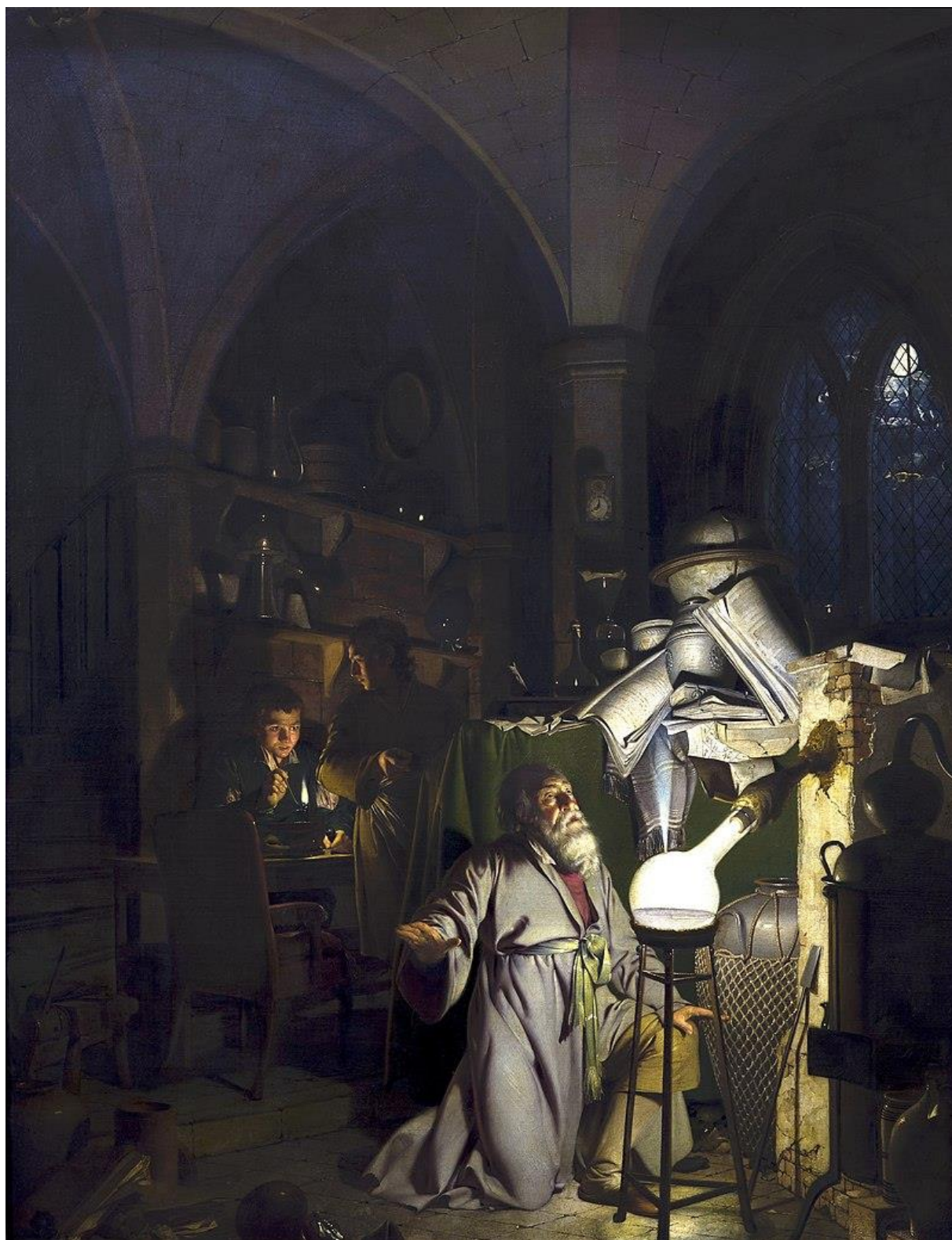


Literary Alchemy and the Transformation of the Transformation

William Thomas Fesmire



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## Abstract

Alchemy is a pseudoscience that has persisted throughout millennia as a result of its own ability to change while retaining its primary purpose: transformation. What began as a means of wielding and evolving metals developed into both a scientific and spiritual quest. Eventually, alchemy was no longer considered a viable science; however, it became a philosophical and psychological framework for analyzing internal transformation. This transformation of alchemy can be seen in literature throughout time. Authors have incorporated elements of the alchemical process into their own works, creating a “literary alchemy” with the same purpose of transformation. After an introduction to alchemy and literary alchemy, this thesis will present four permutations of literary alchemy in Western Literature—William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, and J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter*—in three separate time periods to demonstrate how literary alchemy both reflects the attitudes towards alchemy in the respective time period and remains consistent in its message of transformation.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments		5
Dedication		6
<i>Preparation</i>	An Introduction to Alchemy and Literary Alchemy	8
<i>Nigredo</i>	The Alchemy of the Stage	20
<i>Albedo</i>	Refining Literary Alchemy through <i>Frankenstein</i>	36
<i>Rubedo</i>	A Conclusion through <i>Harry Potter</i> , Jung, and Nostalgia	56
Bibliography		71

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Dedication

To those  
who raised me

To those  
who helped me

To those  
who made me who I am today  
and kept me sane along the way

I thank you, I love you, and I would not be here without you

CLERVAL: Your master is a studious Chemist—nay, as I sometimes suspect, an alchemist.

