as evil schemers, gamblers, duellers and abductors of women, representatives of a history of coercion and repression rather than a just society. Zanoni's mysterious past, personal

beauty, charismatic personality and untraceable and unlimited wealth threatens this patriarchal order of Naples because his identity is not traceable to any lineage and because he uses his money and power for benevolent purposes: healing the sick, reforming the sinful, and defending those vulnerable to the aristocratic abuse of power – most notably the beautiful singer Viola, whom the most powerful local Prince has chosen as his wife because her immense beauty complements his immense fortune. Accordingly, these noblemen get involved in a futile scheme to murder Zandoni, so as to ensure their privileged status and power within Naples society.

Zandoni's mystical master Mejnour is introduced as "a singular recluse," living in Rome as "a stranger and a foreigner" who "breathes in safety the pestilential air. He has no friends, no associates, no companions, except books and instruments of science." Contrary to what the reader finds out about Zandoni, Mejnour "asks no charity, and he gives none – he does no evil, and seems to confer no good" (Z 26-7). This description is significant, since the reader will learn that the immortal herbalist Zandoni, wherever he wandered, "sought to soften distress, and to convert from sin" – and like a nineteenth-century naturalist superhero used neither books nor instruments of science but read only the book of Nature, whose laws he held sacred above all else (Z 256, 77). According to Martineau, Mejnour represents science: "less fallible than idealism, but less practically potent, from its ignorance of the human heart" (Z 423). Bulwer explicitly links the mystic Mejnour to the patriarchal aristocracy of Naples by inserting a scene in which Mejnour visits the powerful prince, who has just abducted and imprisoned Viola in a chamber not unlike the one in which Aylmer confined Georgiana, or Poe's narrator in "Ligeia" holds Rowena. Having been startled by Viola's defiance the prince's ego is reassured as Mejnour calls him "son of the most energetic and masculine race that ever applied godlike genius to the service of the Human Will" (Z 169). He comes to warn the Prince against Zandoni's power and explains that he has undertaken this errand because of ties between himself and the prince's "grandsire," an exiled aristocrat who became the pupil of Mejnour and with his help "estate upon estate fell into his hands" making him "the guide of princes, the first magnate of Italy" (Z 170). Mejnour, in Bulwer's philosophical scheme, is the emblem of a knowledge and power that support the aristocratic, patriarchal social structure that Bulwer had found responsible for many of the ills of contemporary society. His knowledge, unlike Zandoni's, is gained through practical science and learning from books – not from the contemplation of the immutable laws of nature and a sympathy for all mankind, which Zandoni seeks to cultivate throughout the novel. Book one, then, sets up the typological meaning of the main figures in the plot, and divides them into the defenders of what Bulwer believed to be the tyrannical patriarchal institutions and the cold, objective rationalism which buttressed it, or aspirers to an artistic, natural and philosophical idealism, who seek to reform themselves through the use of their individual imagination to fuse the actual and the ideal as a first and necessary step to the eventual reform of society.

Book two is a portrait of Clarence Glyndon, the young Aristocratic English artist, at first an aspiring painter of ideal subjects and later the neophyte of Mejnour and the potential successor of Zandoni, who turns out also to be the Sage of the introduction and therefore the narrator of the novel. In this book the dominant ideology of the English artist

and his even more “matter-of-fact” companion Mervale is outlined. According to Martineau, Clarence Glyndon represents “unsustained aspiration.” He “would follow instinct, but is deterred by Conventionalism” represented by his materialist companion Mervale (Z 424). Possessing artistic genius, the young Glyndon is portrayed by his older and wiser self as “the creature of impulse and the slave of imagination,” whose “ambition rather sought to gather the fruit than to plant the tree” (Z 61). As such the young Glyndon is Bulwer’s version of Reginald de St Leon, more aware of his own social rank and privilege and seeking to attain supernatural powers only to increase this rank and privilege rather than to use them to benefit mankind. Glyndon refuses to marry Viola because his English obsession with class-bound propriety leads him to conclude that while her beauty feeds his artistic temperament and sexual desires, she is not marriageable because “Viola is not of my rank” (Z 80). Importantly, Glyndon’s initial rejection of Viola, together with Viola’s rejection of Jean Nicot, the vile materialist, artist of the real, and revolutionary evangelist, who Martineau describes as “base, grovelling, malignant passion,” leaves the road free for Zanoni to fulfil his new ideal of the androgynous union of the human qualities that both he and Viola’s represent but which can exist only in gendered polar oppositions within the late-eighteenth-century European society in which they live (Z 424).

The two figures Glyndon and Zanoni come to represent the laws of social custom and tradition against what Zanoni calls the more profound “Laws of Nature” (Z 84). Zanoni’s belief, discussed above, in the impossibility of equality belongs to his worship of nature, a realm in which nothing is ever static or equal but always in a state of flux. While Nicot, in his base materialism, can only draw ugly reality and therefore can only espouse ugly revolutionary doctrines, Glyndon, while supporting more noble visionary ambitions, due to his persistent friendship with Mervale, the emblem of social conventions, fails to act on Zanoni’s wisdom that “your pencil is your wand; your canvas may raise Utopias fairer than Condorcet dreams of,” again implying the potential positive influence of art on society (Z 95). This idealistic doctrine becomes increasingly significant because the story’s climax juxtaposes the murderous facts of the Reign of Terror – the result of a purely masculine and material vision of political, legislative change with the androgynous utopian vision of Zanoni.

In Book three, Glyndon’s failure to realise that “knowledge and power are not happiness,” allows Zanoni and himself to literally exchange roles (Z 158). Glyndon becomes the pupil of Mejnour, while Zanoni becomes the suitor of Viola’s love. Book four is entirely devoted to the disastrous consequences of Glyndon’s choice to embrace Mejnour’s cold and disinterested search for knowledge and power, which turns him, much like St Leon, into a solitary wandering outcast fleeing the consequences of his acts. Significantly, Bulwer draws attention in two ways to the gender politics inherent in the mysticism represented by Zanoni and Mejnour: first, by structuring much of this book on the well-known bluebeard fable; and second, by introducing a threatening mystical force entitled the dweller of the threshold, the spirit that in Mejnour’s mystical teachings needs to be confronted and defeated before true illumination can be achieved. Glyndon, as Mejnour’s pupil becomes the umpteenth victim of a tyrannical master as he is locked up in a solitary tower in the middle of the Italian wilderness, surrounded only by a hamlet of

benevolent bandits, who seem to guard the tower, but in fact form an anarchic society of outlaws, who steal from the rich to feed themselves and the poor folk in the area. Glyndon's test, as in the Bluebeard fable, is to resist the temptation to open the chamber to which Mejnour has given him the key, but has forbidden him to enter. This chamber holds the key to the mystical knowledge Glyndon craves but is as yet forbidden to acquire. Mejnour's androcentric lens and elitist attitude towards the world around him becomes evident when he states that his "art is to make man above mankind and his belief that "magic (or the science that violates nature) exists not, – it is but the science by which nature can be controlled" (Z 222, 225). Unlike Zanoni, who holds the laws of nature as sacred and views them as a guide, Mejnour uses his powers to control. This difference between Mejnour and Zanoni makes understandable the now effeminised Glyndon's worries about the fact that the mystic "seemed wholly indifferent to all the actual world" (Z 213). Mejnour tells Glyndon that "if you desire to reform the faulty, why you must lower yourself to live with the faulty to know their faults" (Z 214). Mejnour here ridicules Zanoni's wish to fuse with ordinary society, in order to be able to transform the potential that exists there for good into an actual force for good, to raise individuals to his level. In Viola, Zanoni has even found an independent human being with the intuitive intellect to become his equal. Mejnour, in taking on Glyndon, has found a new subject over which to he can exert his authority.

In contrast to Zanoni's utopian idealism, Glyndon reveals his selfish lust for knowledge and power by disobeying Mejnour's injunctions and entering the locked chamber of mysteries. In book two Glyndon is shown to reject a marriage with Viola due to her inferior social status, allowing Zanoni to become her lover and eventually the father of her child. This rejection foreshadows his inability to confront the female Dweller of the Threshold. Glyndon can neither be Mejnour, the conqueror and controller of the Dweller of the Threshold, or Zanoni, the aspirer to an androgynous ideal that lies beyond Mejnour's cold, objective philosophy. Significantly, outside of Mejnour's isolated tower of masculine mystical wisdom lies the community of outlaws. Foreshadowing his meeting with the female dweller of the threshold, Glyndon here meets the attractive Fillide, a woman with a "stern, brave, wild spirit, in which what seemed unfeminine was yet, if I may say so, still womanly," which "did not recoil" but "rather captivated Glyndon" (Z 239-40). She tells Glyndon that "law never ventures into these defiles," arguing that their existence is a more natural counterpart to the artificial society structured on custom and tradition and law that Glyndon has been used to (Z 238). Significant to the philosophical scheme of the novel, Glyndon comments that that "there is more magic in Fillide than in Mejnour," linking her directly to both Viola and the Dweller of the Threshold, the only other true female presences in the novel (Z 240). Within the natural environment of the Italian community of benevolent banditti, and under the spell of Fillide's personality and words, Glyndon becomes momentarily an idealist. In the confines of an isolated tower and under the repressive spell of Mejnour, however, Glyndon becomes nothing more than afraid, a doubter of his own enterprise.

Unsurprisingly, in book five, Glyndon is shown to succumb again to his customary selfish ambitions and, having disobeyed Mejnour, is now forever haunted by the female

spectre. He flees from Mejnour's castle in fear and returns to England to seek his fortune as a player on "the money-market" (Z 280). Glyndon literally fails to understand Zanoni's teaching that "man never shall be as free in the market place as on the mountain" (Z 43). He picks up his friendship with Mervale, who "chose a wife from his reason, not his heart" who had "the most admirable sense of propriety" and has become "the destined father of a family, and the present master of a household" (Z 279-81). Friendless and alone, Glyndon is finally consoled by the presence of his sister, who comes to live with him. Bulwer here plunders Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" to continue his story of the struggle to unify the actual and the ideal. Glyndon becomes obsessed with the likeness between him and a portrait of an ancestor who had been an alchemist and he and his sister are "the last of our predestined race" (Z 285). Like the paranoid mystic Roderick Usher, Glyndon stands powerless as he sees his sister Adela slowly withering under the spell of the spectre until she was in a state of "apathy, a sleep in waking," eventually falling in front of him "with a shriek to the ground cold and lifeless" (Z 290). This book shows the disastrous effects of Glyndon's refusal to acknowledge Zanoni's naturalist idealism as the true calling for the visionary artist. His fear of confronting the female dweller of the threshold, his abandonment of Fillide and his inability to sympathise with Adele's plight all profess how much the masculinist material realm, in which he tries to regain the respect, status, and property he had lost, is founded on a complete rejection of the feminine and women as equal participators in human society.

Books one to five illustrate that Mejnour's type of mysticism is congruent with an androcentric materialist ideology. It shows that he seeks to overcome and control the feminine principle. Logically, in Bulwer's scheme, book six describes how Zanoni tries to break entirely with his master by bringing about not only the philosophical, but also the physical union with Viola, consequently losing much of his supernatural powers as the two conceive a child. Whereas Zanoni's alchemical idealism sees the spiritual and material as intertwined, according to Mejnour's androcentric viewpoint, Zanoni needs to be punished for fusing the ideal and the real in an attempt to better his own and consequently humanity's lot. Glyndon, older and wiser and more benevolent, is shown to have learned from his mistakes as he expresses the power inherent in Viola's motherhood. He explains that "as a mother, she [Viola] is raised from dependence into power; it is another that leans on her – a star has sprung into space, to which she herself had become the sun!" (Z 302). Here again Bulwer articulates his doctrine of the impossibility of total equality, as the child is naturally dependent on its mother and father. Viola's power as a mother, in the scheme of the novel, is indeed closely tied to her union with Zanoni, the father of the child. As soon as the two are separated, geographically, patriarchy intervenes in the shape of a Catholic priest, whose influence causes Viola to fear that Zanoni is in fact in league with the Devil. Under influence of the Church, Viola flees Zanoni with the assistance of the timely return of an as yet unenlightened Glyndon. While the plot, for those readers who read it merely as a sensational story, becomes increasingly subject to chance, in Bulwer's philosophical scheme, book six logically ends with a chapter that consists only of Zanoni's complete rejection of Mejnour's mysticism and the brotherhood he represents. Zanoni

now blames Mejnour's cold and passionless mystical lore for his loss of Viola, now for some unexplained reason imprisoned in the dungeons of Paris.

Finally, in book seven, Glyndon and Zandoni, and Viola and Fillide, are brought together in Paris during the last days of the Reign of Terror where "Robespierre the king" still rules like a true tyrant by planning to publicly guillotining all those who oppose his plans (Z 321). Glyndon is present as a supporter of the growing opposition to Robespierre's rule and he is the vile schemer Nicot's choice to play Brutus to Robespierre's Caesar. Viola is its unfortunate victim, an innocent prisoner sentenced to be executed because the revolutionaries need a "round number" of victims: "eighty sounds better than seventy-nine!" (Z 401). Fillide plays the betrayed lover, who reveals Glyndon's plans to flee Paris to Nicot, who in turn grovels to join his fellow artist, while planning to betray both Glyndon and Zandoni to the authorities – the former so as to steal the beautiful mountain girl from him and the latter in order to get at his supposed gold. This symbolic nature of the revolutionary setting becomes apparent when Zandoni likens the French revolutionaries to the type of mystics embodied by the as yet deluded Glyndon, the failed pupil of Mejnour's cold, objective mysticism. In a letter to his former master he writes:

and what in truth are these would be builders of a new world? Like the students who have vainly struggled after our supreme science, they have attempted what is beyond their power; they have passed from this solid earth of usages and forms, into the land of shadow; and its loathsome keeper has seized them as its prey (Z 341).

These men, through their own selfish greed for power have become the prey to fear as their revolutionary doctrines have become divorced from any wider benevolent intentions. By rejecting the positive force of the imagination in concentrating too much on the law, and by refusing to involve the entire community in their supposedly utopian scheme, the revolutionaries have nullified the positive potential of their radical doctrines. A too one-sided rationalist, masculinist practice has divorced their philosophical idealism from any positive pragmatism.

Webb explains that, in *Zandoni*, "the marriage, as [Martineau] saw it, is the linking of instinct (Viola) to idealism (Zandoni), and the climax is the fulfilment of that union, in which the laws of the two natures become one" (Webb 199). Zandoni, rejecting Mejnour's disinterested philosophy, uses his faith in the laws of nature, to move from idealistic thought to positive action. At the climax, he sacrifices himself to save Viola and his child and as such the future. In line with the idealistic alchemical scheme to which Zandoni prescribes, in the final scene his death is necessarily paralleled by Viola's death in the cell because they are spiritually one. Their simultaneous demise is emblematic of their "privileged familiarity," the androgynous union that had existed between them from the outset (Z 64). As Martineau argues, Viola, having struggled against the pressures of society to conform to the prescribed standard of womanhood, does not die as such, but is "transmuted...in the aspiration after having the laws of the two natures reconciled" (Z 408). Roberts explains that this philosophical idealism is at the heart of the book's meaning:

“the two states” – the actual and the ideal, the rational and intuitive, the male and the female – “are inseparable and integral, since true enlightenment may only be achieved by acknowledging this fusion” (M. Roberts 178). Zaroni, as Roberts states, “becomes the mouthpiece for Bulwer’s idealist principle, while Mejnour reflects the actuality of scientific empiricism,” the latter becoming an emblem of the way contemporary knowledge and science is used, the other an idealistic alternative (M. Roberts 172).

As in alchemical myth, the death in an androgynous union between the male and female elements is not the end of the story. As in the alchemical myths, the birth of the philosophical child, who in this case “smiled fearlessly on the crowd,” represents the beginning of a new cycle of life and death, on a higher spiritual plane (Z 419). The final tableau of the novel represents the alchemical ideal of the union of male and female principles leading to the creation of new life, but also, as Bulwer had argued earlier in his career, the death of the domestic nuclear family as a social unit. Without parents and a home, the orphaned child becomes the responsibility of the entire community. In the closing scene, both a woman bystander, who is stated to be a mother herself, and a priest confer their attentions on the child on the day that the Reign of Terror ended, fusing maternal and paternal authority. Zaroni’s idealism, fraught by many material and metaphysical obstacles, has led to the downfall of an androcentric will to power and has opened the way, as Bulwer writes in the argument appended to the novel, to “slow restoration; and also, SOMETHING BETTER” (Z 420).

Bulwer’s novel was also successful in the United States. In 1842, Harper published an American edition. Hershel Parker writes that in 1850 one magazine merely noted the *new* Harper edition of Bulwer’s novel by stating: “it is unnecessary to speak of *Zaroni*, as it is well known to every reader of romance.”²⁶ This fact shows *Zaroni*’s continuing popular appeal in America. The following readings of Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and Melville’s *Pierre* investigate to what extent these authors were familiar with Bulwer’s alchemically inspired novel about the evils of socio-political polarization.

Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter: Dissident Alchemical Androgyny in a Puritan Setting

Although there is no direct evidence that Hawthorne read and for that matter appreciated *Zaroni*, there is ample evidence that Bulwer’s alchemical gothic novel-of-purpose was a widely read in the United States. Hawthorne had admired the novels of Godwin and Scott as a youth, and the interest he shows in his early tales for alchemists, magicians, and the supernatural in general may well have brought Hawthorne to *Zaroni* in time. His last finished novel, *The Marble Faun* (1860), shows many overt similarities with *Zaroni*. There are parallels in setting, characterisation and plot structure, most obviously in its portrayal of the artist Kenyon’s initiation into the magical world of the faun-like Donatello who dwells in an old tower in rural Italy. Kenyon’s art is likened to an industrial mode of production in which the artist represents a specific “class of men” with “merely mechanical skill” with “a plaster cast of his design, and a sufficient block of marble” out of which they must free the

²⁶ Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: A Biography*, vol. 2, 1851-1891 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002) 55.

statue.²⁷ In this sense Kenyon is exactly like Aylmer in “The Birthmark.” He assumes intellectual superiority and leaves the actual labour to what the narrator poignantly calls “some nameless machine in human shape” (*MF* 89), an artistic version of Aminidab. Like Bulwer’s Glyndon, Kenyon, while professing idealist pretensions in his art, is ultimately too much attracted to the pleasures of society and too much dependent on social customs to turn his art into a medium for philosophical idealism. His sculpture is an art of aesthetic rather than philosophical ideals.

Donatello is linked to the cultural schema of alchemy by the legend he recounts to Kenyon about the owl tower in which he lives. This tale is of special significance within the novel. It is not only the initial outline of the story that generated Hawthorne’s last attempt at fiction writing, but also the story that circulates around the community of artists in *The Marble Faun* and creates the possibility for change. The story goes that, “a year or two” before Kenyon visited Donatello’s mansion, “an English signore, with a venerable white beard” of whom it was said that he was “a magician, too” came hither from as far as Florence, just to see the tower” (*MF* 184). Kenyon verifies Donatello’s description of the man: “I have seen him at Florence...he is a necromancer, as you say, and dwells in an old mansion of the Knights Templars, close by the Ponte Vecchio, with a great many ghostly books, pictures, and antiques, to make the house gloomy, and one bright-eyed little girl, to keep it cheerful” (*MF* 184).²⁸ Florence, as a centre of the Italian Renaissance, according to Peter Marshall, “helped to develop the Hermetic tradition and alchemy” (Marshall, *Stone* 337). Marshall found significant evidence of alchemical symbolism at The Palazzo Vecchio, at which he found murals depicting among others an alchemist’s laboratory. The visage of this old man and his links with the Knights Templars mark him out as another Hawthornian alchemist who apparently could tell stories about Donatello’s tower from the ancient past, and had come hither to gather up “all the traditions of the Monte Beni family” (*MF* 185). Through this legend Donatello becomes linked to alchemical powers – the androgynous child of the philosopher’s perhaps. The old man himself told Donatello the story of the old monk who had been confined in the tower, and who was burned at the stake by the Inquisition. This is the same punishment undergone by the one-time Dominican friar and alchemical scholar Giordano Bruno who was burned at the stake in 1600. While this is the only allusion to alchemy in the novel, it is an unmistakable reference and immediately brings to mind Bulwer’s popular novel *Zanoni*. In Bulwer’s Naples, similar stories go round about the supposed immortal magician living in a large palace, who various people of various ages have seen at various places at various times, turning his life into legend.