FRITZ: Eh! Ah, I think he is. What is an alchemist, Mr. Clerval?

CLERVAL: Does he not sometimes speak of the art of making gold?

— *Presumption; or the Fate of Frankenstein*, 1823, Richard Brinsley Peake

If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections, and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not benefitting the human mind. If this rule were always observed; if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquility of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved; Caesar would have spared his country; America would have been discovered more gradually; and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed.

But I forget that I am moralising in the most interesting part of my tale; and your looks remind me to proceed.

— *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, 1818, Mary Shelley

*Preparation: An Introduction to Alchemy and Literary Alchemy*

In an 1839 article for *Frazier's Magazine for Town and Country*, an anonymous alchemist wrote the following regarding the alchemical process:

*The philosopher's stone, then, was a composition which contained such proportions of nitre, sulphur, and mercury as were necessary to produce any given transmutation in any given metals under the action of electricity, when in a state of fusion. For want of knowing this plain and universal definition, a thousand crude and absurd remarks have been made on the subject of alchemy, by people who, in fact, did not know what they were talking about (An Alchemist, 451).*

The unnamed alchemist argues that alchemy as a scientific process is a worthwhile pursuit for its past scientific contributions and potential breakthroughs, but, in an age of industrialization and rationality, such a claim was either ignored or ridiculed. Today, a common, cursory understanding of alchemy revolves primarily around two concepts: making gold and achieving immortality. While these two desires were considered byproducts of the alchemical procedure, this knowledge provides only a partial understanding of a process that is more complicated in its influences on science, philosophy, spirituality, and art. Authors throughout history have adopted the tenets of alchemy and have created a “literary alchemy” with a similar goal of sparking transformation in the reader. Furthermore, alchemy and literary alchemy themselves have transformed over the course of history to continue as powerful symbolism, a thought-provoking ideology, and an effective method of storytelling.

Alan Rudrum acknowledges that the most basic understanding of alchemy relies on the existence of a “substance, most commonly known as the philosophers’ stone, which possessed the property of bringing each created thing to the state of perfection proper to itself” (470).



Alchemy is concerned with the transmutation of base metals and ores into gold and the discovery of the philosopher's stone, which provides its wielder the secret to immortality. Through consistent heating, cooling, refinement, and addition of materials, the alchemist hopes to speed up the natural processes of time and create the philosopher's stone, also named the "*opus alchymicum*" (Eliade, 78) or "*opus circulatorium*" (Abraham, 137). The philosopher's stone, said to be the fifth element or quintessence, is an amalgamation of each for the four elements—earth, air, water, and fire—and shares the qualities of the quarrelling contraries in order to achieve a harmonious peace above all else (Abraham, 138).

The process of creating the philosopher's stone has three stages: the *nigredo*, *albedo*, and *rubedo*. However, the three stages of the alchemical process hint at something more profound than wealth or power. Yes, alchemy is a field of transformation: the process of transmuting base ores into gold, with the hope of eventually finding the secret to immortality. Beyond that, alchemy is also a transmutation of the self, a desire to transform into a better individual, worthy of achieving that immortality. Michael Maier, an early-seventeenth-century German alchemist, describes the dual aim of alchemy in his *Symbola aurae mensae duodecim nationum*: "There is in our chemistry a certain noble substance, in the beginning whereof is wretchedness with vinegar, but in its ending joy with gladness. Therefore I have supposed that the same will happen to me, namely that I shall suffer difficulty, grief, and weariness at first, but in the end shall come to glimpse pleasanter and easier things" (568). This transmutation of the alchemist is reflected in the transformation of the matter with which an alchemist works. The *nigredo*, the first and "black" stage in the alchemical process, returns the metal to its most primitive, chaotic state, the *prima materia*. As alchemists believe that regeneration cannot occur without corruption, the living spirit of the material is first killed or putrefied so that it can be reborn as something

greater. Alchemists themselves undergo a similar regression in order to properly begin the alchemical process. Alchemists endure periods of intense fasting, prayer, and self-imposed celibacy in order to obtain a “ritual purity” (Eliade, 56) and reflect the raw matter with which they work. The *albedo* or “white” stage follows the *nigredo*. Through the circulation of heating and cooling through fire and mercurial waters, the *prima materia* transmutes into a pure and spotless white stone. This stage prepares the spirit of the material to be reunited with the body. As “the mind must be in harmony with the work” (Norton, 519), alchemists also hope that they may grow with the matter they purify through the *albedo* and become worthy of the end result of the alchemical process. In the final transformative stage of the *opus alchymicum*, the *rubedo* or “red” stage, the alchemic sulfur and fire heat the white matter and, with that heat, imbue it with a red tincture. The *rubedo* is the chemical wedding between the body and spirit of the material, creating an immortal substance capable of bestowing that power upon others (Abraham, Eliade, Granger).

The chemical wedding, also known as the *conjunctio*, is the crowning achievement of the alchemical process, signifying the successful creation of the philosopher’s stone. Titus Burckhardt describes the chemistry of the chemical wedding as the terrestrial reflection of astrology: “On ‘chemical marriage’ quicksilver takes unto itself Sulphur, and Sulphur, quicksilver. Both forces ‘die,’ as foes and lovers. Then the changing and reflective moon of the soul unites with the immutable sun of the spirit so that it is extinguished, and yet illumined, at one and the same time” (155-156). In Abraham’s definition, the alchemical wedding assumes a power beyond chemistry:

“Metaphysically, the chemical wedding is the perfect union of creative will or power (male) and wisdom (female) to produce pure love (the child, the Stone). The creation of

this Stone always involves some kind of sacrifice or death. Thus emblems of the chemical wedding almost always include emblems of death which overshadow the *conjunctio*...the death at the wedding symbolizes the extinction of the earlier differentiated state before union, and also powerfully conveys the alacrity with which the festive moment of the coagula or wedding is transformed into the lamentation of the solve or death.” (37)

The chemical wedding creates the stone, unifies the soul and mind of the alchemist, and ends the alchemical process. However, the chemical wedding is incredibly difficult to achieve.

Alchemists generally believe that only by undergoing the process oneself, with complete reverence for the work one is doing, can an alchemist reach the final stage and complete the *opus alchymicum*. If one is unsuccessful, the failure results from an inability to correctly participate in the alchemical process themselves, and the alchemist must try again.

While the specific procedure itself has changed throughout time, these three stages are considered imperative to complete the process; Burckhardt notes that “black is the absence of colour and light. White is purity; it is undivided light—light not broken down into colours. Red is the epitome of light, its zenith and its point of greatest intensity” (182). The alchemist who has achieved this state in the matter has also achieved a purification and perfection of the self and can wield the immense power of the philosopher’s stone. Through this metamorphosis, the terrestrial material and the alchemist become connected in order to create something more powerful within both of them.

The aim of internal transformation becomes clearer upon learning the transmutation of alchemy itself. There are no consensus dates regarding the attitudes towards alchemy, yet there exist several different interpretations of the practice in different time periods and cultures. One

such interpretation of an alchemist occurs in Joseph Wright of Derby's 1711 painting: *The Alchymist, in Search of the Philosopher's Stone, Discovers Phosphorous, and prays for the successful Conclusion of his operation, as was the custom of the Ancient Chymical Astrologers*.

Included on the cover page, this painting depicts an old, white, European man—German alchemist Hennig Brand—in stasis, with his hands suspended, in awe of the discovery that he has just made. The alchemist has dedicated his life to the search for immortality, beginning at the age of the young apprentices behind him. He has aged over the course of his journey in the field, and he has been transformed by it. The alchemist, astonished by the light escaping the hole in the flask, hopes the transformation that has taken place may echo his, with the knowledge that the boys in the back will one day take his place, continue his work, and repeat the cycle. *The Alchemist Discovering Phosphorous*, with the vaulted Gothic ceilings and urine-free interior, romanticizes the ideals of alchemy, yet it is one interpretation of a science that has undergone a journey that has transformed over millennia, beginning in the forge, travelling through religion and reason, continuing into mysticism, and persisting into whatever form it may take in the future.

Mircea Eliade notes that “what the smelter, smith and alchemist have in common is that all three lay claim to a particular magico-religious experience in their relations with matter” (8) and that the transformation of their goals reflects their evolving relationship with said matter. According to Eliade, the alchemist was born in the forges of the Iron Age, which started between 1200 and 600 BCE depending on the region. Alchemy began as a means of survival and conquest, in the age of metallurgy. Man sought to take the metal from the earth and create both tools to cultivate the land and weapons to seize and protect it. Because of this association of metal with life and survival, metal was imbued with a religious and sacred awe. Common belief

held that metals were found inside the womb of the Earth Mother, who cultivated these metals to perfection. Because metallurgists “transform[ed] embryos (i.e. ores) into metals by accelerating the growth already begun inside the mother” (51), they assumed the revered position as nurturer. Therefore, miners and blacksmiths, who were highly respected for their work, starved themselves and remained celibate to better achieve the purity necessary to mine and wield these metals, for such rites “were ordained by the very nature of the operation to be conducted” (56).