Donatello himself from the outset is said to exist “outside of the rules,” to be someone who “has nothing to do with time...Donatello has certainly the gift of youth...he must be at least twenty-five centuries old, and he still looks as young as ever,” and Miriam exclaims: “Not to know his own age! It is equivalent to being immortal on earth” (*MF* 19-20). Donatello then, much like *Zanoni*, is an immortal wanderer and significantly, a worshipper of the laws of nature. The wine that Donatello produces, like the potions

²⁷ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961) 89.

²⁸ The bright-eyed little girl would become Pansie in the unfinished manuscript of *The Dolliver Romance*.

Zanoni concocts from the herbs he gathers, seems to hold alchemical powers of regeneration. Donatello's Sunshine wine, "the pale liquid gold," brings about in Kenyon "a gentle exhilaration, which did not so speedily pass away" (*MF* 164, 165). Like Zanoni's herbal medicine, this wine can only be made from very specific natural ingredients, cannot be sold and clearly functions as an elixir, of both physical as well as communal well being, similar to that of Dr. Dolliver in Hawthorne's last work. Kenyon, like Glyndon, is introduced into the secret world of the alchemist. Kenyon observes the "festive joyous character" of the frescoes that adorned the walls of the castle: Arcadian scenes in which "nymphs, fauns, and satyrs disported themselves among mortal youths and maidens" (*MF* 165). These scenes are very similar to scenes of a festive rural community pictured by Bulwer as living in the hills directly surrounding Mejnour's tower of magic.

The results of Glyndon's and Kenyon's initiation into the mystical world of alchemy, however, are very different. While both Glyndon and Kenyon, in the end, are revealed to be the narrators of their tales, Glyndon, through the lens of the editor in search for mystical wisdom, is shown to have learnt from his initial mistakes and has transformed his identity from selfish, worldly artist into benevolent mystic seeking to improve the life of the needy through invisible charity. Kenyon, however, by the end of his story, reveals himself a convert of conventionalism, as he and his bride Hilda return to America professing an inability to decipher the mysteries of Donatello. In contrast to *Zanoni*, then, the overall tone of the novel is one of pessimism about the future rather than hope.

Bulwer himself perceived similarities between *The Marble Faun* and *Zanoni*. He recognised in the book a fiction in which "the mere story of outward incident never be properly understood unless the reader's mind goes along with the exquisite mysticism which is symbolised by the characters." According to Bulwer, *The Marble Faun* was "exceedingly grand in the conception" but "often very faulty in the execution" (*CA* 318). Bulwer may well have admired *The Scarlet Letter* more as a metaphysical novel that united conception and execution, especially because Hawthorne used the cultural schema of alchemy and emblematic characterisation to construct a story consisting largely of individual tableaux, in which the central concern is the positive fusion of idealism and practical reform against an oppressive masculinist society structured along ideological binaries. *The Scarlet Letter* also comes closest to *Zanoni* in its reaction to a culture that defines itself through an ideology of gender polarization and that posits in the future of a child the hope for better things to come. Consequently, Hawthorne, as author of *The Scarlet Letter*, comes closest to embodying his own and Bulwer's ideas about the author as an androgynous intellectual prophet of visionary radical reformer of the individual mind.

In late 1840, George Ripley wrote to Ralph Waldo Emerson about his idea to start "The Brook Farm Institute of Agriculture and Education":

Our objects, as you know, are to ensure a more natural union between intellectual and manual labor than now exists; to combine the thinker and the worker, as far as possible, in the same individual; to guarantee the highest mental freedom, by providing all with labor, adapted to their tastes and talents, and securing to them the fruits of their industry; to do away

with the necessity of menial services, by opening the benefits of education and the profits of labor to all; and thus to prepare a society of liberal, intelligent, and cultivated persons, whose relations with each other would permit a more simple and wholesome life, than can now be led amidst the pressures of our competitive institutions.²⁹

In the January 1842 issue of transcendentalist organ *The Dial*, Elizabeth Peabody explains that “a few individuals, who, unknown to each other, under different disciplines of life, reacting from different social evils, but aiming at the same object, – of being wholly true to their natures as men and women – have been made acquainted with one another, and have determined to become the Faculty of the Embryo University.”³⁰ Ripley’s plans had not remained visionary ideas, but had actually come to material fruition. While Emerson, acting on his own philosophical principles, politely declined to join the scheme, Mellow explains that Hawthorne resigned as Boston Custom House officer, “clearly determined to commit himself to the Brook Farm experiment,” which he called “Ripley’s Utopia” (Mellow 180). Ripley’s utopia, Kolmerten explains, “had many of the same egalitarian principles as the Owenite communities” (Kolmerten 172). Owen had come to the US in 1824 and by the 1840s the American landscape had been speckled with Owenite communities that had experienced varying degrees of success and failure. Hawthorne was at this point still a single man, but his future wife was to be the sister of Elizabeth Peabody, who had written about the Brook Farm idealists in *The Dial*. Elizabeth Peabody had been assistant to the visionary reformer Amos Bronson Alcott at his *Temple School*, opened her own book store and attended the meetings of the transcendental club (see Mellow part two). It is likely that Elizabeth Peabody, who had favourably reviewed Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales*, and who “had never doubted Hawthorne’s genius,” also had the young author in mind as part of the faculty of Brook Farm (Mellow 115).

According to Mellow, “Hawthorne...thought of [Brook Farm] as an escape” (Mellow 181). While this can be interpreted as a negative reason for joining the utopian community, Ripley’s description of the purpose of the Brook Farm Institute shows that by viewing it as an escape, Hawthorne is close to Ripley’s own ideas. Carl J. Guarneri explains that Ripley rejected Emerson’s individualist creed in the belief that “true freedom was impossible in a depersonalised and unequal society.”³¹ Hawthorne’s description of Emerson as “the mystic, stretching his hand out of cloud-land, in vain search for something real,” shows that the author shared more than just a wish to escape society with Ripley (quoted in Mellow, 208). The description of Brook Farm above shows that Ripley was trying to set up a self-sufficient community, which, by living according to the principles of shared labour, shared profits, and shared knowledge, would become a self-contained community of equals, socially as well as intellectually, who would stand as model

²⁹ Quoted by Ann C. Rose in her book *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement 1830-1850* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981) 105.

³⁰ Quoted by John Humphrey Noyes in *History of American Socialisms* (1870; New York: Dover, 1966) 114.

³¹ Carl J. Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), 46.

for how to reform society at large.³² It was probably this Thoreauesque drive to simplify the tasks of everyday life in order to leave more room for intellectual development that attracted Hawthorne, who found that the worldly calling of his Boston Custom House job stifled his imagination. Hawthorne was initially upbeat about Brook Farm as a potential home for his prospected family. His letters to Sophia are full of enthusiasm for both the surroundings and the work he is undertaking. But he came to believe that “this present life of mine gives me an antipathy to pen and ink, even more than my Custom-House experience did” (quoted in Mellow 184). Hard physical labour left Hawthorne simply too exhausted to write. Eventually, Hawthorne left the community weary of the continuing uncertainties surrounding its future. He wrote to Sophia “I can see few or no signs that Providence purposes to give us a home here,” but added that he would remain “an associate of the community,” so as to “take advantage of any more favourable aspects of affairs” (quoted in Mellow, 186). The fact that he comments shortly after his return to Salem that “my life there was an unnatural and unsuitable, and therefore an unreal one,” shows how much Hawthorne identified himself as an author, rather than a farmer, as an intellectual idealist rather than a practical radical. While he sympathised with Ripley’s ideals, he was disillusioned with the way in which the practical reformers went about to materialise them. Hawthorne believed, however, that “stories grow like vegetables, and are not manufactured like a pine table.” This idea probably instigated his second attempt, in September 1841, to become part of the Brook Farm faculty. This time he became a boarder rather than a labourer (see Mellow 187). But even then, he wrote Sophia, he could “not find the sense of seclusion, which has always been essential to my power of producing anything” (quoted in Mellow, 189). Hawthorne’s choice of words here show that he thought of his writing as labour, and that he believed orthodox spheres of productivity – farm, factory, or commercial hub – were not suited to him and his work.

Hawthorne, like Bulwer, was genuinely interested in and sympathised with projects that sought to find alternatives ways of living to a mainstream culture increasingly in the grip of market-place competition. His admiration for the thought and figure of Thoreau, discussed in chapter five, and his attempts to support Ripley’s Utopia despite its struggles for existence and, as Kolmerten has shown, the ultimate inability, despite its ideal of freedom, to realise a society of total gender equality, are proof of this (see Kolmerten 172-175). Like Bulwer, however, who had admired Robert Owen’s utopian vision without joining any of his associationist communities, Hawthorne came to the conclusion that, as an imaginative author, his line of work did not fit in with the practical schemes of Ripley, or the utopianism of Bronson Alcott, whose house in Concord Hawthorne eventually bought in 1852.³³ John Humphrey Noyes explained in 1870 that for all their disparity, the American Owenite and Fourierist experiments in socialism, all aimed at one single goal: “*the*

³² In many ways John Todd’s New Alchemy Institute continued this American tradition of self-sufficient agriculturally based educational, intellectual and politically egalitarian utopian ventures.

³³ In 1843 Alcott founded Fruitlands. Fruitlands would become an even more radically utopian community whose members, Anne C. Rose describes, were “communists in property...anarchists in government...free lovers in marriage...vegetarians in diet, who “aimed at perfect freedom from institutionalised authority.” According to Rose, Alcott’s utopians even went “beyond education to biological means to redeem the race,” making them “early eugenicists” – in theory that is (Rose 121).

enlargement of home – the extension of family union beyond the little man-and-wife circle to large corporations” (Noyes 23). According to Noyes, “this was the charming idea that caught the attention and stirred the enthusiasm of the American people,” including initially Hawthorne. According to Noyes, while the societies would all eventually turn out failures, the spirit of their idealism lived on in those who still believed “in the possibility of a scientific and heavenly reconstruction of society” (Noyes 24). Part of what Hawthorne may have found disappointing in Ripley’s utopia was the fact that while “from the beginning, the Brook Farmers appreciated communal living and labor as ethical alternatives to the competitive system,” as Rose explains, from its inception “Brook Farm was organized as a joint stock company” (Rose 135). Hawthorne had invested a thousand dollars of his savings into the project, which may well have made it seem less of a haven from the workaday business world from which he was so eager to escape. Eventually, Hawthorne had to go through the courts to retrieve some of this money to straighten out debts acquired during his time at the Old Manse (see Mellow 263). Part of what may have cajoled Hawthorne into remaining an associate of the community after his departure was his own idealism about transforming society for the better. In *The Scarlet Letter*, written almost ten years after his utopian adventure, Hawthorne would express his continuing belief in what Noyes described as the possibility of a “scientific and heavenly reconstruction of society.” But several more changes in geography, employment and state of mind went into the cultivation and harvest of this story produced by Hawthorne’s only sporadically fertile imagination.

It was in the secluded atmosphere of the Old Manse, with its vegetable garden planted by Thoreau and its gentle flow of intellectual visitors (Thoreau, Emerson, Fuller, Channing and later Melville), that Hawthorne found the right environment to re-fertilize his imagination, resulting eventually in the crop of tales titled *Mosses from an Old Manse*. In some ways, the Concord intellectuals of the 1840s formed the kind of idealistic commune Bulwer was seeking to create at Knebworth: a group of professional intellectuals, who, apparently unencumbered by the pressures of the competitive outside world, formed a utopia of authors who projected outward, in the form of their published writings, idealist schemes to reform the individual spirit and society at large. That Hawthorne was also seeking to engage with the wider American community as an author, rather than to meditate alone about its imperfect status, can be judged from the notebook entries about the nature of writing (discussed in chapter five). On top of his belief in the author as harbinger of change, in 1844, Hawthorne noted down an idea that would become a key theme in most of his major stories (short and long). He writes that “the Unpardonable Sin might consist in a want of love and reverence for the Human Soul; in consequence of which, the investigator pried into its dark depths, not with a hope or purpose of making it better, but from a cold philosophical curiosity.”³⁴ This entry on the improper use of the intellectual mind, written two years after the publication of Bulwer’s *Zanoni*, echoes exactly Bulwer’s ideas about the socially aloof intellectual as expressed through the figure of Mejnour: that the cold intellectual investigator of how the world works, whose interest lies

³⁴ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The America Notebooks*, ed. Claude M. Simpson (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1972) 251.

not in trying to mend whatever he finds broken, is a useless philosopher. Reynolds writes that Alcott, who was a close acquaintance of Hawthorne, “interpreted Hawthorne as a cleansing reformer who,” much like Bulwer in his crime novels and *Zanoni*, “studies evil only to eradicate it” (Reynolds, *Beneath* 117). In this respect, Hawthorne shows similarities in authorial temperament with his contemporary George Lippard, “an espouser of radical causes,” who, Reynolds explains, “waged holy war against all kinds of social oppressors,” and sought the spiritual and material regeneration of society through the means of gothic fictions structured along both the examples of Bulwer’s urban crime novels as well as the alchemical magico-political tales involving solitary alchemists and mystical brotherhoods intent on creating utopia on earth.

After a period of fruitful literary production at the Old Manse, Hawthorne returned once again to a “proper” job, this time as surveyor of the Salem Custom House. At the same time, however, Hawthorne was encouraging his friend Thoreau to present his experiences and ideas to a wider public by organising some lectures at Salem and putting him up at his house in the meantime (see Mellow 289). He writes to Thoreau, in his capacity as “Corresponding Secretary,” a dry note repeating an earlier invitation by the Salem Lyceum to come and lecture there.³⁵ Only a month later, however, Hawthorne addresses a more personal note to his friend in which he explains that “this secretaryship is an intolerable bore,” repeating his invitation and adding “by all means come” (*LS* 247). While Hawthorne had been disillusioned with the reality of Ripley’s Utopia because of its failure to live up to the ideals on which it was founded, he was equally ill at ease with the public nature of his new job and the intellectual organisations to which he found himself attached as an author.

T. Walter Herbert, Jr., Scott S. Derrick, David Leverenz and Monika Elbert have all stressed how much Hawthorne felt ill at ease with public life in antebellum New England, partly because of his unease with the masculine stereotype prescribed by an “ideology of manhood as competitive individualism” that, as Leverenz explains, was emerging into dominance in Hawthorne’s time.³⁶ Elbert’s observations about Hawthorne’s character indeed go some way in explaining the author’s difficulties in appreciating the increasingly competitive masculine world of commerce. She points out that “there was something eternally feminine about Hawthorne: he enjoyed mothering, at a time where that was a woman’s job...and he records his month alone with his son Julian in idyllic terms; in addition his wife Sophia often complimented Hawthorne for his way with children.”³⁷ Hawthorne had described his secluded domestic life at the Old Manse as natural Paradise. Unsurprisingly, then, the bustle of the Salem Custom House became a living Hell.

According to Scott Derrick, Hawthorne’s “Custom-House” introduction to *The Scarlet Letter* “plainly indicates his unhappiness with the commercial world of the Custom House and the styles of masculinity it promoted.”³⁸ In “The Custom-House” Leverenz

³⁵ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Letters, 1843-1853*, eds. Thomas Woodson, L. Neal Smith and Norman Holmes Pearson (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1985) 243.

³⁶ David Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989) 3.

³⁷ Monika Elbert, *Encoding the Letter A* (Frankfurt am Main: Haag & Herchen, 1990) 18.

³⁸ Scott S. Derrick, “‘A curious subject of observation and inquiry’: Homoeroticism, the Body, and Authorship in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 18:3 (Spring 1995): 319.

explains, “Hawthorne most obviously mocks conventional manly values through his portrait of the Custom-House officers’ bent for system and measurement” (Leverenz 36). Elbert similarly draws attention to Hawthorne’s belief that the “traditions of organised religion and empirical science...are inadequate in sustaining the individual” and that he instead was attracted to, even as he struggled with, what she describes as a more feminine, holistic, open-ended, circular mode of thinking (Elbert 11, 7). In chapter five, Hawthorne’s theory about mankind’s inability to fathom nature’s workings was outlined. Leverenz explains how in his portrait of the old general, “more like ‘a young girl’ in his appreciation of flowers than like an old soldier prizing his laurels,” Hawthorne “intimates the ultimate power of female nature to help kind feelings break through the most patriarchal façade” (Leverenz 36). His Thoreauesque devotion to nature did not wane, then, once Hawthorne re-entered an urban environment and the masculine sphere of the Salem Custom House.

Much like Bulwer’s portrait of the Englishman Mervale in *Zanoni*, Leverenz explains that Hawthorne, once retreated from the public world of commerce, describes the man of business as “custom itself”; he is “no more than his work, and his social role expresses society as mechanical order, with no awareness of feelings” (Leverenz 36). Leverenz points out that despite his need to reject conventional antebellum masculinity, Hawthorne, like Bulwer, was not averse to locking horns with those very manly men he seemed to despise. Playing the sensitive victim of cold and calculating politicians, Hawthorne simultaneously hits back at them in “The Custom House,” as Leverenz points out, with “ruthless malice, projected for the most part onto his rivals and veiled by a genial yet guarded sympathy for suffering” (Leverenz 38). Both Bulwer and Hawthorne, by taking to the pen in order defend themselves and to stand up for their ideals, are separating individual character traits from prescribed gender identities. The author, in their eyes, is not effeminized because of his interest in the imaginative, aesthetic and irrational realms of thought. In fact, from their perspective, a sensitivity to the aesthetic, imaginative and idealistic, does not belong to a specific gender type, but is available to all and can be utilized to engage in public issues.

In “The Custom-House,” Hawthorne confesses that he thinks that his Puritan forefathers would do nothing but frown upon his efforts to become a writer of fiction, a feminine, irrational, unproductive activity. Hawthorne recounts how there was no place for his artistic sensibility in the Custom House. Like the Puritan theocracy, the American government was peopled with masculine figures of authority, and Hawthorne is perplexed to find “such a patriarchal body of veterans under his orders.”³⁹ He defines his own position towards them as “paternal and protective,” again stressing that his outlook is one that would be considered feminine by his masculine peers, but one which he adopts in favour of the prescribed masculine attitude (*SL* 15). Hawthorne does not so much effeminise himself, as attribute to his own identity characteristics that those who prescribe to the dominant gender ideology would interpret as feminine. That Hawthorne is concerned with patriarchal structures of masculine authority becomes evident from the description he gives of the man in charge: there was “the father of the Custom House – the

³⁹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, eds. Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty and E. Hudson Long (New York: Norton, 1962) 13.

patriarch, not only of this little squad of officials, but, I am bold to say, of the respectable body of tide-waiters all over the United States...a certain permanent inspector” (SL 16). In line with Elbert’s description of Hawthorne’s interests, Hawthorne domesticates the Custom House scene by performing the role of the mother inside the house, and projecting onto the inspector the patriarchal role of head of the household, permanent fixture of authority. Hawthorne shows his discomfort with the supposedly authoritative role that he is expected to play in public by referring to this ultimate patriarch as a beast with “no soul, no heart, no mind; nothing” (SL 17). Herbert is right to view Hawthorne as a man who “felt his own character to be anomalous in relation to the prevailing standard of masterful public manhood.”⁴⁰ Herbert argues that Hawthorne, in a manner not unlike that of contemporary constructivist gender theorists, “persistently queried the natural foundation of manhood and womanhood... because he recognized that his own character was in some respects deeply at odds with these definitions of normality” (Herbert 287). Hawthorne is afraid of becoming a stern patriarch like the general. As a husband, father and breadwinner, he is very much in line with social expectations about masculinity. He describes himself, however, as “an idler,” frowned upon by “stern and black-browed Puritans,” of whom he writes: “no aim, that I have ever cherished, would they recognize as laudable” (SL 11). As a writer of romance fiction, Hawthorne positions himself outside of the public sphere, like his alchemists, Hawthorne the author does not exist in the actual world, and from the margins looking towards the centre he is able to undermine antebellum gender roles.