The practice of alchemy also originated from this belief in the Earth Mother. Early alchemists believed that the Earth Mother nurtured and cared for the metals as they grew and evolved, from base metals into gold and finally into the immortal life-giver that would become known as the philosopher’s stone. In the minds of early alchemists, transmutation was a natural process that occurred through time. Alchemists believed that they could aid in this natural process: “The tendency of Nature is to perfection. But since gold is the bearer of a highly spiritual symbolism...it is obvious that a new idea [wa]s coming into being: the idea of the part assumed by the alchemist as the brotherly savior of Nature” (52). The alchemical procedure only sped up these natural processes, meaning that alchemists were wielding and advancing Time, for “what Nature cannot perfect in a vast space of time we can achieve in a short space of time by our art” (Geber).

Alchemy became a popular scientific study because it was closely related to natural processes, as seen in its supposed relation to the Earth Mother. Furthermore, because of its relationship to the process of creation and transformation, alchemy lent itself to answering questions such as man’s relationship to both creation and a creator: scientists most concerned with the physical transmutation even noted that “their work was analogous to the redemptive work of Christ—analogous as being essentially the same cosmic process operating on different

levels of being” (Rudrum, 470). The spiritual and religious aspects of alchemy that were present from its inception became clearer when science and religion began to diverge. Carl Jung notes that at some point “the chemist and the Hermetic philosopher parted company” (227). Although scientists as late as Isaac Newton believed in the scientific potential of alchemy and remnants of alchemy can be found in the fields of medicine and chemistry, alchemy gradually became seen as a pseudoscience (Gilbert). However, the spiritual and philosophical characteristics of alchemy persisted. The idea of internal alchemical transformation, whether it be through self-determination or the grace and power of a creator, was key to the development of Hatha-yoga and tantrism, Taoism, Greek philosophy, and even Christian tradition (Eliade, Jung).

In order to keep up with the changing world around it, alchemy has transformed since its beginnings in the forge. In order to convey this message of transformation—of matter, mind, or man—alchemy itself adapted. This consistence in purpose was not lost upon artists, who used their works to convey this message of internal transformation, a technique called literary alchemy. Acclaimed Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky once said, “The aim of art is to prepare a person for death, to plough and harrow his soul, rendering it capable of turning to good.” Having studied ancient alchemical texts after noticing alchemical imagery within the dreams of his patients, Carl Jung noticed similar imagery within the classical epic. While he suggests an unconscious adoption of alchemical symbolism in literary texts, many critics argue that some authors have intentionally used the imagery of alchemy in their works. Alchemy itself lends to artistic representation. Alchemists argued that the philosophical experience of matter, being esoteric and difficult to understand, could only be adequately expressed in symbol, emblem, paradox, and allegory (Abraham). Furthermore, alchemists also used symbolic language to protect their research, claiming that they could not allow the “ungodly, foolish, slouthful, and

unthankful hypocrites” (Debus, 62) to experience alchemical truth. As a result, alchemical symbols are ambiguous, multidimensional, and flexible, allowing a malleability for authors employing literary alchemy. Jung’s research into alchemical imagery in the unconscious and the dreams of his patients further suggests a “collective unconscious” in relation to these symbols that allows an author easier access to convey this message of internal transformation.

While many varieties of art have utilized alchemy in order to convey this message of transformation, the focus of this thesis is literary alchemy. Literary alchemy is an explicit or implicit allusion to alchemy in a piece of literature in order to achieve an internal transformation within the reader. This transformation can result from witnessing a proper alchemical process within the protagonist, seen in *The Tempest* and *Harry Potter*. The author can also present an improper alchemical process by characters who seek only the benefits of alchemy without undergoing a similar transformation, an appropriation that occurs in *The Alchemist* and *Frankenstein*. Both demonstrations of alchemy hope to spark some transformation in the reader. I have found four different methods authors have used in order to incorporate the alchemical transformation into their works: imagery and symbolism, character transformation, structure, and adaptation and evolution of previous work. I believe literary alchemy to be some amalgamation of these literary techniques; however, as alchemists rarely shared “the same opinion regarding the exact course of the process and sequence of its stages” (Jung, 228), these four methods are not definite requirements but analytical concepts through which one can interpret such a work. Furthermore, as alchemy itself changes and transforms throughout time, literary alchemy does as well. Thus, no single framework encompasses an entirety of literary alchemy.

In order to demonstrate how an author may adapt literary alchemy in their work, I will use Sara Teasdale’s 1914 poem, “Alchemy:”

I lift my heart as spring lifts up  
     A yellow daisy to the rain;  
 My heart will be a lovely cup  
     Altho' it holds but pain.

For I shall learn from flower and leaf  
     That color every drop they hold  
 To change the lifeless wine of grief  
     To living gold.