It is in the “Custom-House” that the author portrays himself as “a man who felt it to be the best definition of happiness to live throughout the whole range of his faculties and sensibilities,” who for “too long [had] lived in an unnatural state” (SL 24, 35). It is the voice of his fiction, as he moves towards *The Scarlet Letter*, that shows how through his Custom House experience Hawthorne had indeed set himself out a project that engaged with Heilbrun’s definition of androgyny: “the merging of masculine and feminine with equal passion” (Heilbrun 25). Heilbrun was able to write, “America has not produced a novel whose androgynous implications match those of *The Scarlet Letter* (Heilbrun 63). Below it will be explained that Hawthorne created the most androgynous of American novels, not because he was incorporating into his fiction classical theories on the ontology of mankind, or borrowing from romantics such as Keats the misogynist practice of dissolving the female into a male poetic super-ego. Hawthorne’s androgynous idealism, like that expressed in Bulwer’s *Zanoni*, is a product of his dissatisfaction with the masculine and feminine stereotypes that the dominant culture prescribed and his vision that reform can only be achieved by the utopian union of the bifurcated concepts of actual and ideal, material and spiritual, productive and creative, kept apart by the dominance of an ideology of gender polarization.

Having been ousted from public office, Hawthorne did not manage once again to find a rural idyll like Brook Farm or the Old Manse to which he could retreat. Hawthorne writes to John Jay, *Blackwood’s Magazine’s* legal representative across the Atlantic, that “at present I am in a very unsettled condition, and am looking about me for a country or sea-

⁴⁰ T. Walter Herbert Jr. “Nathaniel Hawthorne, Una Hawthorne, and the *Scarlet Letter*: Interactive Selfhoods and the Cultural Construction of Gender,” *PMLA* 103:3 (1988): 285.

shore residence, for the sake of economy and quiet. When once established, I shall betake myself to my pen” (HL 296). Hawthorne writes his friend Horatio Bridge that “a lack of physical vigor and energy...re-acts upon the mind.” Consequently, he explains: “I long to get into the country...I should not long stand such a life of bodily inactivity and mental exertion as I have led for the last five months. An hour or two of daily labor in a garden, and a daily ramble in country air or on the seashore, would keep all right” (HL 312). History repeats itself in Hawthorne’s search for the perfect environment, in which individual identity and material surroundings are intertwined: a worldly job as custom house officer kindles the desire to escape into a rural idyll, defined by its natural surroundings rather than manmade institutions. Here he can pursue what he believes to be his calling, because only here, mind and body, the material and the spiritual, are properly balanced. In a 1851 letter to Bridge, Hawthorne is still expressing his ideas about finding a balanced environment when he explains that “it will do well to play Robinson Crusoe for a summer or so; but when a man is making his settled dispositions for life, he had better be on the mainland, and as near a rail-road station, as possible” (HL 495). But a year earlier, detesting the city, Hawthorne writes to the same friend: “anywhere else I shall at once be entirely another man” (HL 313). This anywhere where he can transform his identity becomes his study, to which he escapes, as if to Brook Farm, so as to try to reap the fruit that must grow from the seeds he has sown in his mind.

Hawthorne, like Bulwer, did not want to literally enter into the marketplace to become a buyer and seller of material commodities, but wished to enter it on his own terms as an author, competing in the marketplace of ideas, and offering his creations produced in the workshop of his intellectual mind to a public audience, whose minds he sought to improve. Hawthorne shows a concern about the difficulty to reach a wide audience and to stay true to his intellectual ideals. In a letter to his publisher, J.T. Fields, Hawthorne expresses his worries that “you will not like the book nor think well of its prospects with the public” (HL 305). To the publisher’s suggestion to expand the story of Hester to novel length, Hawthorne replies that the story is “diversified no otherwise than by turning different sides of the same dark idea to the reader’s eye” and states that it “will weary very many people, and disgust some,” wondering finally whether it is “safe, then, to stake the fate of the book entirely on this one chance?” (HL 307) After favourable reactions from both his wife and his publisher, Hawthorne’s joy at being able “to calculate on what bowlers call a ‘ten strike’” jumps off the page of his letter to his long-time friend Horatio Bridge (HL 311). That Hawthorne was moving into the realms of the expression of the ideal in fiction is suggested by his proposed title for the book in which the story that would become *The Scarlet Letter* was to be included. Hawthorne suggests that it should be called: “Old-Time Legends; together with *sketches, experimental and ideal*” (HL 306). Hawthorne, like Bulwer, wrote his books with the mass reading public in mind, even as he thought that his “writings do not, nor ever will, appeal to the broadest class of sympathies, and therefore will not attain a very wide popularity” (HL 311). Like Bulwer, Hawthorne was wrong about his public. Like *Zanoni*, *The Scarlet Letter* would be a success on both sides of the Atlantic.

Elbert argues that in the figure of Hester Hawthorne created a “new prophetess as a combination of spirit and matter,” even as he remains “ultimately not sure of this

reconciliation of truths (in Hester), or about his own androgyny” (Elbert 19). According to Noyes earlier spiritual revivalist movements and the experiments in social utopia were closely linked, “in their essential nature and objects, and manifestly belonged together in their scheme of Providence, as they do in the history of this nation” (Noyes 26). Their failure, as Bulwer would also argue, lies in the fact that “they despised each other,” and would not put their two great ideas together...the Revivalists failed for want of regeneration of society, and the Socialists failed for want of regeneration of the heart” (Noyes 27). *The Scarlet Letter*, more so than the *Blitbedale Romance*, which Hawthorne explained to a friend had little connection to his Brook Farm experience, is a tale in essence much like Bulwer’s *Zanoni* (HL 569). It has as one of its possible meanings the articulation of the difficulty in reconciling an idealistic spirit to the barriers presented by a material existence, when the actual life of each individual is organised around social institutions that always necessarily lag behind the soaring free mind in their development and seek to repress rather than release such free spirits. *The Scarlet Letter* would become a tale of a New England town on the margins of a wild forest inhabited by Indians, where the social outcast finds solace from the repressive ideology of its elders and the condemning stare of the ignorant mob; a story about the unpardonable sin, that is, the disastrous outcome of antisocial philosophical idealism; a story expressing the hope for a future in which intellectual freedom of thought goes hand in hand with a philosophy of benevolence. A story in which polarized male and female gender identities and their allotted social roles are shown as unnatural, ideologically prescribed stereotypes that serve a patriarchal order that inhibits the realisation of social reform.

Jonathan Arac explains that in Antebellum America, as in Victorian Britain, “it was not yet taken for granted that literature must be intransitive, useless as well as harmless.”⁴¹ He offers *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as a clear example of this thesis, arguing that Harriet Beecher Stowe not only wished to entertain, but also to change the mindset of her readers. “Rather than being a fiction of philosophical ambiguity,” Arac argues, “*The Scarlet Letter* aims to produce an invisible change, an internal deepening like that which transforms the letter even as its form remains the same.” According to Arac, Stow and Hawthorne differ about the potential their work has to alter society at large. Arac argues that Stowe believed “this change would visibly affect your outer actions as well”; he argues that Hawthorne did not (Arac 251). The following analysis of *The Scarlet Letter* will show that the novel is strikingly similar in execution and theme to both *Zanoni* and in plot echoes one plot strand of George Lippard’s *Paul Ardenheim* (1848) both magico-political gothic tales, in which anarchic alchemists play an important role in articulating visions of utopian reform involving the fusion of the actual and the ideal within the individual mind as a necessary means of reforming the social structure.

Reynolds argues that “Hawthorne discovered prototypes for literary themes and devices in his contemporary popular culture” and that he was “not particularly original in his choice of characters and themes” (Reynolds, *Beneath* 115, 123). A look at the similarity between the frame narratives of *Zanoni* and *Paul Ardenheim* shows that, in writing *The Scarlet*

⁴¹ Jonathan Arac, “The Politics of *The Scarlet Letter*,” in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, eds. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 251.

Letter, Hawthorne was working with similar narrative structures and stock gothic figures. The “vision of relativism” Reynolds finds in *The Scarlet Letter*, may not be so much part of Hawthorne’s ambiguous reaction to radical reform, as his adoption of a vision of the necessity to replace cultural binarism with a utopian vision of the fluid state of society (Reynolds, 118). Monika Elbert argues that in opposition to the “scientific humanist, or more aptly, male-centred, frame of mind,” which “could still find refuge in absolute truths, as scientific laws could easily be established on the male’s ‘unbiased’ observation of nature,” *The Scarlet Letter* “is a novel about various truths co-existing in the universe” as well as “a vindication of the feminine voice” (Elbert 7, 16). She argues that in the novel “Hawthorne traces the history and folly of modern man’s thinking, from Dimmesdale’s paternalistic, legalistic and religious views, to Chillingworth’s deterministic and scientific attitudes” (Elbert 190). While Reynolds argues that “Hawthorne explores the subversive and then recoils to the pious,” *The Scarlet Letter* articulates a mode of thinking characterised by terms such as pluriformity, fluidity and simultaneity (Reynolds, *Beneath* 122).

By the time Hawthorne started on his design for *The Scarlet Letter*, Bulwer’s *Zanoni* had become as successful in America as it was in Britain. In 1851, Lippard paid tribute to “the pure thought of *Zanoni*” which he believed must have “delighted hundreds of thousands” of readers (Reynolds, *Beneath* 205).⁴² Lippard, aware of “the distance between democratic ideals and the horrors of industrialised America,” and writing in what Reynolds calls “a style perhaps unparalleled in its irrationalism,” had published three sensational gothic novels that all called for the fusion of philosophical idealism and practical reform (Reynolds 1988, 205). *The Ladye Annebel* (1844), *The Monks of Monk Hall* (1845) and *Paul Ardenheim, the Monk of Wissabikon* (1848) all involve solitary mystics as well as brotherhoods of immortal alchemists who invisibly attempt to reform a corrupt medieval feudal society, the contemporary urban moneyed classes and revolutionary America respectively.

Paul Ardenheim is overtly indebted to Bulwer’s *Zanoni*. The novel is presented to the reader by an editor who claims to have deciphered a manuscript “utterly untranslatable, at least, without a key.”⁴³ Like *Zanoni*, it presents the search for the union of the actual and the ideal through the search of an invisible benevolent band of immortal alchemists who do battle with wizards in search for a saviour, who will sacrifice his life to save the American continent from the peril of being once again enslaved by the British Monarchy. Paul Ardenheim, the son of a benevolent, solitary, mystical alchemist, living in the woods of Pennsylvania along the Wissahickon, is that chosen individual. He needs to fight off the challenge of an evil wizard and other villains before he can become the leader of a Rosicrucian brotherhood which saves America and prophesies that Robespierre’s radicalism will lead to the reign of terror, how Napoleon will rise in the guise of a saviour but rule like a tyrant, and how there will be socialist uprisings throughout Europe in 1848.

Less overtly political or sensational, *The Scarlet Letter* shows structural and thematic similarities to Bulwer’s and Lippard’s popular fiction. On a structural level, it shares the use of an introduction to outline how the history that is about to be recounted has fallen into the hands of the author. Like Bulwer and Lippard, Hawthorne is using his introduction as a

⁴² George Lippard, *The White Banner*, 1 (July, 1851): 149.

⁴³ George Lippard, *Paul Ardenheim, the Monk of Wissabikon* (Philadelphia, Penn: T.B. Peterson, 1848) 3.

doorway through which the reader can step from the real world into the fantastic world of the story itself. In both *Zanoni* and *The Scarlet Letter*, this doorway to the fantastic is situated in a contemporary commercial establishment. In *Zanoni*, the translator and editor of the novel meets in a London bookshop the old sage Glyndon who hands him the manuscript of his adventures. According to Bulwer's introduction, on the margins of the work-a-day world of London's commercial thoroughfares, there exists a world in which mystical manuscripts containing illuminating knowledge are passed down, translated and presented to the public in the form of sensational gothic fictions. In Hawthorne's semi-autobiographical introduction, on the "second story" of a New England Custom House, decorated with "aged cobwebs that festoon its dusky beams," Hawthorne finds "a small package, carefully done up in a piece of ancient yellow parchment," an envelope that has "the air of an official record of some period long past" which "quickened an instinctive curiosity", and made him "undo the faded red tape, that tied up the package, with a sense that a treasure would here be brought to light" (*SL* 25-6). By introducing his fictional subject matter in an everyday setting, Hawthorne, like Bulwer, shows awareness of the building blocks of popular gothic fiction, the lingering presence of forgotten histories, superstitions and other forms of knowledge in the dark corners of an enlightened rational world. With a "mysterious package" about to be opened, the nineteenth-century reader of fiction would likely anticipate a plunge into a fantastic gothic world – especially if this reader had read Hawthorne's earlier tales. Like Glyndon's ciphered manuscript, the "affair of fine red cloth" that Hawthorne recovers "reduced...to little other than a rag" presents Hawthorne with "a riddle, which...I saw little hope of solving" (*SL* 27-8). As with Glyndon's manuscript, which the translator/ editor calls "uncanny," Hawthorne professes that "there was some deep meaning in it, most worthy of interpretation, and which, as it were, streamed forth from the mystic symbol, subtly communicating itself to my sensibilities, but evading the analysis of my mind" (*Z* xix). The cloth, like Glyndon's manuscript, is shown to have near supernatural abilities as it gives Hawthorne "a sensation not altogether physical, yet almost so, as of burning heat," when he places it on his breast. The cloth is accompanied by "a small roll of dingy paper" presenting "a reasonably complete explanation of the whole affair." Like Bulwer's manuscript, these papers present the story of an outcast individual, in this case Hester Prynne, whom some remember as "a very old, but not decrepit woman, of a stately and solemn aspect" whose habit it had been

from an almost immemorial date, to go about the country as a kind of voluntary nurse, and doing whatever miscellaneous good she might; taking upon herself, likewise, to give advice in all matters, especially those of the heart; by which means, as a person of such propensities inevitably must, she gained from many people the reverence due to an angel, but, I should imagine, was looked upon by others as an intruder and a nuisance (*SL* 28).

What Hawthorne has found, like the editor of *Zanoni*, is the story of an extraordinary personage who apparently devoted her life to helping those in need. In fact, as the manuscript of *Zanoni*, which its translator/ editor has necessarily interspersed with

“interpolations of my own,” the papers Hawthorne finds also present a “record of other doings and sufferings of this singular woman,” which he explains are all told in “the story entitled *The Scarlet Letter*,” the outline of which, if not the details, he claims is “authorised and authenticated by the document of Mr Surveyor Pue” (Z xx; SL 28). Just as the editor/translator of *Zanoni* feels it his duty to take on the job of deciphering the manuscript, Hawthorne, impressed by his find, imagines the ghost Mr. Pue visiting him and how “with his own ghostly hand, the obscurely, but majestic, figure had imparted to me the scarlet symbol, and the little roll of explanatory manuscript” and had asked him “to bring his mouldy and moth-eaten lucubrations before the public” (SL 29). Like *Zanoni* and *Paul Ardenheim*, then, *The Scarlet Letter* is introduced to the reader as a true but mysterious story, in need of decipherment. As such, this novel also challenges the reader to solve the riddle so as to be illuminated by the special knowledge the story possesses.

Another overt parallel between the three novels is the central presence of an alchemist with supernatural powers and anarchic tendencies in both his thought and behaviour. If Hawthorne had intended his story as a moral fable about the disastrous consequences of adultery under repressive Puritan ideology, he would not have needed to mould the cuckolded husband into this archetypal gothic figure: a solitary alchemist who mysteriously appears on the margins of a community and uses his preternatural powers to break down its power structure from within. In Hawthorne’s earlier stories involving alchemy, this gothic cultural schema illustrated the difference between a repressive ideology of scientific rationalism and a belief in the superior and more benevolent power of nature. In the sketches for his final uncompleted novel, the alchemist Dolliver again takes on anti-authoritarian identity.⁴⁴ In both Bulwer’s and Lippard’s gothic novels, the figure of the alchemist is a vessel for idealist and benevolent mysticism, which when unified with social practice has the potential to create a utopian society, but which, by the interposition of a crime of passion that kindles desires for selfish revenge, fails to materialise.

According to Mellow “*The Scarlet Letter* is relentlessly allegorical” and “it is one of the flaws of the novel – amongst its considerable virtues – that the characters remain ‘types’ of the guilty heart, and of fallen human nature, serving out their predetermined roles in the allegory” (Mellow 305). Luther H. Martin has argued that *The Scarlet Letter* is in fact, much like *Zanoni*, an alchemical allegory. He explains that “alchemical thinking assumes the unity of the world and, consequently, a continuity between spirit and matter. As such, it demands the transformation of the outer, material realm as parallel to that of the spirit.”⁴⁵ He argues that Hawthorne was familiar with alchemical fictions and other alchemical texts and that “the overall theme of *The Scarlet Letter* is remarkably similar to” the American alchemical scholar, Ethan Allan “Hitchcock’s alchemical thesis that ‘Man was the subject of

⁴⁴ Hawthorne describes Dolliver as a “man of high purpose” who knows his schemes are “inconsistent with the plan of the world, and, if generally adopted, would throw everything into confusion”. He is an alchemist who “might have imagined a way to clean disease out of the world; some great beneficence, at all events.” He wishes “to confer a material benefit on the world, how to get rid of poverty, or slavery, or war. But while he toils away on his own and in doing so disturbs “the order of nature, the real tendency and progress of mankind accomplishes it without any agency of his; whereas his method would have destroyed the whole economy of the world” (EL 532).

⁴⁵ Luther H. Martin, “Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*: A is for Alchemy?” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 58 (December 1985): 31.

Alchemy; and that the object of the Art was the perfection, or at least the improvement, of Man. The salvation of man – his transformation from evil to good, or his passage from a state of nature to a state of grace – was symbolized under the figure of the transmutation of metals” (quoted in Martin 32). In Martin’s reading of the novel as alchemical allegory Chillingworth “is portrayed as the student of alchemy,” who also represents the base state of corrupted matter (Nigredo), and often is associated in the novel with the colour black (Martin 33). Hester, with her scarlet letter embroidered with golden thread, represents the red stage of the experiment (Rubedo), “symbolising a transformed and purified stage of existence” (Martin 34). Dimmesdale, according to Martin, “is associated with the white of spirituality,” as yet trapped in an earthly form. The colour white, Martin shows, is often used by Hawthorne when speaking about the reverend (Martin 35). In the alchemical allegory, Hester and Dimmesdale’s union represents the stage of the alchemical wedding that brings about the philosophical child – Pearl in this case – the androgynous being in which both parents are equally represented. The end result of Chillingworth’s experiment is that Pearl becomes “the richest heiress of her day, in the New World” (quoted in Martin, 39). In the alchemical allegory, such a phrase should be read symbolically as denoting Pearl’s function as the transformative agent in the experiment towards perfection/ spiritualization (see Martin 37).

Martin’s reading explains to some extent why Hawthorne would choose to turn Hester’s cuckolded husband into an alchemist, since this would foreground the allegorical nature of the figures in his text. However, this reading aligns itself to the type of spiritualist alchemical interpretation of Hawthorne that Clack has also undertaken. A focus on alchemical symbolism as a metaphorical system for purely spiritual ideals does not explain the overt presence in *The Scarlet Letter* of an anti-authoritarian narrative that, as Elbert explains, gives great scope to the female voice. The alchemist, Chillingworth’s presence in an anti-authoritarian narrative that harbours a critique of the dominant gender ideology can be traced to the alchemical gothic novels popular in Hawthorne’s time. In fact, the figure of Roger Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter*, like his later Dolliver, fuses into one gothic alchemist the figures of Zanoni and Mejnour in Bulwer’s novel, or Lippard’s immortal magical investigators and utopian idealists.

Like Zanoni – and not unlike Brown’s Carwin – Chillingworth enters the Puritan community of Boston as a stranger. What we learn from him at the end of the novel is that up to the point when he entered Boston “all [his] life had been made up of earnest, studious, thoughtful quiet years, bestowed faithfully for the increase of [his] own knowledge, and faithfully too,” like Zanoni or Ranulph, “though this latter object was but casual to the other, - faithfully for the advancement of human welfare” (*SL* 125). As with Carwin and Zanoni, the community cannot identify with him because his identity does not correspond to any of their templates. Chillingworth stands “by the Indian’s side...on the outskirts of the crowd...a white man, clad in a strange disarray of civilized and savage costume” (*SL* 47). Clearly at odds about what to do with a mysterious figure such as Chillingworth, the authorities “lodged [him] in the prison...until the magistrates should have conferred with the Indian sagamores respecting his ransom” (*SL* 54). The official story about Chillingworth is that he has been a captive of the Indians, who now seek to

exchange him for a ransom. If this is really true, why lodge a freed man in a prison? As in *Zanoni*, the authorities clearly distrust a man “dropping down, as it were, out of the sky, or starting from the nether earth,” and who consequently, “had an aspect of mystery, which was easily heightened to the miraculous” as he “gathered herbs, and the blossoms of wild flowers, and dug up roots and plucked off twigs from the forest-trees, like one acquainted with hidden virtues in what was valueless to common eyes” (SL 88). Like Zanoni, Chillingworth holds an interest in and worships the healing powers of nature. The alchemist reveals to Hester, and thus also to the reader, that rather than a captive of the Indians, he has been their student. His “old studies in alchemy...and [his] sojourn, for above a year past, among a people well versed in the kindly properties of simples, have made a better physician of [him] than many that claim the medical degree.” Chillingworth’s own story, then, does not correspond with the “official” story on which the magistrates are acting in housing him in the prison and later placing him in the position of community physician. Chillingworth has been an apprentice amongst the Indians of their alternative folk medicine to complement his European alchemical skills and has “learned many new secrets in the wilderness...in requital of some lessons of [his] own, that were as old as Paracelsus” (SL 55). Chillingworth has been exchanging knowledge with the Indians, deemed illegitimate to the Puritan authorities. The narrator explains that Chillingworth did not “conceal from his patients, that these simple medicines, Nature’s boon to the untutored savage, had quite as large a share of his own confidence as the European pharmacopoeia, which so many learned doctors had spent centuries in elaborating” (SL 87). His link with the alchemists of gothic fiction is strengthened by his apparent connection to “a German university,” from whence the community believes he has been divinely transported to help out the Puritan community (SL 89). The community’s misguided ideas about Chillingworth’s origin, as in *Wieland* and *Zanoni*, work to show the difference between appearance and reality, the actual and the ideal. The community is in need of a doctor, so they invent for Chillingworth an identity as German physician, while the narrator is able to explain that he came from Amsterdam, studied the works of alchemists such as Paracelsus, and came to Boston, with a knowledge that fuses this alchemical wisdom with Indian herbal medicine.

This discrepancy between the town’s official story and the narrator’s description of Chillingworth’s origins sets up a narrative structure that highlights throughout the novel that the wish-fulfilling customs of the civilized Puritan community repress an alternative truth in which the wild vitality of nature is allowed to play a more significant role. As Elbert explains, instead of working to heal its citizens, “Chillingworth’s philosophy, if not his medical perspective, is the real threat to this Puritan community as it goes against all the fundamentals of the Church doctrine” (Elbert 209). Chillingworth initially is Zanoni, an alchemist who acknowledges the necessity of embracing the material world, and who lives as much according to the laws of nature as by the laws of his alchemical mysticism.

But as Hawthorne’s plot reveals, he has equally the potential to become Mejnour, the cold philosopher who commits the unpardonable sin by severing his intellect from his heart and seeking truth without any reverence for the consequences. As Elbert points out, “in *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne traces the history and folly of modern man’s thinking,

from Dimmesdale's paternalistic and religious views, to Chillingworth's deterministic and scientific attitudes; in contrast to these closed systems, we have Hester's openness and circular thinking, which is at the heart of man's redemption" (Elbert 190). While Elbert, in her study of the gender politics of Hawthorne's early work, argues that he engages with a form of androgynous idealism as an alternative to the ideology of gender polarization, upheld by the continuing dominance of patriarchal institutions and social customs in antebellum America, she does not link this latent androgynous idealism to the presence of the cultural schema of alchemy in *The Scarlet Letter*. For her, Chillingworth is the type of misogynist scientist that Aylmer is revealed to be in "The Birth-Mark."

The figure of Chillingworth, however, it has been shown above, is at the outset of the story very close to the anarchic figure of Carwin, or the idealist Zanoni, fulfilling the same function in extracting a misguided reaction from the figures in the novel that represent the ideological status quo and articulating the invisible presence in the community of alternative ways of viewing the world. The fact that Chillingworth eventually lapses into a figure like Bulwer's Mejnour can be explained by turning to Lippard's *Paul Ardenbeim*. One of the subplots of Lippard's novel contains a story that in most of its constituent parts, if not in its meaning, foreshadows Hawthorne's plot for *The Scarlet Letter*. It is told in a manuscript, authored by a character called Eustace Brynne, and later retold by one of its characters, the alchemist Ranulph. He tells the protagonist how he "discovered the principle which Men call Life," how, like Godwin's St Leon, he set about to use his powers to "replace Superstition, Bigotry and War, with the calm and omnipotent Unity of Universal Brotherhood...teach men to love each other by a simple disclosure of the sublime harmony, which pervades all nature." Like Zanoni, or Godwin even at his most idealistic moments, he explains, it was his calling to "gradually lift all mankind into my own walk of being" (PA 501). Ranulph explains that while "it was my purpose to use this deathless existence for the good of mankind...this purpose of boundless Good was wrecked into a Necessity of hopeless Evil" because of a crime he committed, which was brought about as a reaction to an initial crime of passion committed by his brother.

Ranulph explains to Paul, just as Chillingworth would to Hester, that in an earlier period, his beloved "virgin-wife" Eola, "who knew no learning but the instinct of Woman's all-trusting Faith, would call [him] back to life with her presence, wake the heart into motion with her voice, thrill the nerves into serene consciousness with her touch" at the times when his "brow was pale with the horror of the night-long watch among the dead, when [his] eye was mad with the glare of thought, – thought indulged and prolonged at the expense of the physical being, until the heart was pulseless and the nerves palsied" (PA 502-3). Just as Zanoni believed to have found in Viola a woman of equal intellectual potential who could be taught in his mystical ways to become his equal, Ranulph "had resolved to raise Eoloa to [his] own sphere" The two could not have a child until this union was achieved. Unfortunately, his brother Harry, a man in position of great worldly authority, and with uncontrollable passions, "had roused the mere animal part of her nature" and "she became the partner of his appetite, and the mother of his Child" (PA 504). Obsessed by motives of revenge, Ranulph murders his brother. The child who travels

across the ocean is supposedly Paul's father and it is in Paul that Ranulph sees "a Hope born of a Better World" (PA 505).

The history of Ranulph and Eolo foreshadows that of Chillingworth and Hester before the action that opens *The Scarlet Letter*. Like Ranulph, whose too lofty aspirations barred him from any true sympathy and intimacy with his beloved Eolo, Chillingworth tells Hester that the reason for her present suffering was "my folly, and thy weakness" (SL 56). His folly was the same mistake made by Ranulph, as described above:

I, - a man of thought, - the bookworm of great libraries, - a man already in decay, having given my best years to feed the hungry dream of knowledge, - what had I to do with youth and beauty like thine own! Misshapen from my birth-hour, how could I delude myself with the idea that intellectual gifts might veil physical deformity in a young girl's fantasy! Men call me wise. If sages were ever wise in their own behoof, I might have foreseen all this. I might have know that, as I came out of the vast and dismal forest, and entered this settlement of Christian men, the very first object to meet my eyes would be thyself, Hester Prynne, standing up, a statue of ignominy, before the people. Nay from the moment we came down the old church-steps together, a married pair, I might have beheld the bale-fire of that scarlet letter blazing at the end of our path!" (SL 56-7)

Chillingworth's initial words to Hester then are an acknowledgement of his guilt in bringing about her present suffering; words that sting Hester, because his belated acknowledgement of guilt implies that he had had the power to avert it. Hester explains, "I was frank with thee. I felt no love, nor feigned any." This suggests that their marriage had been an arrangement, or that the man called Roger Prynne [aka Chillingworth] had taken advantage of her situation. From Chillingworth's point of view, they "have wronged each other," but he adds that his "was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay." He is clear in expressing that he seeks no vengeance on Hester as such, but that he is out to unmask the figure that has "wronged us both" (SL 57). This statement links Chillingworth's eventual statement of the "dark necessity" of his actions to Ranulph's more melodramatically stated "Necessity of hopeless Evil," because both are lured by their own passions for revenge into committing the unpardonable sin: too absorbed in their intellectual studies, they lost contact with the actual, which led to the crimes of passion that in turn fuelled their desire for revenge (SL 126). No longer able to fuse the actual and the ideal, the intellect and the heart, they set about to pull them further apart, contrary to their initial idealistic motives. Simultaneously, however, hope for a better future remains because, their revenge effected, they both seek to rekindle the utopian idealism they have lost by transmitting the idealistic vision they still possess to the children.

The portrait of Chillingworth, then, is a portrait of a philosophical idealist with good intentions, who by committing the unpardonable sin is caught in the grip of obsessive revenge. Elbert explains that "Chillingworth is as much a man out of control as Dimmesdale," who is equally obsessed by a single objective, the upkeep of his public purity

(Elbert 217). Dimmesdale represents traditional, patriarchal, Christian authority, while Chillingworth, the one time alchemical idealist, increasingly forgets his worship of nature, and slowly comes to embody the very identity the community had given him, the modern physician, prying into other people's well-being, without a concern for the well-being of society. As such, he increasingly aligns himself with the Puritan authorities, rather than the outcast Hester, to whom he is still married. This rejection of Hester as his companion is symbolic of his adoption of the Puritan mindset. He can no longer think in the alchemical terms of the union of the actual and ideal, spirit and matter, male and female, but chooses to solely focus on the spiritual: Arthur Dimmesdale.

Sacvan Bercovitch is right in arguing that Hawthorne's story is built on "a politics of both/ and" instead of the Puritan, and antebellum politics of either/ or.⁴⁶ Dimmesdale, who continually represses his dark side, as Elbert explains, along with the Puritan magistrates, represents the either/ or worldview that Chillingworth joins at the expense of his own idealism. Hester, however, from her outcast position as victim of this either/ or worldview, is able to develop the idealistic perspective Chillingworth has lost. It is in this transferral of idealist thought and reformist vision from the increasingly androcentric Chillingworth to the female figure of Hester that *The Scarlet Letter* most overtly engages with gender politics by articulating an androgynous ideal.

In *The Scarlet Letter* orthodox gender identities are upheld by the Puritan theocracy for which "the forms of authority were felt to possess the sacredness of divine institutions" (*SL* 50). They represent an ideological structure not unlike the one Hawthorne portrayed in "The Custom-House." The elders of late seventeenth-century Salem are stern "iron men," similar to the patriarchs of Hawthorne's Custom House (*SL* 142). These men are the representatives of both religion and law. While the narrator notes that "the age had not so much refinement, that any sense of impropriety restrained the wearers of petticoat and farthingale from stepping forth into the public ways," they are still clearly subject to a purely patriarchal body of authority (*SL* 40).

The narrator throughout juxtaposes antebellum American culture and the Puritan past: "There was, moreover, a boldness and rotundity of speech among these matrons, as most of them seemed to be, that would startle us at the present day, whether in respect to its purport or its volume of tone" (*SL* 40). This highlights the novel's identity as a fiction of purpose. The portrait of Puritan women in public, who have an audible voice, however feeble, would have expressed dissidence towards most nineteenth-century readers' conception of the nature of gender differences, and the gender roles these differences prescribed. Herbert argues how, for most antebellum citizens of America, the differences between men and women in their culture was

a law of nature and nature's God, a matter of universal essences that were at once biological and ethereal – inherent and transcendent gender identities that would assert themselves no matter what deviations individual men or women might indulge in (Herbert 287).

⁴⁶ Sacvan Bercovitch, "The A-Politics of Ambiguity in *The Scarlet Letter*," *NLH* 19:3 (1988): 634.

The narrator of *The Scarlet Letter* points out that the social and economic differences of his own time are factors that have changed gender role expectations. In the pre-industrial Puritan community he describes how women are still present in the public sphere, even though, under patriarchal rule, they had no voice in government. Home and workplace, as in the case of Bellingham and Dimmesdale, are still one. Masculinity, the narrator's words suggest, was constituted not by occupation of a public politico-economic sphere, but through positions of authority. Thus Queen Elizabeth is given the epithet "man-like" (SL 40). As in Zanon, the more an individual seeks authority over others – like Glyndon in his search for supernatural powers, or Mejnour through his immortality – the more he, or she, is cajoled in adopting an identity prescribed as masculine. Chillingworth's authority in the community rises as his identity alters from that of anarchic alchemist to modern physician.

According to the narrator, "feminine gentility," in the Puritan community of the novel, is "characterised by a certain state and dignity, rather than by the delicate, evanescent, and indescribable grace, which is now recognised as its indication" (SL 42). The dignity lies of course in Hester accepting the punishment laid on her by the elders of the community: abiding by their authority. Significantly, Hawthorne chooses to use the words "recognise" and "indicate, which suggest that femininity is a quality that is perceived by society to correspond to a pattern of behaviour that is not fixed but acquired and subject to historical change. Because Hester refuses to retain her acquired dignity with regards to the elders – she refuses to give up her child – the narrator writes: "some attribute had departed from her, the performance of which had been essential to keep her a woman" (SL 118). Crucial here is the use of the word performance used to describe the nature of identity almost a century and a half before the work of Judith Butler would push the term into the academic critical mainstream.⁴⁷ The text presents masculinity and femininity as constituted through verbal acts and role-playing: Hester's dissident stance towards authority destabilises her feminine identity. Such a concept of individual identity fits Hawthorne's own notion, which he shares with Brown, of how mankind lives in a continual state of masquerade.⁴⁸ The narrator comments how:

The rulers, and the wise and learned men of the community, were longer in acknowledging the influence of Hester's good qualities than the people. The prejudices which they shared in common with the latter were fortified in themselves by an iron framework of reasoning, that made it a far tougher labor to expel them (SL 117).

Their masculinity is so tied up in authoritative behaviour in the community that Hester's successfully concerted independence, undermining the elders' authority, cannot be acknowledged. The text stresses the performative nature of gender by erasing Hester's femininity as soon as she is ostracised from the community and stressing Chillingworth's increasing masculinisation as he gains authority in the community.

⁴⁷ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999) 171-190.

⁴⁸ See the discussion of Hawthorne's ideas about the artificial nature of identity construction discussed in chapter five.

While Chillingworth is adopted into the patriarchal fold as physician and is pushed into a prescribed masculine role, Hester becomes androgynous, not by fusing the prescribed male and female gender roles or by intermingling psychological traits that are usually defined as male or female (as Heilbrun argues), but because the adoption of the scarlet letter, and her abjection from the community push her into a social vacuum where there is no code of behaviour that signifies a prescribed gender identity. In her cottage near the seashore, Hester needs neither be submissive to authority or authoritative over others, because apart from the lawless Pearl there is nobody around.

Dimmesdale effeminised by the presence of Chillingworth in his house and the authority the latter holds over him, cannot become an embodiment of an androgynous ideal because he holds a public socio-political office that in the world of the story can only be held by a figure who fully complies with the androcentric ideology that structures the Puritan community. Chillingworth, while initially possessing the potential to embody an androgynous idealism, loses this potential when he “isolates himself through his intellectual studies, more specifically through the new empirical science,” as Elbert explains, increasingly rejecting the idealism latent in his alchemical thought (Elbert 207).

While Chillingworth’s life had turned from intellectual endeavour with benevolent intentions to a passionate hatred with an aim at revenge, in her isolated state of existence on the margin of the Puritan community, Hester’s “life had turned, in a great measure, from passion and feeling, to thought” (*SL* 119). While Dimmesdale’s struggle to repress his passions and the dark side of his personal history represent the hegemonic culture’s drive for stasis, between Chillingworth and Hester a role reversal occurs. It is in the chapters titled “Another view of Hester,” and “Hester and the Physician” that this role reversal is explicitly expressed. The narrator explains how “hatred, by a gradual and quiet process, will even be transformed to love, unless the change be impeded by a continually new irritation of the original feeling of hostility.” Hatred in the form of Chillingworth, and love in the form of Hester, can thus be potentially reconciled, just as the townspeople, once Hester lives outside of the borders of their community, and no longer stands under their moral loop, is perceived in a new light as a figure of charity and benevolence, who like Zanoni, responds “to every demand of poverty” and remains present when pestilence stalked through the town” (*SL* 116). Zanoni was seen as dangerously immoral by the authorities – due to his professed magical abilities – and as a saviour by the abject groups of society on whom he bestowed the benefits of his magic. Similarly, Hester’s presence, announced by the letter on her breast, “elsewhere a token of sin... was the taper of the sick-chamber.” That she becomes a mysterious “sister of mercy,” becomes evident from the fact that “it was only a darkened house that could contain her. When sunshine came again, she was not there” (*SL* 117). Hester becomes a kind of mysterious super heroine, complete with recognisable costume, whose conduct manages to smooth the “sour and rigid wrinkles” of the public figures of authority into an “expression of almost benevolence” (*SL* 118). As Chillingworth slowly turns into the scientific double of Dimmesdale, as Elbert explains, Hester is transforming into the figure Chillingworth once was, a benevolent idealist, with a “the marble coldness of... impression,” caused by “the circumstance that her life had turned, in a great measure, from passion and feeling, to thought.” Just as for

Chillingworth, the British alchemist, the existing laws of science did not hold true, even before his arrival in Boston, so Hester, after her expulsion from Boston, “the world’s law,” the patriarchal law of the Puritan community, “was no law for her mind.” Taking on the mental frame of mind initially harboured by Chillingworth, Hester is imbued with a revolutionary spirit, “a freedom of speculation, then common enough on the other side of the Atlantic,” from whence Chillingworth had come, “but which our forefathers,” the Puritan authorities, “had they known of it, would have held to be a deadlier crime than that stigmatized by the scarlet letter.” It is unlikely that Hawthorne is referring here to feminist thought, as suggested in the footnote to this passage in the Norton critical edition of the text. The timeframe in which the action of the story takes place does not run into the era of Wollstonecraft, for instance. It is, however, the era of alchemical thought, as stressed by Hawthorne’s various references to seventeenth-century European alchemists. Hester, then, is not so much becoming a feminist, but is taking on the identity of visionary mystic. She does not read books imported from Europe, but “thoughts visited her, such as dared to enter no other dwelling in New England.” Just as Viola, in *Zanoni*, lives in a cottage by the seashore, and experiences idealistic visions of her union with the mystic Zanoni, and just as Zanoni uses herbs and the visionary powers of his imagination to conjure up guiding spirits, Hester is described as calling up through her visionary imagination “shadowy guests, that would have been perilous as demons to their entertainer, could they have been seen so much as knocking at her door” (*SL* 119).