The first and most explicit implementation of literary alchemy is the imagery and symbolism of the practice. Because the esoteric, transformative, and philosophical nature of alchemy lends itself to symbolic representation and the secretive nature of the alchemists, there exists an abundance of images and symbols from which authors can draw for their work. Teasdale's "Alchemy" takes great advantage of that imagery. The first alchemical allusion is to the *citrinitas*. While often excluded from the process of alchemy beginning in the fifteenth century, the *citrinitas* occurs between the *albedo* and *rubedo* and represents a further purification and preparation for the final transmutation in the *rubedo*. Its symbol is the golden flower. The "yellow daisy" is undergoing similar growth and preparation before it fully blooms. Flowers in general also represent "the powdery form of substances obtained by sublimation" (Abraham, 79), which is part of the purification process in the *albedo* and *citrinitas*. Because the philosopher's stone is considered a growing, organic matter, it is often presented as a plant or tree, of which a flower is "an essential part..., that which has attained the fullest perfection" (80).

Rain also plays a role in alchemy, as the "mercurial rain or dew of grace" (42) purifies and whitens the *prima materia* at the bottom of the alchemical vessel, or "cup," preparing the matter and vessel so that they may receive the "'seed' of gold" (42). The narrator's heart serves as that fragile alchemical vessel, in which her grief, or *prima materia*, dwells. From the "flower" and "leaf" the narrator shall witness the power of transformation. The leaf is part of the



philosophical tree, a symbol for the progress of the *opus alchymicum*, of which the leaf and fruit are culminations. As it is the spring time, the leaf is probably a vibrant green, an alchemical color suggesting that the philosopher's stone has been created and is in its infancy. Concerning the "wine of grief," grapes are a symbol for the "raw matter of the stone" and "fruit of the philosophical tree" (Abraham, 89). The juice of grapes (read as wine) is used to dissolve the raw matter of the stone into the *prima materia*: "pour on them sweet Wine till they be inebriated and divided into smallest parts" (Dee, 44). The "wine of grief" breaks down and putrefies the narrator's self so that she may eventually be built back up and transmute into the "living gold," another term for the organic and radiant philosopher's stone.

The second and less explicit presentation of alchemy is that of internal, character transformation. The transmutation of the self is integral to character development in works of literary alchemy. The author hopes that the transformation in the protagonist is reflected in the reader so that they may undergo the alchemical process themselves. In Teasdale's poem, the narrator's internal transformation is representative of this process. The narrator associates the transformative power of "flower and leaf" with the power early alchemists ascribed to Earth Mother. As she undergoes the alchemical process, her heart will no longer hold "pain" but will become "lovely." Teasdale also applies the alchemical transformation to the grieving process. The grief that she experiences is not unlike the *nigredo*, that which breaks down the individual into the rawest of states. Concerning the five stages of the grieving process, denial and anger seem to fit with the *nigredo*, as the individual devolves to their rawest emotions as they begin their road to acceptance. The narrator also describes the *albedo*, as she undergoes a period of growth followed by moments of regression as she comes to terms with the trauma that has occurred. The continual heating and cooling in the *albedo* mirror the growth and regression

occurring in the bargaining and depression stages of the grieving process. Finally, in the *rubedo*, the narrator achieves the internal transformation to “living gold,” accepting the grief that has plagued her, and she has been transformed in a way that has lifted her heart and transformed her outlook on life and other relationships.

In literary alchemy, the alchemical process is also reflected in the structure of the work itself. The least explicit of the methods, structure further contributes to the underlying, unconscious suggestion of literary alchemy. Often, such structural decisions incorporate the numerology present in alchemy. In Teasdale’s “Alchemy,” for example, each stanza is comprised of four lines. Four is an incredibly important number in alchemy, representing both earth and the universe. Considering that there are four ages, four elements, four humours, four seasons, and four cardinal points, the number four suggests harmony with the natural and cosmic world. Another important number in alchemy is two; representative of the doppelganger and reconciliation of opposites that occurs in the albedo, the number two is integral to alchemy. In “Alchemy,” two separate selves exist, one in each stanza. The first stanza presents a narrator in grief, seeking aid, seeking help, seeking waters in which she can heal herself. The second hints the transformation that she is undergoing as well as the product of that transmutation. The number two also represents the alchemical marriage of these two separate selves into the complete *opus alchymicum* (Abraham; Granger, *How*).