Hawthorne draws a parallel with his own sense of authorship as an imaginative and visionary means of reforming society by having the narrator state, “it is remarkable, that persons who speculate the most boldly often conform with the most perfect quietude to the external regulations of society. The thought suffices them, without investing itself in the flesh and blood of action.” The narrator dwells on what “she might” have been had she put her thought into direct action and that she would probably, like the utopian alchemists of old with regards to the Catholic hegemony, “have suffered death from the stern tribunals of the period, for attempting to undermine the foundations of the Puritan establishment” (*SL* 119). Hawthorne, like Bulwer, as well as Godwin, Shelley, Poe and Melville, did not solely live in the world of his intellect and imagination. He chose authorship, the communication of ideas through language dressed in the form of a popular fictional genre, as his medium to turn thought into potential action. Hester does not become an author, but her story is being read as it is being told, and is thus equally communicated, not to her fictional contemporaries, but to the contemporary reader, nonetheless. When she constructs in her mind a Wollstonecraftian feminist manifesto, the reader of *The Scarlet Letter* is reading it, in the words Hawthorne has chosen to describe it. As Emory Elliot explains, “she may be said to blend the roles of the hermit-philosopher with that of the Romantic poet-priestess.”⁴⁹

As such, like Bulwer’s *Zanoni*, Hawthorne uses the trope of alchemy and the visionary idealism it harbours to construct a plot in which such idealism is continually struggling to turn itself into progressive action, and in which the apparent failure of such

⁴⁹ Emory Elliot discusses Hester’s identity as hermit philosopher shortly in his essay “Art, Religion and the Problem of Authority in *Pierre*,” in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, 340.

idealism within the plot is balanced by the un-erasable presence of the idealism from the material product that is his gothic novel. The visionary thought of Hester, as described by the narrator is therefore worth quoting in full as it is the natural outcome of the struggle between the ideal and the actual as embodied in the relationships between the allegorical figures themselves:

The same dark question often rose into her mind, with reference to the whole race of womanhood. Was existence worth accepting, even to the happiest among them? As concerned her own individual existence, she had long ago decided in the negative, and dismissed the point as settled. A tendency to speculation, though it may keep woman quiet, as it does man, yet makes her sad. She discerns, it may be, such a hopeless task before her. As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew. Then, the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position. Finally, all other difficulties being obviated, woman cannot take advantage of these preliminary reforms, until she herself shall have undergone a still mightier change; in which, perhaps, the ethereal essence, wherein she has her truest life, will be found to have evaporated. A woman never overcomes these problems by any exercise of thought. They are not to be solved, or only in one way. If her heart chance to come uppermost, they vanish (*SL* 120).

Hester thinks here of the *race* of womanhood, suggesting at first an essentialist notion of gender. Like other oppressed races, women cannot accept oppression, she seems to suggest, even though, she acknowledges, they are relatively well off for an oppressed race. The ambivalence about the prospect of revolutionary change is highlighted here by the suggestion that some women lived a happy existence under the patriarchal law. The narrator uses the words “ethereal,” and “nature,” to describe womanhood. However, Hester, the fictional character and dissident voice of the novel, is allowed to realise that oppression lies with the existing hegemony that needs to be torn down and rebuilt from scratch; a new ideology needs to replace the Puritan patriarchy. She realises that the essentialist construction of womanhood is nothing more than “hereditary habit” which had become so ingrained into society that it is thought of as essential, natural. While the narrator’s voice is conservative, Hester’s voice is clearly revolutionary. She moves from an essentialist to a performative notion of gender identity. This realisation, whether or not it is acted upon by Hester within the confines of the novel’s plot, opens the door to the possibility of social change.

As in *Zanoni*, where the alchemical idealist needs to literally sacrifice himself in order to ensure the life of his utopian vision, Hester needs to sacrifice her visionary radicalism for “an object that appeared worthy of any exertion and sacrifice for its attainment” (*SL* 120). In order to give a future to her visionary gender utopia, Hester must not escape the present patriarchal culture, but has to be fully part of it. In this light, the

chapter "Hester and the Physician" performs a similar function in Hawthorne's story as Bulwer's book six, "Superstition deserting Faith," where Zanoni rejects Mejnour as his master and with it his too intellectual philosophies that fail to engage with the actual lives of mankind that Zanoni seeks to better. Just as Zanoni addresses Mejnour in order to refute his authority, Hester calls on the transformed Chillingworth: "I would speak a word with you...a word that concerns us much" (*SL* 122). Here it is not Chillingworth who acts, but Hester. In their discussion, which results in Hester's denunciation of her ties to him and therefore also any promises she has made to him, Chillingworth shows exactly how much he has become Mejnour (who held Glyndon's life in his hands and tormented him with the spectres his powers conjured up), by flaunting only with the power he holds over Dimmesdale: "that he now breathes, and creeps about the earth, is owing all to me!" Hawthorne is more sympathetic to Chillingworth than Bulwer is to Mejnour, however, probably because he has incorporated in this particular alchemist-turned-scientist both possible natures: the visionary alchemical idealist and the cold rational scientist, the former of which Chillingworth rejected because of his obsessive drive for revenge and his increasing socialization into the patriarchal order. As he boasts of his power to crush Dimmesdale at will, "the unfortunate physician" experiences "one of those moments...when a man's moral aspect is faithfully revealed to his mind's eye." Like Dorian Gray, who is horrified at his moral counterpart when he confronts his portrait after years, Chillingworth, "not improbably...had never before viewed himself as he did now" (*SL* 124). As the alchemical idealist, turned cold investigator of man's ills, he realises how far he has strayed from his original path. Chillingworth's greatest flaw has been the judgement that his work has only a causal relation to the improvement of society, since such a causal attitude towards the potential social benefits has led to the development of an increasing obsession with selfish ends.

Hester, who in contrast to Chillingworth stands in an increasingly abject relationship to Puritan society, like Zanoni, is able to fully realise her idealism by rejecting the causal nature of the relationship between her visionary ideas and their affect on society. She replaces this idea, like Zanoni, with a relationship of direct cause and effect. Zanoni rejected Mejnour as his master; Hester " marvelled how she could ever have been wrought upon to marry" Chillingworth (*SL* 127). Zanoni sacrifices his immortality on the guillotine, erected on the scaffold of the Reign of Terror. This tricks the authoritarian revolutionaries into becoming the spectators of their own downfall, as they honour Zanoni's request to wait one day with the execution of Viola. Zanoni is able to save not only the child, but ensures that Robespierre can be overthrown. Similarly, Hester, by rejecting Chillingworth's authority and his status as husband, is able to free Dimmesdale from his constricting grasp. She is able to urge him to "exchange this false life of thine for a true one," which she links up with a wilder natural state of being. She calls on him to become, "if thy spirit summon thee to such a mission, the teacher and apostle of the red men" (*SL* 142). By communicating the truth about Chillingworth to Dimmesdale in the dark forest from which the alchemist himself had come forth at the outset of the tale, another reversal takes place. Hester is now the visionary mystic in touch with a wild, lawless nature, while Chillingworth, inhabiting Dimmesdale's house, has become an orthodox figure of

authority. The one-time alchemist with knowledge of Indian herbal medicine has now become “the man who has wronged us both.” Hester’s visionary nature is now able to fuse with the actual as it compels her to call on Dimmesdale to “Preach! Write! Act! Do anything, save to lie down and die!” (SL 142)

As Dimmesdale eventually stands unmasked on the scaffold, “the men of rank and dignity” become mere spectators, including a now bewildered and defeated Chillingworth (SL 179). They fail to understand the import of the drama they are witnessing. By forcing Dimmesdale to confront his sin and to recognize Pearl as his child, Hester has literally silenced patriarchal authority, by allowing a dissident voice to be heard: “what we did had a consecration of its own,” she had told Dimmesdale in the forest (SL 140). Only with the literal support of Hester and Pearl can the minister stand strong enough to acknowledge this. Hester’s radical visionary thought does have direct social consequences. On her return to Boston, “not the sternest magistrate of that iron period would have imposed” on Hester that she readopt the scarlet letter, a symbol she wears “of her own free will,” and which therefore begets an entirely different meaning, as she becomes the visionary prophet that “in Heaven’s own time, a new truth would be revealed, in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness” (SL 186). That such a change is already slowly taking place is suggested by the fact that Chillingworth, who before he dies apparently undergoes yet another change of character, leaves his fortune to Pearl, the elf-child born of sin, in an anti-patriarchal gesture. The narrator ironically points out that by the acquisition of such wealth, the young girl, at one time described as “the Pearl of great price,” and initially perceived by the authorities as “the demon offspring,” the living symbol of the scarlet letter, “might have mingled her blood with the lineage of the devoutest Puritan among them all,” suggesting that through the medium of Pearl, A stands for anarchy (SL 184). Pearl’s lawless character, her simultaneous demonic, yet attractive nature, works to break down the ideological boundaries that the Puritan authorities have raised around their community in order to ensure its stability. The stern Puritan morality, as in *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), is shown to be only as strong as their slender defences – an irrational rejection and repression of all worldly ties – against the lure of material possessions.

The story of Pearl from the authority’s perspective is the story of a mysterious child, symbol of wild nature, untrammelled by the customs of a patriarchal social order who inherits an alchemically conceived fortune and has the power to undermine traditional authority. Pearl’s identity seen through the androcentric lens of the Puritan society, as well as the narrator’s antebellum point of view, shows how much the social order of both Puritan Boston and Antebellum America was an artificial order reliant for its natural appearance on an ideology of gender polarization. Pearl’s entrance into the ranks of European nobility can be read as a rejection of her earlier wild and anarchic nature, but it equally highlights how such social structures are not natural, but artificial constructs. The story of Hester’s ability, through radical thought and sympathetic social action, to defy the symbolical meanings that the Puritan magistrates attribute to the scarlet letter shows how their moral authority is upheld only by the refusal to acknowledge alternative modes of thought and action. Most significantly, the role-reversal that takes place in the novel

between Chillingworth and Hester, as figures embodying radical visionary ideals with utopian potential, foregrounds the androgynous gender politics of the novel, because it shows that such visionary idealism leading to social reform is not merely the intellectual province of the masculine mind (the legacy of Puritan utopianism and its use of alchemical imagery), but is open to all.

The narrator emphasises Hester's gradualist perspective about this gender revolution by stressing her belief that it will take place "in heaven's own time." He even explains that Hester felt she could not be a prophetess because of her sinful existence. This description of Hester's radicalism may look like a pessimistic negation of its potentially radical force, a resignation to an imperfect present (which is a typically alchemical world vision also expressed by *Wieland*, *St Leon* and *Zanoni*). Hester's story of her transformation from adulteress to female radical visionary, however, is simultaneously an expression of a hope, a belief even, in the inevitability of a better future (typical of the Godwinian visionary idealism as expressed in chapter three). In the unavoidable future Hester envisions, women no longer have to ask the question "why they were so wretched, and what was the remedy," which is definitely the case in the Puritan Boston of the novel and as the introduction of the novel implicitly argues, in the antebellum Salem (*SL* 185). The improved future Hester envisions, and which the novel leaves the reader contemplating, is similar the future as envisioned by Judith Lorber who also hopes, by "individual agency, informal social action, and formal political organisations (none of which are separate from each other)," to achieve "a society without gender," not in the sense that masculinity and femininity will be erased as identity markers, but in the sense that gender, like race or religion, as a pluriform concept, will work as a positive marker of both individual and group identity. This is the "brighter period" of which Hester speaks to those who seek her out, and which the narrator mediates to the reader, despite Hawthorne's continued lamentations about the dark character of his narrative.⁵⁰

Melville's Pierre: Dissident Alchemical Androgyny in an Urban Setting

Moby Dick can be described as Melville's first gothic tale. In it Melville exchanges the haunted castle for a "long seasoned and weather stained" ship and turns the patriarchal tyrant into a diabolical sea captain, as Allan Lloyd Smith explains:

Ahab himself seems a frantically exacerbated version of the Gothic villain, magnetically imposing his will on the crew as he pursues his own demented purposes. He is possessed by hatred and the desire for revenge on the whale that took his leg and his manhood, literally possessed in the demonic sense such that he becomes not a man but a thing – "the tormented spirit that glared out of bodily eyes, when what seemed Ahab rushed from his room, was but for the time a vacant thing, a formless, somnambulist being, a ray of living light, to be sure, but without an object to color, and

⁵⁰ Judith Lorber, *Gender Inequality*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing, 2001) 265, 258.

therefore a blankness in itself' ...in other words, and picking up the theme of savagery that threads through the book, a zombie (Smith 81).

Interestingly, in his description of Ahab, Lloyd-Smith draws attention to the gender politics embedded in the story of Ahab. Ahab seems to be possessed by a consuming fear of losing his masculinity, in a world in which having a masculine identity means being socially and politically privileged. Melville's sea-faring novels have often been read as deeply engaged with the issue of masculine identity in antebellum American culture. Leverenz explains that, in *Moby Dick*, "by the end, as Ishmael fades into the a passive invisibility, the drive to be Ahab and the fear of being Pip" – the ship's boy who jumps overboard, is rescued, but goes insane – "or the craving for dominance and the fear of being a coward, turn out to be the same thing." According to Leverenz both Ahab and Pip are "boy-men, bonded by their cosmic humiliations" (Leverenz 29). Because *Moby Dick* is all but devoid of a feminine presence, it does not overtly engage with any form of androgynous idealism, socially or psychologically utopian. The all-male crew is not so much a microcosm of American society at large, as a microcosm of the available forms of manhood in antebellum American society. By representing Ahab in the dim shades of the gothic overreacher, Melville engages to a certain extent with the British gothic-Romantic tradition of the satanic hero. In essence, however, *Moby Dick* is an American tale, more directly influenced by Melville's own sea-faring experience, realistic sea adventures such as Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), or a dark fantastic voyage such as Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838). If Melville's interest in British literature influenced its conception, it can be found more directly in Shakespearean tragedy, than in Radcliffean or Godwinian gothic romance.

The analysis of "The Bell-Tower" in chapter five, however, showed that Melville did not stand entirely aloof from the influence of the popular British gothic fictions that were widely available and much read in America during his time. Just as "Bartleby" is overtly indebted to Charles Dickens, "The Bell-Tower" represents Melville's engagement with the Frankenstein myth, as it originated in Mary Shelley's novel and was adopted later by Melville's friend Hawthorne. The analysis of Melville's gothic tale of magical science practiced in a fictional world structured by patriarchal customs, showed how Melville continued a tradition of alchemical gothic stories harbouring dissidence towards ideologies of gender polarization. In the same sense, *Pierre*, while often discussed as a satire on the sensational and domestic popular novels of the 1840s and the publishing industry that promoted such works, can also be read as a magico-political tale, borrowing several important structural and thematic devices from Bulwer's *Zanoni*, an alchemical gothic novel infused with visionary philosophy that harboured theories of radical social reform, including an androgynous gender utopianism.

While Melville's grandfather Thomas Melville was involved in the Boston Tea Party, Herman Melville was never directly involved with any form of practical radicalism, or even with the kind of reform movements and associationist communities that had lured Hawthorne temporarily into their fold.⁵¹ Hawthorne, from the outset, engaged closely with

⁵¹ On the revolutionary involvements of Thomas Melville see Laurie Robertson-Lorant, *Melville, A Biography* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1996) 2-3.

the nature of male-female relationships – both socially and psychologically – in his stories and gave them symbolic resonance by continually employing the cultural schema of alchemy as structural device to express his vision of the dangers of gender bifurcation and his vision of its eradication. Melville's early novels *Typee* and *Omoo*, however, are characterized by their celebration of adventure, homosocial bonding, and a proto-anthropological interest in "uncivilized" societies. On the surface, Melville's early work, and even *Moby Dick*, as described above, seems aloof from any concern with an ideology of gender polarization.

Melville's contemporary reviewers as well as his later critics, however, did find harboured in these apparently a-political adventure stories a social utopianism. One reviewer explains that, in Britain, *Typee* was published as "an addition to Mr. Murray's Colonial Library." He describes the book as "a great curiosity" rather than a great work of fiction, which "consists of adventure and observation," in which "the descriptive parts are of not so striking a character" (Higgins and Parker 6-7). Importantly, the reviewer constructs a link between this apparently harmless piece of adventure fiction, which includes an account of South-Sea island culture and a visionary utopianism founded in Godwinian anarchism. According to the British reviewer, Melville pictured a society where "a community of goods, and an absence of anything like jealousy or female restraint, realize the Pantisocracy which Southey, Coleridge, and others, fancied the perfection of society during the phrensy of the French Revolution" (Higgins and Parker 413). The youthful Romantics' anarchist utopia here alluded to (which was to be established in North America) was inspired by their early enthusiasm for Godwin's anarchist philosophy as presented in the first edition of *Political Justice*. Even though Melville may never have been directly interested in Godwin's philosophy, or personally engaged with the anarchic style of American reformism as practiced by Alcott, Stephen Pearl Andrews or Josiah Warren, in Britain, his early fiction was perceived by some – those knowledgeable of Godwinian radicalism – to contain a utopian vision.

Even though there is no obvious critique of an ideology of gender polarization in *Typee*, Lorant argues that "Melville's Typee Valley is a utopia," in the way that its inhabitants "exhibit a spirit of cooperation" and that "their social relationships appear to be governed by an 'inherent principle of honesty and charity towards each other'" – Godwin would have approved. Importantly, "they make little distinction between family and friends, or work and play" – Godwin would have been pleased – because "they hold 'their broad valleys in fee simple from Nature herself' and 'their goods in common,' there is 'not a padlock in the valley,' and poverty and crime are unknown" (Lorant 140). The Typeean community reverses Tommo's perspective on civilization, as he "comes to see relationships in 'civilized' society countries as cannibalistic." Lorant explains that Tommo alters his point of view on western civilization. He starts to wonder whether there is a significant difference between eating human flesh and the punishments dealt out by the legal system in his own culture. Contrasting western culture with the primitive island culture, Lorant argues, that "for Melville, cannibalism was a metaphor for economic competition and social injustice," at least that is the point of view that the figure of Tommo articulates (Lorant 141). Such a reverse signification is the rhetoric of a radical reformer more than

literary aesthete. So too, *White Jacket*, with its denunciation of naval flogging practices, can be read as an adventure tale with an overt political agenda, even though Lorant wants her readers to believe that it “merely caught the wave of reform” (Lorant 235). Unsurprisingly both Alcott and Thoreau enjoyed the book (see Lorant 143). Paul Giles argues that Melville’s works have a history of being linked with philosophical radicalism. Apart from the anarchist utopianism that the British reviewer found expressed in *Typee*, Giles explains that Victorian “poets like Dante Gabriel Rossetti and James Thomson were attracted to Melville because of the way his broad cultural iconoclasm seemed to be linked, at some vital level, with an ambience of sexual freedom, an issue that greatly concerned British radicals of this era.”⁵² Sexual freedom has been a radical reformist issue since the days of Godwin and Wollstonecraft, and was a topic of debate in American utopias from Alcott’s Fruitlands to Andrews’ and Warren’s Modern Times, utopian communities that combined socialist egalitarianism with a negation of orthodox gender roles and sexual morality.