Finally, reflecting alchemy itself, literary alchemy is prone to adapt and transform previous work. Consistent allusion to not only the alchemical process but also previous novels, poetry, and plays abound in literary alchemy. Furthermore, these allusions mirror the alchemical process by evolving and transmuting other works of literary alchemy. Teasdale’s “Alchemy” is no exception, pulling from two poems by William Wordsworth. Teasdale’s “yellow daisy”

harkens back to the “golden daffodils” of “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” and both flowers conjure the same reverence of nature present in their respective first stanzas. “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” itself is an alchemical poem discussing the powerful, transformative, and transporting power of nature, bringing man to his most basic existence in order to build him into something more than a man lying on his couch. Similarly, the lifting of the heart described in the first line of “Alchemy” alludes to the first line of “The Rainbow:” “My heart leaps up when I behold” (1). “The Rainbow” also serves as a work of literary alchemy. The rainbow represents the intermediate state between the nigredo and albedo stage and the beginning of new life (Abraham), which is reflected in line three: “So was it when my life began” (4). Teasdale utilizes the knowledge of the poems and their references to transformation and applies these poems to the grieving process.

Alchemy is a practice rich in scientific, philosophical, spiritual, and artistic representation. This theory of transformation itself has transformed throughout the ages, rooted in the earliest stages of humanity and continuing throughout history. Every aspect of alchemy throughout the ages has all built and contributed to the core principle of the practice: transformation. Literary alchemy is no different. Through imagery and symbolism, character transformation, structure, and adaptation authors have introduced alchemy to readers throughout time, and some of the most popular and lasting works of Western literature, including William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist*, Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, and Rowling’s *Harry Potter*, reflect both the different attitudes towards alchemy in their respective time periods as well as the consistent goal of literary alchemy—to spark that same transmutation within the reader.

*Nigredo: The Alchemy of the Stage*

There is no consensus regarding the beginnings of literary alchemy in Western literature. Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* depicts two devious and foolish alchemists. Bonnie Wheeler argues that Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* utilizes alchemical imagery to depict the personal and psychological development of Sir Gareth of Orkney. The Elizabethan and Jacobean stages provide an excellent starting point to witness the transformation that alchemy has undergone. Frances Yates argues that "Elizabethan and Jacobean London was unique in Europe in possessing large numbers of public theatres" (*Theatre*, 92), while David Hawkes notes that "alchemical images and concepts inform the writing of this period to an extent unimaginable to those unfamiliar with its technical terminology" (159), suggesting that a large portion of art and entertainment experienced by Londoners was imbued with some form of alchemy. Specifically, both William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, premier poets of the time period, make use of alchemical imagery in their work. Margaret Healy examines the alchemical imagery Shakespeare uses in his sonnets, and *Romeo and Juliet* is one of the most famous examples of the chemical wedding, the marriage of opposites. Jonson employs the trickery he associates with alchemy in *Volpone*, *Bartholomew Fair*, and several masques, including *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists*. In particular, *The Alchemist* and *The Tempest* are the most overt works of alchemical literature by their respective playwrights. Both plays demonstrate opposing arguments concerning the benefits of the practice in the time period, specifically through their use of alchemy within the fiction of the play and the staging and presentation of the play itself.

Alchemy and scientific thought grew substantially in certain academic circles throughout England in this time period. This growth is most easily associated with mathematician, philosopher, and magus John Dee. F.R. Johnson writes that "during the third quarter of the

century, John Dee and his friends and pupils constituted the scientific academy of England...he set about forming his own library of scientific books and manuscripts, which, by 1583, had grown to over four thousand volumes” (138). Concerning the “scientific academy” about which Dee had such a hold, Yates points out that there existed a “split between science and grammar school and university education in Elizabethan England,” (*Theatre*, 3) and that “the way to get on and to make money in those days was not by displaying uncalled for interest in mathematics, mechanics, and magic” (3). Dee served as advisor to Queen Elizabeth I, a believer in alchemy herself (Flachmann, 260), and his work and interest primarily lay in mathematics, Hermetic philosophy, and alchemy. Dee became a symbol of the alchemical movement in Elizabethan England before his dismissal from service, censure by King James, and eventual death in poverty and disgrace in 1608 (Feingold), though Yates argues that Dee’s reputation was both unwarranted and incorrect, citing modern historians who have properly retitled him “the practical scientist fully abreast of the latest scientific thought, translating it into practical use for the service of his countrymen” (*Theatre*, 7). Justin Kolb notes that Europe was undergoing a “revival of interest in alchemical knowledge” (115) when these plays were written. Yates also acknowledges that this time period saw a new spiritual and cultural movement taking over England: “a ‘Rosicrucian’ type of culture, inheriting the traditions of Renaissance magic as expanded by alchemical and Paracelsist influence, an esoteric approach to religion by involving tolerant and kind attitudes to religious differences, and hope of reconciliation through the younger generations” (*Shakespeare’s*, 118). Rosicrucianism, a combination of beliefs including Hermeticism, Jewish mysticism, and Christian Gnosticism, was becoming prevalent in England around this time, partly due to the studies of Francis Bacon (Gilbert).

Both *The Alchemist* and *The Tempest* exhibit a mastery of the alchemical process as applied to literature. Both plays were written around the same time (Carney, 90), though the exact dates are disputed. The first recorded performance of *The Alchemist* occurred in Blackfriars Theatre in 1610 (Munro), and, after its first performance in court for King James in 1611, *The Tempest* also completed a run at Blackfriars (“Stage History”). However, each play presents alchemy in a different light. *The Alchemist* offers a rejection of this evolution in thought, science, and technology and argues that alchemy, as it was currently being used in England, is a cheap delusion with harmful consequences, while *The Tempest* embraces alchemy as a transformative process.

Jonson’s presentation of his thoughts regarding the current form of alchemy is both direct and punishing. An acrostic poem, which spells THE ALCHEMIST, begins the play and supplies a summary of the events about to occur, namely of the “servent...corrupted,” “A Cheater and his punk,” and the “abuse” that these three “Coz’ners” (Jonson, Argument, 2-3, 4, 9, 6) will inflict on the remaining characters. Using an acrostic poem highlights the trickery and levity that follows. Jonson expands this degrading view of alchemy to the entirety of London in the Prologue:

Our scene is London, ‘cause we would make known

No country’s mirth is better than our own

No clime breeds better matter for your whore,

Bawd, squire, imposter, many persons more,

Whose manners, now called humors, feed the stage;

And which have still been subject for the rage

Or spleen of comic writers. Though this pen

Did never aim to grieve, but better men,  
Howe'er the age he lives in doth endure

The vices that she breeds, above her cure. (Prologue, 5-14)

The Argument and Prologue explicitly state Jonson's attitudes towards the alchemy currently being implemented for material gain and the "abuse" that results.

To emphasize the illusory and dishonest characteristics of alchemy, Jonson strips these aspects from the production of the play. By utilizing and repurposing Aristotelian unities and classical staging, Jonson removes the spectacle from both theater and alchemy, revealing the purpose of both: the exchange of money in order to perform some form of trickery and deception. While describing Jonson's fragile relationship with frequent collaborator and stage designer Inigo Jones, Henry Turner writes the following regarding Jonson's adherence to classical tradition:

Jones seems to have sought to elevate his own art by attributing to it the very ethical purpose—the *architectonikē*—that Sidney had already claimed for poetry, and to have done so on no less authority than that of Aristotle himself. To Jonson, this claim must have seemed like a superlative arrogance, and he responded in kind, this time with a critique 'drawne' from the *Poetics*. There Aristotle has clearly stated that the work of the 'Tire-man' or *skenopoion*—the visual aspects of the play, especially the costume—were the 'least artistic element, the least integral to the art of poetry', and although he had granted the *skenopoion* authority over the poet as far the spectacle itself was concerned, nevertheless he clearly subordinated all the visual or material aspects of performance to the proper object of the poet: the imitation of act. (273)

Johnson implements the three Aristotelian unities—requirements that a play perform a single action, in a single location, within a single day (“Unities”)—within *The Alchemist* to take the illusion out of alchemy and theatre itself.

*The Alchemist* evolves the unity of action by weaving six different deceptions into a single overall presentation of alchemy. Throughout the play, the alchemist Subtle and his cohort of Face and Dol Common perform the following shams: taking over the house of Lovewit for their schemes, fooling Dapper into believing he will win at gambling, tricking Abel Drugger into changing the feng shui of his shop, “tutoring” Kastril in debate, selling Epicure Mammon’s belongings after promising to turn them to gold, and duping Tribulation Wholesome and Ananias to forego religious ethics to further enrich the church. Throughout all of these different plotlines, there is one single action being performed: “abuse” (Argument, 9). Subtle, Face, and Dol Common use their power in order to abuse those gullible enough, desperate enough, or corrupt enough to trust them. This fake alchemy concludes when Face performs a disingenuous “chemical wedding” between Dame Pliant and Lovewit so that he may be forgiven for the chaos he has caused. Jonson utilizes the unity of single action in order to convey a united purpose but also diverges into separate plotlines to highlight the mass disregard these “Coz’ners” have towards each and every individual.

Jonson continues this treatment of the Aristotelian unities with place and time. Sean McEvoy notes that “the play’s most remarkable and important feature is actually its use of time and place” (101). Not only does *The Alchemist* take place almost entirely in a single house in Blackfriars, London, but the first run of the play was staged in Blackfriars Theatre (Carney, 90). Beyond that, the play is set in the modern day:

Were not the pounds told out,



Upon the second day of the fourth week,  
 In the eight month, upon the table dormant,  
 The year of the last patience of the saints,  
 Six hundred and ten? (V.v.101-105).