Sterling Delano explains the difference between the American associationism of, for instance, Brook Farm, and the more radically individualist and visionary utopianism of reforms such as Warren. Delano writes that even though “associationists had been accused [by various established authorities] most often of advocating the abolishment of the institutions of marriage, representative government, and the Christian Church,” this was never actually their aim.⁵³ In fact, Delano argues, “associationists would not abolish or significantly alter any of these institutions, though they would try to improve them” (Delano 22). More radical reformers sought to overthrow the established authorities and the institutions they upheld. Warren, for instance, wanted to rid the world of a monetary system of exchange and tried to achieve this by opening up a Time Shop in Philadelphia. Alcott, in his “Orphic Sayings,” denounced church and state as coercive institutions holding the individual from true spiritual and material progress. Andrews, in his manifesto “The True Constitution of Government,” repeatedly stressed “the supremacy of the Individual” above all else (Andrews 9-44). Unorthodox associationists such as Andrews and Warren were continuing in many ways the philosophical and political utopianism of Godwin. The father of anarchism himself never identified with the popular reform culture in his native Britain. Like Bulwer, he believed that popular reformist movements could only hinder true progress, because its too hasty attempt at forcing change was merely substituting one coercive ideology for another. Godwin believed, instead in the gradual reform of society through an initial and gradual reform of the individual. The individual, through diligent study and increasing self-illumination, could influence other individuals to do the same, and so spread the gradual intellectual enlightenment of society resulting in his anarchist utopia where each individual would always pursue the common good. The radicalism of this seemingly conservative, gradualist, philosophy of progress, as with Alcott, Andrews and Warren, lies in the fact that Godwin believes in the inevitable and complete overthrow of all forms of government and the institutions it upholds. This faith leads Godwin to speculate about the possibility of worldly immortality.

⁵² Paul Giles, “Bewildering Intertanglement’: Melville’s Engagement with British Culture,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*, ed., Robert S. Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 224.

⁵³ Sterling Delano, *The Harbinger and New England Transcendentalism* (London: Associated UPs, 1983) 22.

This version of Godwin's anarchism became widely known in both Britain and America, and was ridiculed by its opponents in the course of the nineteenth century as a harmless form of radical visionary idealism. The belief in the domino effect of imagined gradual individual intellectual illumination, however, informs both Bulwer's *Zanoni* and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, novels that suggest, as Stephen Pearl Andrews wrote, that "there is abundant evidence to the man of reflection that what we have thus performed in imagination is destined to be rapidly accomplished in fact" (Andrews 30).

Another figure whose ideas link Melville's work with the radical social reform culture of his day, Giles explains, is Henry S. Salt, the eccentric turn-of-the-century literary scholar who had an "interest in rebellious figures like Shelley, Swinburne, and Thoreau," who was connected to "the Fabian Society and the newly emerging Labour Party," and "published widely on British authors whom he could cast as outsiders – William Godwin, Thomas DeQuincey – as well as vigorously promoting American authors like Emerson, Hawthorne, Poe, and Whitman, in addition to Melville" (Giles, *Intertanglement* 225). Apart from the fact that Melville owned a copy of *Caleb Williams*, there is no evidence that Melville had any interest in the philosophy and fictional practice of the British anarchist. But those who read his work, from the 1850s onwards, find in Melville a congenial spirit of more overtly outspoken radicals. Unsurprisingly, like Hawthorne, Melville expresses sympathy for the plight of the contemporary American visionary reformer. In a letter to Hawthorne, Melville writes the one-time associationist, "it can hardly be doubted that all Reformers are bottomed upon the truth, more or less;" adding the rhetorical question, "to the world at large are not reformers almost universally laughing-stocks?" (*ML*, 127) Melville's recognition of the reformist dilemma, which he equates with that of the novelist, identifies him as a philosophical ally of radical reform even though he does not share the confidence that mere practical reformism such as the American style socialist associationism would reform society. Melville and Hawthorne, as well as Godwin and Bulwer would have agreed with the self-professed "visionary" reformer Stephen Pearl Andrews, who wrote "the blunder of Socialism is not in its end, but in its means" (Andrews 3, 21).

Reynolds' work on the influence of popular culture on the authors of the American Renaissance further strengthens the link between Melville's writing and this visionary radical reformist tradition. Reynolds, like the London *Spectator* reviewer, identifies in much of Melville's early fiction an unorthodox mode of social reform, more radically dedicated to overthrowing the dominant ideologies that shape formative institutions such as family and community. He identifies the crew in *Redburn* (1848) as radically unorthodox associationists by emphasising how

ironically enough, morality emerges from mass immorality: this crew of thieves and desperadoes all steal from each other, but they establish "a community of goods"...and at last, as a whole, they become relatively honest, by nearly every man becoming the reverse (Reynolds, *Beneath* 286).

Immorality was a charge often levelled at the Godwinians in the 1790s, but also to the more openly subversive socialist communities in Melville's America, such as Modern Times (known as "the Sodom of the pine barrens") which similarly sought reform through a reversal of established moral values, strongly coupled with a reform of established gender roles, which were deemed to serve only the interests of the increasingly powerful capitalist merchant bourgeoisie.⁵⁴

In *Moby Dick* (1851), too, Reynolds finds the same radically unorthodox form of associationism. Aboard the *Pequod* "no longer is a rebellious crew set against an oppressive master. Both are fused in one mad, grand purpose" (Reynolds, *Beneath* 289). Reynolds goes so far as to assert: "*Moby Dick* is the literary culmination of the radical egalitarianism that had its roots in Jacksonian democracy" (Reynolds, *Beneath* 289). The associationist George Ripley (of Brook Farm), read the novel in a manner in which Bulwer would have liked him to read *Zanoni*, suggesting that "beneath the whole story the subtle and imaginative reader may perhaps find a pregnant allegory, intended to illustrate the mystery of life" (quoted in Lorant 290). The democratic rhetoric implied in concepts such as social fusion plays a crucial part in *Pierre*, the sensationalist gothic novel that immediately followed *Moby Dick*. While Lorant argues that "Melville set out to write a domestic best-seller," for all its parodic style and vulgar sensationalism, *Pierre* turned into Melville's urban gothic novel illustrative of how the dominance of a Jacksonian-style of democratic idealism and individuality, buttressed by economic policies that stress competition above charity are in fact fragmenting the individual subject, both male and female (Lorant 300). As in *Zanoni* and *The Scarlet Letter*, the cultural schema of alchemy works in *Pierre* to articulate an (as yet unrealised) utopian vision. There is no direct evidence that Melville was interested in alchemical philosophy, but Lorant explains that, like his Transcendentalist contemporaries, he interested himself in "Eastern thought as an alternative to the growing materialism of America" (Lorant 45). Melville was also intimately familiar with Hawthorne's tales and *The Scarlet Letter*. Lorant even argues that "Reading *Mosses from an Old Manse* was a catalytic event for Melville" (Lorant 252). He may well have gleaned the potential of the cultural schema of alchemy as a metaphorical vehicle for tales involving radical social reform from Hawthorne's collection of tales. The visionary reformer Andrews would also use alchemical imagery to articulate his own vision of reform: "these days of universal death," he wrote, "must be days of universal rebirth, if the ruin is not to be total and final!" According to him, like the alchemical image of the phoenix, "the new society...is to be constructed from the fragments of the old (Andrews 2-3). In *Pierre*, the naive idealist Pierre Glendinning can be seen to struggle to express philosophically and embody socially an androgynous idealism in a society that is intent on keeping concepts such as the actual and the ideal, the public and private, art and society, masculine and feminine thoroughly polarized.

Fiedler argues that Melville's *Pierre* was conceived "in the full flush of his enthusiasm for Hawthorne's work" (Fiedler 299). According to Giles, however, Melville's work is generally characterized by an "intertextual dialogue with British culture." While *Pierre* is often read as a parody of the conventions of the popular British novelistic genres, Giles

⁵⁴ Tom Morris, "Brentwood, a Place Built on Dreams" 11 March 2004 <<http://www.newsday.com/extras/lihistory/spectown/hist005i.htm>>

argues that “the thematic direction involves not just antagonism but also equivalence” (Giles 237). Lorant points out that “many critics complained that *Pierre* was not ‘American’” (Lorant 325). Edward H. Rosenberry explains that during the 1840s, “popular taste shifting away from the romance of adventure toward to the romance of society – from Scott, as it were, to Bulwer and Dickens,” or, in other words, from Scottish historical romances to English novels of political purpose.⁵⁵ He distances Melville from this tradition, however, by arguing that “Melville as a popular novelist in the 1850s was a square peg in a round hole...a hopeless misfit” (Rosenberry 88). Emory Elliott argues that the “references to Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and Byron delineate a European literary continuity that gives the book its narrative frame and much of its allusive richness,” strengthening the point about *Pierre*’s transatlantic debts, while keeping the novel in the high cultural bracket (Elliott, *Problem* 342). Contrary to Rosenberry and Elliott, however, Leon Howard argues that *Pierre* shows “numerous verbal echoes or incidental parallels” with various popular English novels by authors such as William Godwin, Walter Scott, and Mary Shelley, as well as with native productions by Hawthorne and Poe, thus fusing both Fiedler’s and Giles’s viewpoints.⁵⁶ But Howard also incorporates to some extent Rosenberry’s ideas, by stating that Melville “was attracted to the Gothic tale,” but “was not trying to write in the Gothic genre. His ambiguities were designed to do something more than thrill the reader” (*P* 370). Melville probably indeed tried to do more than just thrill the reader, but such a statement does not distance his work from its gothic models. In fact, it only strengthens *Pierre*’s relationship to the novels of Godwin, Mary Shelley, Bulwer and even Dickens, all of whom, in their own ways, utilized key elements from the gothic with a didactic, often political purpose in mind, rather than for mere literary effect. Howard’s statement says less about *Pierre* as a work of fiction than about Howard’s views on the cultural work of gothic fiction as a popular genre that cannot be serious or philosophical. According to Howard, his rhetoric implies, gothic novels are straightforward sensational tales that offer the reader a moment of escape from reality. Rosenberry counters Howard, however, when he suggests that “*Pierre* is, like Melville’s other major books, a novel of ideas, and the durable pattern of its meaning is found in its philosophical skein” (Rosenberry 95). Paradoxically, Howard’s critical perspective leads him to the following insight: “the book that did the most to transform Melville’s ‘silly thoughts and wayward speculations’ into a definite plan for *Pierre*” was Bulwer’s *Zanoni*. As the analysis of *Zanoni* above has shown, Bulwer’s novel is very much a magico-political tale rooted in the gothic tradition and highly serious and philosophical in its use of the cultural schema of alchemy to articulate a vision of utopian reform that, through its metaphors of male and female metaphysical as well as material union, highlights an androgynous gender ideal.

His neighbour Sarah Morewood had gifted Melville this extremely popular novel in 1851, not long before he started work on *Pierre*. Apart from the British and German editions of the novel, at least two American editions of *Zanoni* were published in the 1840s. Sacvan Bercovitch explains that, in writing *Pierre*, “Melville knew what he was doing”: “he

⁵⁵ Edward H. Rosenberry, *Melville* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979) 88.

⁵⁶ Leon Howard, Historical Note, *Pierre, or the Ambiguities* (Evanston: Northwestern Newberry Press, 1971) 369.

wanted the book to sell” and “was trying to please.”⁵⁷ While Rosenberry argues that “the repellent features of *Pierre* can all be traced to some infectious source in the adolescent art of the American popular novel” (he probably has Lippard in mind), Robert Miles argues that *Pierre* in fact follows closely the ideological and psychological nature of British gothic fiction: its engagement with the repression of a less than perfect national and familial past (Rosenberry, 88). With regards to the utopianism and androgynous idealism present in *Pierre*, however, *Zanoni* functions as a direct intertext that proves that “Herman Melville’s *Pierre* is closer to English Gothic romance” – I would add especially the alchemical magico-political tale – “than is generally understood.”⁵⁸

According to Howard, *Zanoni* and *Pierre* show marked thematic parallels: “the most important of these parallels may be found in Bulwer’s method of treating the conflict between the ideal and the actual” (P 371). Howard argues, however, that Melville’s novel reverses the Christian implications of this theme as it is presented in *Zanoni*: “Zanoni lost the whole world but gained his own soul, and Glyndon, who could not remain steadfast in his pursuit of the Ideal, failed” (P 371). For Howard, then, *Zanoni* only functions as a contrastive intertext. He argues that, while Bulwer’s naïve artist Glyndon fails the test of initiation into Mejnour’s Chaldaean order, and *Zanoni* finds his idealism realised only in death, *Pierre* “passes all the tests that Glyndon fails, and the tragic consequences of his ‘success’ may have reflected Melville’s ironic reaction to Bulwer’s belief in the superiority of the ‘Ideal’ to the ‘Actual’” (P 371). According to Howard, Melville, by reversing Bulwer’s philosophy in *Pierre*, “appears to have been” consciously denying the Christian values of Bulwer’s book (P 372). Just as he implies that gothic fiction always functions as mere escapist literature, Howard is here implying that Bulwer’s novel should be read only as a Christian spiritual allegory, not as a magico-political tale articulating a vision of radical social reform. But it is as a novel of radical social reform that *Pierre* is closest to *Zanoni*.

The two novels share one very important metaphor that binds them together as potential magico-political tales. This is the metaphor of the artist as alchemist. In fact, both novels can be seen, in their own way, to use the metaphor of the artist as alchemist to fuse the material with the ideal, as Marie Roberts stresses is the case in *Zanoni*. Leverenz explains that the dominant antebellum gender ideology called men to the battlefield of economic competition, “where men come to measure their worth primarily through their work.” Because of the identification of men with the work-a-day world, out there, masculinity became equated with the material. According to Leverenz, “womanhood begins as a domestic code, centred on child rearing” (Leverenz 73). Within a culture that ideologically defined the domestic sphere as an ideal, and that identifies womanhood with domesticity – even though in practice, much recent scholarship has shown, such separate yet complementary spheres never truly existed – femininity becomes ideologically equated with idealism.⁵⁹ The artist as alchemist, within a culture that seeks ideologically to keep the ever-

⁵⁷ Sacvan Bercovitch, “How to Read Melville’s *Pierre*,” rpt. in *Herman Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Myra Jehlen (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1994) 116.

⁵⁸ Robert Miles, “Tranced Grieffs: Melville’s *Pierre* and the Origins of the Gothic,” *ELH* 66 (1999): 157.

⁵⁹ On the inherently intertwined nature of ideologically separated gender spheres in nineteenth-century American culture see Monika M. Elbert, ed., *Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence in American Literature 1830-1930* (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2000).

blurring spheres apart, becomes a dissident figure, as he, or she, refusing to do battle in the masculine world of commerce, works instead on idealistic artistic creations. Such a fusion of the actual and the ideal is also a fusion of masculine and feminine stereotypes. Art as a feminised practice performed, bought and sold within the public domain becomes an alchemical device capable of articulating the necessity of fusion by illuminating how the dominant gender ideology of separate spheres stands at the basis of political and economic forces that have pulled concepts such as family and community apart and projected them onto the gendered ideological binary that informs individual identity.

As Reynolds' comments on *Redburn* and *Moby Dick* have shown, Melville's work continually engages in finding ways of re-constructing the institutions of the community and the family as mutually supporting institutions. *Pierre* is divided into two halves, each of which deals with a specific geographical setting and class: a rural American aristocratic family and an urban commune of paupers, artists and idealists. The alchemy/art analogy is introduced on the dividing line between these two worlds, which highlights the way in which the novel's proposed alternative way of constructing family and community is underscored by a revision of established gender roles from a highly bifurcated male and female gender ideology in the rural aristocratic milieu that underscores traditional class relations to the anarchic fluid identities of Pierre's new-found larger family and more tight-knit community within the walls of his room at the Apostles' commune. In *Pierre*, alchemy works as a metaphor for a socially engaged art, similar to Bulwer's concept of the artist as utopian alchemist in *Zanoni*.

Melville's novel reveals how institutions such as marriage, family and community – institutions that dominate all of Melville's fiction of the 1850s – became defined increasingly through the highly gender-marked discourse of free-market economics that relied on the separation of work and home. Through such an ideology, the institutions of community and family were stripped from their most commonly understood denotations. Community no longer referred to the possibility of mutual aid and companionship beyond the direct family circle, but denoted the opportunity for public material exchange between individuals unrelated through blood-ties, leading to mutual benefit. The increasingly private family lead, however, to social estrangement, since it became more a haven from the community, rather than an integral part of it. Pierre's revolution in literary calling, from sentimental poet to metaphysical novelist, brings about not only a revolution in his own sense of self, from patriarchal heir to socially androgynous idealist, but also a revolution in his perception of the way in which society should be structured. He exchanges the binary-structured world of his rural aristocratic youth for that of the anarchic community of mystical visionary reformers.

Significantly, both *Zanoni* and *Pierre* are founded on a highly artificial plot structure, which stresses the novel's allegorical potential. The seven books of *Zanoni* reflect the stages of Zanoni's metaphysical experiment to fuse the actual and the ideal. *Pierre*, also divided into books, has an even more overtly symbolical structure, as Rosenberry points out: "architecturally, no book of Melville's is simpler: the story is divided into two approximately equal parts, the first located in the country, the second in the city, and the two joined together by a crucial – indeed, symbolic – journey" (Rosenberry 90). This

journey, Melville's use of alchemically grounded metaphors suggests, represents the alchemical wedding of Isabel and Pierre, Pierre's literal and metaphysical transformation from fashionable author to utopian alchemical artist, who, like Zanoni, is intent on dissolving the artificial binaries that structure the domestic sphere in which he grows up and the patriarchal family structure that it upholds in order to realise his androgynous ideal – a genderless society.

Milton R. Stern notes how *Pierre* challenges domestic ideology by illuminating “the fictive construction of the family.”⁶⁰ Michael Paul Rogin more strongly states that “*Pierre* assaulted the family,” and argues that the novel is “a declaration of war against domesticity.”⁶¹ Within the rural American-aristocratic milieu of the Glendinning family, individual and communal identity is defined strictly along rigidly policed gender, class and even race boundaries. As Miles points out, the family estate and lineage are built on the suppression of the past, the native Indian heritage of the actual land itself by the continual reconstruction of its founding history as site of American heroism through the tale of Pierre's grandfather, the revolutionary general Glendinning. By assigning themselves the status of patrons, the Glendinnings also erect a class boundary between themselves and the community. They make pseudo-royal visits to the lower-class sewing circles and entertain the spiritual leader of the community, the Revered Falsgrave. The male and female gender roles to which the individuals adhere are highly dichotomised because they have become political tools for ensuring the family's dominant status within the community. The world in which Pierre finds himself is a world of patriarchs, who marry lovely angelic maidens in order to produce the next heir, who, in turn, needs to be a legitimate offspring of the original General Glendinning to ensure the survival and apparent legitimacy of the Glendinning estate. The Glendinning estate is so thoroughly rooted in patriarchal ideology that Pierre can call his mother sister and his mother can call Pierre her brother. Whether Pierre is called son or brother is of no consequence because he will always remain heir, and with it retain his socio-political function as the family patriarch. Because Lady Glendinning knows that Pierre will succeed his father as head of the household, she is not concerned whether Pierre calls her mother or sister, as long as he remains “a noble boy, and docile” and does his aristocratic duty by marrying the local domestic angel Lucy (*P* 19). Significantly, this apparently frivolous naming game reinforces one of the major faultlines of aristocratic ideology by outlining the propensity for incestuous marriages within aristocratic circles. In one instance Melville satirises the pressures but on Pierre by a patriarchal familial ideology by repeating his mother's view of Pierre as a docile boy twelve times within the space of a single page (*P* 20). In another instance he turns Pierre's favourite horses into “a sort of family cousins” who “acknowledged Pierre as the undoubted head of the house of Glendinning” (*P* 21).

Within this patriarchal domestic scheme of mothers and heirs, the beautiful Lucy Tartan exists only as an object, desired not only by Pierre, but also, and even more so it seems, by the mother, because she sees in Lucy's person, the mother-to-be to the next

⁶⁰ Milton R. Stern, “Melville, Society and Language,” in *A Companion to Melville Studies*, ed. John Bryant (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986) 441.

⁶¹ Michael Paul Rogin, *Subversive Genealogy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983) 160.

Glendinning patriarch. The narrator undermines Lucy's position as a true love interest by placing her on the proverbial pedestal: "Her cheeks were tinted with the most delicate white and red, the white predominating. Her eyes some god brought down from heaven; her hair was Danae's, spangled with Jove's shower; her teeth were dived for in the Persian sea" (P 24). The arrival of the illegitimate, outcast, working-class, Isabel, who enters the Glendinning world by leaving the domestic sewing circle in which she is initially spotted by Pierre, cannot be acknowledged within this politicised gender framework of the Glendinnings. Her appearance and seemingly supernatural powers come to present the largest threat to the stability of the nuclear aristocratic family and their position within the larger community. Of the wrong class and race, Isabel claims to be a blood relation of the Glendinnings nonetheless.⁶² Isabel's family, significantly, is the extended one of her adopted home: the sewing industry, in which she earns a living. Her intrusion into the Glendinning world through ties of blood threatens to pull the Glendinnings within this extended community, which would mean losing their position as patrons, their status and their estate.

Leyland S. Person argues that Isabel "encourages [Pierre] to conceive of the self in a new way as a dynamic rather than a static entity" (Person, *Headaches* 72). This is true for both his individuality as well as his social identity. After his introduction into Isabel's working-class world of fluid identities, histories and social relations, Pierre, early on in the novel, needs to find a new ideology through which to construct his individual identity and social role. The narrator articulates a Zanonian theme when he states, "for the most might of nature's laws is this, that out of Death she brings Life." The narrator equates this grand law of nature with democratic ideology: "the democratic element operates as a subtle acid among us; forever producing new things by corroding the old" (P 9). Isabel can be read as the personification of this sentiment of democratic Nature. Eugenia C. Delamotte adds evidence for such a reading by explaining that even though Isabel is "associated constantly with interiors," she "is nonetheless priestess of nature" (Delamotte 73).⁶³ According to her, and I agree, "the passion Isabel arouses in Pierre is, among other things, a passion for knowledge" (Delamotte 48). She points out that "Pierre's love for Isabel begins as 'a wild, bewildering, and incomprehensible curiosity,' a desperate desire to know what secret is hidden in her eyes" (Delamotte 66). In order to acknowledge Isabel as his sister, he needs to find an ideology in which family is not defined through its separation from the larger community and protected by class boundaries.⁶⁴ His encounter with Isabel is therefore not

⁶² When Pierre first meets "the mystic girl," the narrator describes her as possessing a "foreign feminineness" and a voice with "foreignness in the accent" (P 112-3). She has "soft tresses of the jettiest hair" and to Pierre she seemed "half unearthly" (P 118). The narrator turns her into an exotic object by describing how Pierre lingers on "the girl's wonderfully beautiful ear, which chancing to peep from among her abundant tresses, nestled in that blackness like a transparent sea-shell of pearl" (P 119). Isabel is clearly not of Anglo-Saxon blood.

⁶³ In her biography of Melville Lorant explains that in his poem "In the Desert," which deals with a type of gnosis, Melville "identifies the intense light with the effulgent radiance of the Godhead known as the Shekhinah, the feminine and indwelling aspect of the Deity extolled in the Zohar, a Jewish mystical text expunged from the Old Testament by the patriarchs" (Lorant 384). Isabel, like the Sophia of the Gnostics, in many ways fulfils the same function for Pierre.

⁶⁴ Wyn Kelley argues that Melville presents a domestic ideal "founded not on marriage and family but on the riskier relations of fraternity" but "unfortunately, his vision of the home as a community inspired by fraternal ideals was too radical for many middle-class readers, and his book failed with that audience." See her essay

an escape from his social milieu, but marks his recognition of, and entrance into the larger community of Saddle Meadows opening the door towards the metropolis. Isabel, the working-class orphan and living offspring of the Glendinning patriarch and blood relation of Pierre, is the living embodiment of one of the major faultlines of the ideology that empowered the Glendinning family to their position as patrons of the community. Pierre's acknowledgement of Isabel's existence alone is in itself a confrontation with the dominant ideology that had transformed notions of family and community into political tools to ensure its own hegemony, while suppressing their potential as signifiers for an ideal of individual solidarity through communal equality and mutual benefit. Person argues that "the demand [Isabel] makes upon Pierre is precisely that which might enable him to realize himself as a man and as an artist...her special female authority serving as a model for Pierre's own creative experience" (Person, *Headaches* 73,75). It is also possible to go further and to suggest that Isabel's demands on Pierre transform him from the Glyndon like worldly, aristocratic artist, into a visionary Zanonian idealist.

In *Zanoni*, the androgynous alchemical ideal informed a more activist social ideal, based on the separation of individual and community identity from the binaries that structured the increasingly dominant free-market economics and its underscoring domestic ideology. *Pierre*, similarly is constructed on an elaborate metaphor, in which author is linked to alchemist and the process of writing a confessional narrative is linked to the alchemical experiment in which the projected philosophical change also advocates a change in social structure that calls for a revision of existing gender ideologies that dominate the construction of individual identity, family and community. In this extended metaphor Person's description of Isabel as representing "all that is 'unsystemizable' in human experience, in human nature, and in art" has extra significance (Person, *Headaches* 79). Like Hester, she is the anarchic force in the novel that destabilizes the status quo, allowing change to occur.

While, according to his mother, Pierre's dominant trait is docility, she already highlights Pierre's potential for transformation by using the term "mercurial" to describe his character (*P* 60). Mercury is the central metaphorical figure of the alchemical myth, "symbolising the universal agent of transmutation", and a synonym for Hermes – Carwin's philosophical mentor in *Wieland* (Abraham 124). While Pierre's personality is linked to an alchemical process of transformation, interestingly it is Isabel's revelations that, according to the narrator, function as "a chemic key of the cipher" (*P* 70). Isabel's memories and revelations about the Glendinning past can be retrospectively interpreted and all that has been hidden in the past revealed. Just as the alchemist and original Rosicrucians used the alchemical writing and images to discover secrets of the self, under the influence of Isabel's mystical power, Pierre "can rummage himself all over, for still hidden writings to read" (*P* 70) and use this new-found knowledge to change the social make up. Such change, as the structure of the novel foregrounds by its two-part division between life at Saddle Meadows and life at an urban commune of visionary philosophers and artistic rebels, involves the destruction of the patriarchal domestic nuclear family and domestic ideology.

"Pierre's Domestic Ambiguities," in *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 91.

As Priestess of Nature, Delamotte argues, Isabel holds the mysteries into which Pierre is to be initiated (Delamotte 76). As in *Zanoni*, acknowledgement of the superior powers of a democratic nature can lead to the corrosion – to use the narrator’s terms – of the dominant socio-political ideology that stifles individuality. In Bulwer’s novel, only the artistic, visionary alchemist can fully grasp such an ideal. Isabel’s identity as a visionary mystic with alchemical powers is underscored in the novel because the narrator describes her as “a child of everlasting youngness,” of “original and changeless youthfulness” (P 140).⁶⁵ Like Zanoni, Isabel is a mysterious stranger who appears out of nowhere, offering the naïve hero visionary powers that inspire a radical creativity. Isabel’s power over Pierre, the narrator stresses, is not just one of alleged familial bond:

A certain still more marvellous power in the girl over himself and his most interior thoughts and emotions; - a power so hovering upon the confines of the invisible world, that it seemed more inclined that way than this; - a power which not only seemed irresistibly to draw him toward Isabel, but to draw him away from another quarter – wantonly as it were, and yet quite ignorantly and unintendingly; and, besides, without respect apparently to any thing ulterior, and yet again, only under cover of drawing him to her. For over all these things, and interfusing itself with the sparkling electricity in which she seemed to swim, was an ever-creeping and condescending haze of ambiguities (P 151).

By contact with the mystical Isabel, Pierre’s mind, like that of Glyndon in *Zanoni*, is opened up to allow him to view his position in society from a different perspective and to act in order to change what he now perceives as his own heretofore artificially constructed identity as Pierre Glendinning, heir to his father’s estate and patron of the community of Saddle Meadows. Pierre’s choice to embrace Isabel instead of Lucy is symbolic of his choice to embrace radicalism instead of conventionalism. As Wynn Kelley explains, “*Pierre* rejects marriage, offering a warped utopian alternative,” warped from the point of view of the other figures in the novel as well as the narrator, but not necessarily negative in its intentions, the more radical even, as Kelley’s words suggest, because “Pierre resolves the conflict between patriarchal house and maternal home by leaving both behind,” a move which illustrates that “Melville’s treatment of domestic life eventually works to shatter middle-class norms of marriage and home” (Kelley 93).

As in *Zanoni*, in *Pierre* the supernatural quality of the slow process of the protagonist’s awakening to his new state is emphasised: “Pierre felt himself surrounded by

⁶⁵ Importantly, Isabel’s story of her youth is a story of being raised in “an old ruinous house, in some region...a wild, dark, house, planted in the midst of a round, cleared, deeply sloping space, scopped out of the middle of deep stunted pine woods” (P 114). This scene is markedly similar to Lippard’s portrayal of Paul Ardenheim’s youthful abode in the woods along the Wissahickon and also echoes Poe’s description of the setting of “The Fall of the House of Usher,” another story about an alchemical union between brother and sister that ends in mutual death, rather than resurrection. The couple who watch over Isabel could be an alchemist and his soror mystica, since in stereotypical gothic fashion the man is described as having a face, “almost black with age,” suggesting he may eternally hover over furnace, which was “a purse of wrinkles,” suggesting he is extremely old. Like a true alchemist, he sports a “hoary beard always tangled, streaked with dust and earthly crumbs” (P 115).

ten thousand sprites and gnomes, and his whole soul was swayed and tossed by supernatural tides; and again he heard the wondrous, rebounding, chanting words: 'Mystery! Mystery! / Mystery of Isabel! Mystery! Mystery! / Isabel and Mystery! Mystery!'" (P 150). In typical alchemical rhetoric Pierre needs to become one with the spirit of Isabel. This process is achieved by means of Isabel's "atmospheric spell," which again, typically alchemical, is "both physical and spiritual." The alchemical link is strengthened by the allusion to Isabel's origin as "moulded from fire and air, and vivified at some Voltaic pile of August thunder-clouds heaped against the sunset." For Pierre, this is all the work of "an invisible enchanter" (P 151), as Isabel in her mystical communion with Pierre, is "transformed" from a poor orphaned seamstress into an androgynous mystic being, urging that between her and Pierre there are no sexual differences – "there is no sex in our immaculateness" (P 149) – which allows Pierre to own "that irrespective, darting majesty of humanity, which can be majestic and menacing in woman as in man" (P 160).

It is immediately after Isabel's mystic spell and Pierre's revelation that the narrator reflects on the typically Godwinian doctrine of progress, expressed also by Melville in his famous letter to Hawthorne, and shared by such American radicals as Josiah Warren:

all the world does never gregariously advance to Truth, but only here and there some of its individuals do; and by advancing, leave the rest behind; cutting themselves forever adrift from their sympathy, and making themselves always liable to be regarded with distrust, dislike, and often, downright – though, oftentimes, concealed – fear and hate (P 166).

Godwin and Bulwer had both experienced this plight personally. Both English novelists believed that human improvement should start at the level of the individual mind, and fiction, privately read and thought about, and publicly discussed, was for them the ideal vehicle for bringing about such individual education, and mutual benefit. Melville, in his letter to Hawthorne, articulates a similar idea, and Pierre, through his transformation in union with Isabel, comes to embody it. He becomes a metaphysical novelist intent on giving the world that will open the reader's mind to "things as they are." This is "the reformist zeal" that Elliott identifies in Pierre and of which Pierre asks "what forces have 'fated' him to fail?" (Elliott, *Problem* 344).

Crucially, such a philosophy and moral outlook are analogous to the plight of the alchemist in all the gothic novels discussed so far. Gary Kelly speaks for all of them when he argues that *St Leon* ends in a negation of Godwinian optimism because "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). As in *Wieland*, *Frankenstein* and Poe's alchemical tales, secret knowledge with the power to change society is presented as perilous to the individual who holds it. Like St Leon, "the more Pierre strives to do good, the worse he does," as Samuel Otter explains.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Samuel Otter, *Melville's Anatomies* (Berkeley: U of Berkeley P, 1999) 251.

In *Zanoni*, however, the visionary alchemist is allowed a more positive role when he chooses not to walk the path of alienated intellectualism and secret meddling, but turns his attention and his powers to direct social reform. In his choice to marry the orphaned singer Viola and to sacrifice his own immortality for the life of their child, Zanoni is able to bring about positive change. In *Pierre*, a similar development takes place. After his initiation into the mysterious world of Isabel, Pierre is able to read his culture from an alternative perspective. Only once he declares himself one with Isabel, can Pierre transform himself from the aristocratic gentleman author into radical novelist of purpose, articulating the necessity for change. The narrator elaborates on his mystical imagery surrounding Isabel and Pierre, by writing that Pierre has told Isabel how they “both reach up alike to a glorious ideal”— St Leon’s lost paradise of “continual domestic affection.” Like the well-known alchemical symbolism of Brother Sun and Sister Moon, “they changed; they coiled together, and entangledly stood mute” (*P* 192). Like the numerous alchemical emblems of lovers intertwining while immersed in water, or lying under the earth, or confined to a shared coffin in their act of mutual recognition, they have become dead to the world, riding into the black abyss that is Melville’s dystopian depiction of inner-city New York and settle into their hermitage at the Apostle’s.

The dominant alchemical metaphor that is born from the preceding alchemical imagery, that of an all-transforming Great Art, is introduced into the novel at a crucial moment in the plot: in the chapters reviewing Pierre’s career as an aristocratic amateur author of light verse, and immediately preceding his entrance into the Church of the Apostles with his mystical sister-wife Isabel. At this point, Pierre resides in the wasteland between country and city, aristocracy and democracy, conservatism and radical reform. As Pierre merges with the identity of Isabel and both become “equal,” Pierre’s art changes as well. The narrator recounts how “it is often to be observed that as in digging for precious metals in the mines, much earthly rubbish has first to be troublesomely handled and thrown out; so, in digging in one’s soul for the fine gold of genius, much dullness and common-place is first brought to light” (*P* 258). In equating the profession of writing with mining for gold, the narrator is not merely drawing a useful analogy between the process of artistic creation and the gold fever that was raging in the west, which Brian Roberts shows was infused with alchemical rhetoric, he also strengthens the significance of alchemical imagery in the novel. The alchemical analogy between gold digging and soul searching, used by Hawthorne in inverse order to describe Chillingworth’s change from alchemical outcast to figure of authority, is taken a step closer to authorship by the narrator when he states: “not will any thoroughly sincere man, who is an author, ever be rash in precisely defining the period, when he has completely ridded himself of his rubbish, and come to the latent gold in his mine” (*P* 158).⁶⁷ Authorship is here portrayed as the alchemical process of repeated experiments, which have as their goal the ultimate purification of the base matter. The author as alchemist is no longer merely the genteel scribbler of light verse, but becomes an individual intent on seeking not merely for material gold, but intent on seeking

⁶⁷ In *The Scarlet Letter*, the narrator explains how Chillingworth has been “calm in temperament, kindly, though not of warm affections, but ever, and in all his relations with the world, a pure and upright man,” but having entered the Puritan community, he “now dug into the poor clergyman’s heart, like a miner searching for gold” (*SL* 94).

the metaphorical gold within his own soul. This crucial chapter in which Pierre's mind awakens to the task ahead of him ends with the following reflection by the narrator:

And though this state of things, united with the ever multiplying freshets of new books, seems inevitably to point to a coming time, when the mass of humanity reduced to one level of dotage, authors shall be as scarce as alchemists are to-day, and the printing-press be reckoned a small invention: - yet even now, in the foretaste of this let us hug ourselves, oh, my Aurelian! That though the age of authors be passing, the hours of earnestness shall remain! (P 264)

The analogy between writing and alchemy become solidified here in the simile that likens serious authors of purpose to the actual (scarce) presence of alchemists. The exclamation "oh, my Aurelian!" is particularly striking in its multi-dimensional allusive character. As an aristocratic amateur author of light verse, Pierre is the narrator's Aurelian. Melville might well have been acquainted with the work of the Renaissance poet Aurelian Townshend, great grandson of Sir Roger Townshend of Raynham and author of "lyrics, which possess much charm and grace" which "are scattered through manuscript miscellanies" produced in his time.⁶⁸ Aurelian Townshend was a popular author of high reputation at the court of Charles I, where he succeeded Ben Jonson as composer of court masques. What makes the narrator's exclamation so important is that the name does not only refer to the Pierre of the first half of the book, but it also underscores the alchemical metaphor being set up. Apart from alluding to a renaissance court poet, the stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius and the Roman Emperor Aurelius (270-275 AD), it is also a synonym for the silkworm's chrysalis (as well as for Lepidopterist, the student of the insect world), and most strikingly of all, as an adjective it denotes a golden colour.⁶⁹ What is so striking about the use of this reference is that, within the metaphor of authorship as alchemy in mind, the name Aurelian works to reinforce the alchemical transformation of Pierre. Melville may well have been acquainted with William Harrison Ainsworth's urban gothic novel featuring alchemists who disturb both the patriarchal and commercial order in London, *Auriol, or the Elixir of Life* (1845), initially serialised in *Ainsworth's Magazine* during 1844 and 1845.

At this very moment in the novel, Pierre is in a cocoon, between his earlier life at the Glendinning estate as patriarch and patron of Saddle Meadows, and his new existence as part of an urban community of outcasts at the Church of the Apostles. He is also in a state of transformation between that of an aristocratic genteel author and a serious metaphysical didactic novelist. The dross of his lyrics, the fake sunshine of light verse, will have to change into the Aurelian colour of his radical prose masterpiece that he hopes will illuminate mankind as to the truth of their situation.

During Pierre's transformative stage, the protagonist has the following idea: "though the soul of man doth assuredly contain one latent element of intellectual

⁶⁸ An extract from Lewis H Hughes book on Aurelian Townshend can be found on <<http://home.worldonline.co.za/~townshend/aureliantownshend.htm>> 12 October 2005.

⁶⁹ See the online *Oxford English Dictionary*: <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50014876?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=aurelian&first=1&max_to_show=10> 12 October 2005.

productiveness; yet never was there a child born solely from one parent; the visible world of experience being that procreative thing which impregnates the muses; self-reciprocally efficient hermaphrodites being but a fable” (P 259). This is a crucial thought in Pierre’s mind with regards to the gender politics of *Pierre*. Pierre does not seem to believe in the alchemical ideal of the self-generative hermaphrodite that symbolises a utopian androgynous ideal – the ever fluid state of masculine and feminine principles that flow into each other in order to form an organic whole. Pierre’s thought suggests a typically Romantic idealism in which he invokes a female muse, whom, as a male artist, he cannibalises. There is, however, a significant difference between the theory of idealist inspiration that the narrator places in Pierre’s mind and the female muse of the Romantics. In Pierre’s thought it is not the female muse who stands at the root of poetic inspiration, but “the visible world of experience” which “impregnates” the muse, who together with the author is involved in the creative act. Pierre’s image of artistic creation describes his relationship to Isabel, who functions as the vital creative force that has transformed him into a radical visionary author. According to Person, “not only does [Melville] affirm the artist’s need for experience of the world, but he expresses that need in language which equates creativity with female sexual identity and relationship” (Person, *Headaches* 80). Person also argues that Isabel is no Romantic muse figure. According to him, “more than merely Pierre’s inspiration, she serves as a guide to a condition of social alienation but private, male-female relationship” (Person, *Headaches* 81). Pierre needs to refute the social world dominated by patriarchal traditions in which Isabel can only be a seamstress, a sister or a wife, in order to acknowledge her as his superior visionary guide – the alchemical Sophia, who in contrast to domestic ideology, is wisdom personified.

The narrator, describing Pierre’s transformation under the influence of Isabel, is not alone in utilizing alchemical metaphors. Crucially, the narrator’s and Pierre’s language merge when Pierre himself refers to his early writings, contained in the chest he has brought with him from his ancestral estate, as “Trash, Dross, Dirt!” Isabel asks: “Pierre! Pierre! What change is this?” She reprimands Pierre: “didst thou not tell me, ere we came hither, that thy chest not only contained some silver and gold, but likewise far more precious things, readily convertible into silver and gold? Ah, Pierre, thou didst swear we had naught to fear!” (P 272). Isabel’s question to Pierre takes the analogy between alchemy and authorship that was introduced in the preceding chapter to its logical conclusion. Pierre views his writings as fragments of the philosopher’s stone with which he can multiply the little mound of gold and silver already in his possession. The rhetoric of the narrator and the imagery used by the figures in the novel merge into one style during this section. During the first half of the novel, the narrator’s ironic commentary clashed with Pierre’s pensive seriousness and self-deception. By utilizing alchemical metaphors in articulating Pierre’s transformation from aristocratic sentimental poet into esoteric visionary, the narrator takes Pierre’s own point of view, reinforcing the serious, philosophical and idealistic tone of the second half of the narrative – even if Pierre himself ultimately remains self-deceived. His self-deception is now not mocked for satire, but is the fatal flaw that, as in Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher,” brings on the tragedy of his and Isabel’s death.

What is crucial about the alchemical metaphors used in the pivotal section of *Pierre* is that, just as in Godwin's *St Leon* and Bulwer's *Zanoni*, the alchemical project is linked to altruistic motives. Pierre's secret art developed under the guidance of Isabel, like Zanoni's art developed while under the spell of the musician Viola, is a secret art that has as its object the complete transformation of the social fabric. The metaphor of the author as alchemist develops in parallel with a growing anti-bourgeois capitalist sentiment in the narrator's observations on the urban society in which Pierre is now situated. The dominant socio-economic state of affairs is referred to as "that doctrine which the world actually and eternally practices, of giving unto him who already hath more than enough, still more of the superfluous article, and taking away from him who hath nothing at all, even that which he hath" (P 262). By joining the "remarkable company of poets, philosophers, and mystics of all sorts," the "poor and penniless devils...resolutely revelling in the region of blissful ideals," who had gradually filled up the vacant chambers of the old church now known as the Apostles, Pierre is joining a subculture that is rebelling against the individualistic materialism that had become increasingly dominant in the American social make-up since the Jacksonian period (P 330, 267).⁷⁰

Basically, the Apostles are Melville's nineteenth-century squatters, eco-punkers and anti-globalist idealists, who differently, but not entirely dissimilar to Brian Roberts' gold-hunters, are bound together by their refusal to participate in the dominant social structure. The narrator describes how the various "Teleological theorists, and Social Reformers" did not invent their name themselves but were dubbed by the outside world as Apostles (P 268). As such "the occupants of the venerable church began to come together out of their various social dens, in more social communion; attracted toward each other by a title common to all." This very social convergence of a "company of harmless people" into an organised group of altruistic Apostles, leads the establishment to secretly suspect that they have "some mysterious ulterior object, vaguely connected with the absolute overturning of Church and State, and the hasty and premature advance of some unknown great political and religious Millennium" (P 269). Wynn Kelley points out that the Apostles can also be approached as a "radical utopian brotherhood" and even though "Melville's narrator mocks their transcendentalism that feasts on Graham crackers and water, presided over by the faintly ghoulish guru, Plotinus Plinlimmon...at least Pierre has found a community congenial to his newly conceived revolt against house and home" (Kelley 103, 106).⁷¹

It is here that, with the mystical guidance of Isabel, Pierre starts his attempt at writing his book with both "the burning desire to deliver what he thought to be new, or at least miserably neglected Truth to the World; and the prospective menace of being absolutely penniless, unless by the sale of his book, he could realize money" (P 283). Like Zanoni, whose primary concern in marrying Viola was to affect a spiritual and material

⁷⁰ In chapter two of *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America*, Guarneri uses the term "apostles" to speak about the group of utopianists that Albert Brisbane, the voice of Fourierism in America, gathered together to form an organised and vocal associationist movement. Melville may well be consciously referring to these radical figures in *Pierre*.

⁷¹ The elusive Plotinus Plinlimmon is Melville's Mejnour the mystic of "non-benevolence" whose main character trait was neither "Malice nor Ill-will; but something passive" (P 290). Like Zanoni, Pierre needs to learn to break with such a mystical idealism and to embrace society.

union that superseded the laws of marriage, Pierre too, Kelley explains, “tries to oppose the family hierarchy by creating a spiritual fraternity that will obliterate the traditional power relations of marriage” (Kelley 104). The narrator here describes the major paradox in all the benevolent projects undertaken by the gothic alchemists from St Leon to Zanoni. St Leon’s benevolent actions lead only to more accusations of a credulous public who need to know where his capital is coming from; Zanoni’s powers are only useful so far as he willing to sacrifice them for an even higher ideal; Chillingworth’s alchemy enables him to break down naturalised masculine structures of authority and the hypocritical nature of one its representatives, but, as he is increasingly incorporated into the dominant culture as a physician, his radicalism is stifled. Like Godwin, Alcott or Warren, Pierre fails to transform society as a whole, because he is recognised by those in power as a menace to the hegemonic ideology instead of a liberator.

Pierre, like Godwin and Bulwer, is stuck in a double bind. His alchemy of authorship can only reap real metaphysical gold when he allows his creation to be incorporated in the capitalist publishing world, which will turn his radical literary project into a consumer object. His philosophical idealism needs to be reduced to a material exchangeable product for it to be able to have effect on the society he wants to illuminate. But as consumer product its radical potential is already partly stifled as it becomes absorbed within the dominant cultural ideology. The narrator explains the demands of the material world on his philosophical idealism:

at length, domestic matters – rent and bread – had come to such a pass with him, that whether or no, the first pages must go to the printer; and this was added still another tribulation; because the printed pages now dictated to the following manuscript, and said to all the subsequent thoughts and inventions of Pierre – *Thus and thus; so and so; else an ill match*. Therefore, was his book already limited, bound over, and committed to imperfection, even before it had come to any confirmed form or conclusion at all (P 338).

Unlike Isabel’s and Zanoni’s wisdom, which is the unwritten wisdom taught by a close encounter with a vital natural force, Pierre’s wisdom, as yet, is the masculine wisdom of the authoritative printed page, printed pages that now gain authority over his mystical vision and dictate his pen. Like Glyndon, who learns to reject the knowledge available in the aloof and solitary Mejnour’s books, Pierre needs to reject the authority of the printed word, symbolised by the pamphlet written by Plinlimmon, who can be identified as Melville’s Mejnour, whose mesmeric stare holds Pierre captive.

Like Zanoni, as Delamotte explains, “Pierre is trying to make public a knowledge the public cannot appreciate anyway, and his very publishers are in the end an insuperable barrier of ‘Steel, Flint & Asbestos’” (Delamotte 79). As with St Leon and Frankenstein, Pierre’s downfall in the plot is caused by his failure to recognise that his utopianism calls for an open if dissident engagement with the world, from a position in the margins of society. Instead, the narrator suggests, using imagery allusive to *Frankenstein* and also analogous to Bulwer’s description of Mejnour, “in a city of hundreds of thousands of

human beings, Pierre was solitary as at the Pole” (P 338). In the Godwinian spirit, he was “resolved to give the world a book, which the world should hail with surprise and delight”; however,

while Pierre was thinking that he was entirely transplanted into a new and wonderful element of Beauty and Power, he was, in fact, but in one of the stages of the transition. That ultimate element once fairly gained, then books no more are needed for buoys to our soul; our own strong limbs support us, and we float over all bottomlessness with a jeering impunity. He did not see, - or if he did, he could not yet name the true cause of it, - that already, in the incipency of his work, the heavy unmalleable element of mere book-knowledge would not congenially weld with the wide fluidness and ethereal airiness of spontaneous creative thought (P 283).

The narrator continues his alchemical metaphor by describing how in fact “two books were being writ; of which the world shall only see one and that the bungled one. The larger book, and the infinitely better, is for Pierre’s own private self.” As with the traditional alchemist, Pierre labour is analogous to a spiritual quest. Therefore, as Pierre develops in his thought, he comes to the point where “he could not now be entertainingly and profitably shallow in some pellucid and merry romance” (P 304). He has reached the point in his life where the paradox of the alchemical point of view forces him to choose to go either one way or the other. The dominant ideology of antebellum American society is forcing him to choose either the wholly spiritual path – becoming a disciple of Plinlimmon, or the material path – becoming a best-selling novelist. St Leon too had had to choose between two extremes: confined domesticity, or alienated alchemist. Zanon had to make a similar choice: a fruitful intellectual as well as domestic life with Viola, or a cold and detached spiritualism in Mejnour’s secret brotherhood of immortals. Like Pierre, both alchemists refuse to choose the options given them by society and attempt to merge both in an idealistic project, with varying success. St Leon attempts to use his powers to save a war torn Hungary from dire poverty, but his lingering aristocratic habit of continually publicly displaying his wealth undermines his project. Zanon, more successfully, tries to stem the tide of the Reign of Terror, but has to offer himself up in the process. Significantly, the idea of mystical brotherhoods in *Zanon*, as in Lippard’s alchemical gothic novels, is portrayed as a purely masculine realm; while Lippard seems to champion this homosocial idealism, *Zanon*, by illustrating the alchemical herbalist’s benevolent socially engaging mysticism by means of a spiritual and material union with the visionary female artist Viola, foregrounds an androgynous social idealism, in which wisdom and the power and authority it gives the individual is un-gendered.

Like the gothic alchemist of Godwin and Bulwer, Pierre tries to fuse the actual and the ideal. His alchemy of writing is an attempt to change the structure of society by transforming his visionary mysticism into consumable print. But as Elliott explains, “Pierre lacks the power and imagination to escape the bonds of the established ideology” (Elliott, *Problem* 348). While “he may rebel against old beliefs, Pierre cannot escape them, lest he

completely lose his sense of self,” because he is still too reliant on “an either/ or, saint/ sinner, Ramisitic logic.” Pierre’s labour is an attempt to merge the public and private spheres of business and domesticity, to make public his private ideal, but it is doomed to fail as long as he rejects Isabel as an integral part of his own identity. Elliot explains that “Pierre cannot commit what he believes to be incest with Isabel because his sense of guilt and his moral values are too much a part of his individual identity”; the forces of the dominant ideology are still too strong for Pierre’s developing idealism (Elliott, *Problem* 345). Pierre’s Isabel-inspired vision of a metaphorical fusion of active male and female principles – unified through real experience – that will bring forth his philosophical child, collapses as he fails to shake off the ideology of gender polarization on which his youthful identity was founded. This abstract idea is given material shape in the novel. Just as St Leon’s alchemical laboratory is sacked by a mob of invading peasants who fear him as a sorcerer, Pierre’s literary hermitage at the Apostles is forcefully intruded by the figures that represent the bifurcated public and private worlds of antebellum society.

All at once Lucy, the symbol of rigid domestic femininity, and Glen and Fred, public aristocratic masculinity personified –barge into his newfound community, and assume once again control over his life, reinforcing the orthodox family and community boundaries that make up the dominant ideology that give these men their identities and the prerogative to force their way into Pierre’s new-found home. Because these figures represent the law, it is they who decide who is lawless. Consequently, they set about to demonise Pierre for adopting a new family within a new community that stands as a dissident example to the socio-political structure that gives them their identity.

The final chapters of the book take the form of a clash between the dominant culture and a resisting subculture, in the shape of the trio in Pierre’s apartment. First Glen and Fred are thrown out of the Church of the Apostles “as two disorderly youths invading the sanctuary of a private retreat” (*P* 326), and then Pierre is similarly arrested by many hands, after his desperate murder of Glen, whose legal and psychological machinations have driven Pierre to become the “Mr. Monster” (*P* 329). Like the alchemists St Leon and Zanoni, Pierre’s chosen path, his choice to exist between the categories that define the individual within antebellum society, has turned him into a monster in the eyes of those who prescribe to the dominant ideology. From this moment onwards, Pierre comes increasingly to look like Melville’s most famous outsider, Bartleby the scrivener. Even his fate, death in the dungeon of Sing-Sing, foreshadows the mysterious copyist’s end. Just as Pierre’s room is situated above law offices, Bartleby constructs his own hermitage within a law office. The “mysterious professor of the flute” who lives in the Apostles’ church may well have been Bartleby, who “replies in a flute-like tone” (*PT* 22). There is a significant interfigural link between Bartleby and Pierre that should be explored, as it can shed light on the philosophical complexity of what seems to be the melodramatic ending of *Pierre*.

Bartleby’s non-conformist stance, leads the lawyer to reflect that Bartleby “seemed alone, absolutely alone in the universe” (*PT* 32). From the lawyer’s capitalist perspective, the youthful clerk who refuses to work becomes an “Incubus” (*PT* 38). The lawyer becomes fearful that the ubiquitous Bartleby will outlive him and by simply being around will inherit his property. Rogin argues that “Bartleby” undermines the dominant

conception of community because Bartley “drains his surroundings of the humanity in which the lawyer would like to believe” (Rogin 196). He also argues that “Bartley’s hermitage is no escape from society,” but a confrontation with society being situated within the lawyer’s own private office (Rogin 200). The lawyer is complicit with the dominant ideology and Rogin argues that he “needs to erect boundaries, for Bartley is boundaryless and insatiable” (Rogin 196). His conscious passivity and unproductiveness undermine the highly gendered social categories the lawyer uses to make sense of his world. Like Pierre’s mother, and Glen Stanley, the lawyer’s panic is the result of a fear of losing possession and control. Failing to position Bartley within his expected masculine role as office clerk, the lawyer tries to place Bartley in a feminine role, asking him to come home with him.

Bartley, analogous to the alchemists in his seemingly utter self-sufficiency, and refusal to conform to the ideologically prescribed masculine role in antebellum society, becomes a highly subversive force. As in *Pierre*, this force is contained only through legal coercion. Both Pierre and Bartley, in their adopted mystical mysteriousness, threaten to undermine the authority of the law, and both end up victims of the system. Pierre’s greatest mistake in the novel – foreshadowed by St Leon, but not made by Zanoni – is his inability to take up Lucy and Isabel’s offer to become co-authors of his work. In his earlier vision, Pierre had realised how he needed to accept a vital female wisdom and actual experience of the world, if he were to become the visionary author he wished to be. Even though Pierre is offered the means by which to realise this ideal, pressures from the past – his mother’s suicide and Glen and Fred’s patriarchal threats, together with the demands of his publishing firm – keep him from realising this ideal. Lucy says to Pierre “see Isabel and I have both offered to be thy amanuenses; - not in mere copying, but in the original writing; I am sure that would greatly assist thee.” Pierre’s fatal reply is, “Impossible! I fight a duel in which all seconds are forbid” (P 349). Like the education of Reginald de St Leon and Frankenstein (both deluded idealists), Pierre’s youthful education that lead him to view the world through lenses of gender polarization led him to perceive his own radical project as a one-*man* duel with a hegemonic ideology. Such entrenchment with a residual masculine heroic ideology bars him from positive action, as he can only kill his cousin Glen Stanley, who stands for everything Pierre despises in orthodox society.

Like St Leon, Pierre the author as alchemist has rid himself of much of the earlier ideological forces that constituted his character, but he has not been able to fully distance himself from the concept of manhood that underscored his earlier existence at Saddle Meadows. Therefore, his challenge to society fails, as he is fighting with the enemies’ weapons. He should have accepted the necessity of equal partnership between individuals, which Zanoni did. Had Pierre allowed Isabel and Lucy entrance to his study, so that they could have joined in his radical artistic project, his transformation and alternative conception of community would have been realised. Pierre enters the Apostles as one with Isabel. He then sets out to redefine the old gendered divisions between domestic and commercial labour, by refusing Isabel an active part in the creative writing process, thus

breaking their intellectual equal partnership.⁷² By refusing Isabel's active participation Pierre fails to activate the radical potential that is inherent in his art. As a consequence, Pierre comes no further than parodying the world outside of the Apostles. His newfound family and community disintegrate with his novel.

According to Kelley "the religion of the American family, Melville implies, demands the worship of false idols. Melville's alternative is not, as it might appear, radical individualism, for Pierre's iconoclastic writing is rooted in an egalitarian, communal domesticity." She wonders, however, why Melville did not "make Pierre's utopian community a triumph of ideal love and sacrifice," as Bulwer did (Kelley 110). This question can be answered by returning to the alchemical metaphors with which Pierre's utopian project is described. From the perspective of the narrator, Pierre, the disinherited incestuous aristocrat, caught in the ideology that initially constructed his sense of self, is doomed to suffer the power of the dominant patriarchal law that Fred and Glen Stanley bring down upon him. But Pierre the author, as alchemical idealist, like Bannadonna, dies in a grand solitary act of defiance towards this very ideology. As with Zanoni's idealistic sacrifice, to ensure the life of the philosophical child, Pierre's death lets loose into the world an alternative, unofficial story that undermines the dominant ideology. The official story about Pierre's death in the Tombs of New York highlights his crime, murder, and his status as a social outcast. His and Isabel's mutual suicide through a mysterious vial of poison, however, can also be read as the final consummation of their alchemical marriage, in which the earthly dichotomies of male and female, sun and moon, actual and ideal merge into a single identity. The power of the universal solvent marks the end of the story in their death, but also the birth of Melville's novel in the marketplace, with potentially radical effect; as Kelley has also argued, "to readers in the twentieth century...Pierre offers a radical reading of the gender roles and domestic structures that have produced profound distress in middle-class culture" (Kelley 110). Kelley does not specify what this radical reading entails, apart from a thorough critique of antebellum domesticity. Bercovitch argues even that *Pierre* should be read as "a tragicomedy of downward mobility," which presents "an inversion not only of the self-made man but of the self-reliant idealist" (Bercovitch 119). As the analysis above has shown, however, another way to read *Pierre* is as a magico-political tale in which the alchemical metaphors point towards a form of androgynous idealism that, through its very repression by the dominant order in the novel, illustrates how the ideology of gender polarization that upholds the dominant order is in fact an artificial construct reliant for its apparent naturalness on the successful coercive practices of patriarchal tradition and custom – and *man-made* law. *Pierre*, like *Zanoni* and *The Scarlet Letter*, is a utopian fiction in the exact sense of the word, a futurist manifesto of what is possible, while illustrative of a dystopian present.

⁷² In various alchemical legends the alchemist conducts his experiments necessarily together with a soror mystica, who not only aids the alchemist, but takes an active part in the experiments. Pierre, the author as alchemist, rejects this idealism of a gender harmony action.