Establishing *The Alchemist* in modern day England on the approximate date that this run of performances occurred, complete with direct references such as the district in Smithfield colloquially named the “Pie-corner” (I.i.25), encourages the audience to stay within the reality of London instead of some historical battlefield or fantastical island. By keeping the satire within reality, *The Alchemist* “dissolv[es] [alchemy] in the social and material life of London (Kolb, 117). Furthermore, with the exception of a short gap in time between Acts II and III, the play occurs in real time. Jonson evolves the Aristotelian unities of time and place by not only holding to them but also applying them as directly to the audience as possible. By trying to present the play to the audience as real, *The Alchemist* presents the misdeeds that Jonson believes are currently occurring in the world of the audience.

*The Alchemist* continues this demonstration of the dangers of alchemy through its classical staging. From the works of Vitruvius, Jonson developed a strict understanding of ‘scene’ as both the physical location for the actor to perform in relation to the audience and its ‘accessories,’ which, according to Jonson, consisted of minimal set dressing such as a background painting to signify the fictional location (A.W. Johnson, Turner). *The Alchemist* is the epitome of this understanding, with few staging requirements: “a platform, a window, and two or three doors at the rear of the stage, one of them leading to Subtle’s laboratory” (Smallwood, 147). If *The Alchemist* truly concerns itself with “pretence and delusion of all kinds,

with illusion and self-delusion” (146), Jonson acknowledges this delusion within his own play through minimal set design, costumes, and props.

This minimalism is further exemplified through Jonson’s writing of his characters, who serve as types through which *The Alchemist* further demonstrates his distaste towards the spectacle of alchemy and theater. By refusing to succumb to spectacle, *The Alchemist* relies almost entirely on “the imitation of act” to deliver the message: “The play is nothing less than an examination *through* performances of the many operative and quasi-empirical modes of knowledge...of their methods and aims; of their instrumentality, or their claims to transform self, nature, and society; of their seemingly miraculous productive and generative power; and of the different forms of wealth and status that they promised” (Turner, 265). Each accurately-named character demonstrates the corruption of these modes of knowledge Turner describes. Tribulation Wholesome and Ananias, two elders of an Anabaptist community, debate religious and ethical implications of hiring an alchemist to make them wealthy. Ultimately, by differentiating “coining” from “casting” (III.ii.151-152), Subtle convinces the pastors that sacrificing their religious morals is worth it to expand the power of their sect.

No character serves this aim better than Face, the butler of the house in which he, Subtle, and Dol Common pursue their deviousness. Subtle claims Face a homunculus: “Thou vermin, have I ta’en thee out of dung.” (I.i.64). The title of homunculus, a common alchemical symbol and practice that involved growing a human being using human tissue and feces, suggests that Subtle rose Face out of nothing and that only through Subtle’s powers of deception can Face achieve anything. However, as one may suspect from a charlatan and cheat, Subtle is wrong. Face not only turns out to be the most intelligent and deceitful character in the play but also plays tricks on his master Lovewit, Subtle, and the audience. The audience does not learn Face’s true

identity until Act IV, Scene vii, and Face may have kept this secret from the audience if there were no threat of Lovewit's return: "Be silent; not a word, if he call or knock. / I'll into mine old shape again and meet him, / Of Jeremy, the butler" (IV.vii.119-121). Face hides his true identity for nearly twenty-five hundred lines of dialogue before revealing himself to have been wearing a persona the entire play. The audience, on the other hand, never thinks to question his identity before this moment, for, having watched Face transform into Lungs while tricking other characters in the play, they believe that they are in on the tricks and dupes with him. As this moment proves Face untrustworthy to the audience, such deceit is no longer confined to the stage but extends to the theater itself, further blending the reality of the drama with that of the audience.

Face continues this trickery on the audience once more in the Epilogue, in which he invites the audience to dine with him:

yet I put myself

On you, that are my country; and this pelf

Which I have got, if you do quit me, rests,

To feast you often, and invite new guests. (V.v.163-166)

Having witnessed his actions throughout the entirety of the play as well as being deceived themselves, the audience has no reason to trust him or accept any invitation. Face does not reckon with the "foul deed[s]" (Shakespeare, III.iii.74) he performs that day and undergoes no transformation other than that of his own acting. Face also acknowledges that the audience, as his jury, decides his fate. By refraining from applause or refusing to attend future performances, *The Alchemist* will be forced to close, and Face will be no more. However, performance after performance, audiences continue to fill the theatre and participate in the illusion. This self-

referential transformation of actor is reinforced by the fact that Face delivers the Epilogue: “[*The Alchemist*] provided a mocking epilogue, spoken by its most resourceful, and yet most likeable, villain—and, as Clifford Leech observes, the tradition is strong by which the epilogue is spoken by the character closest to the dramatist’s heart” (Smallwood, 145). Through the epilogue, Jonson acknowledges that his creation, a homunculus by the name of *The Alchemist*, is no longer under his control and will continue to trick and deceive.

A final, overt mockery of alchemy within the play is an allusion to John Dee, the alchemical symbol of the time period. One of Subtle’s more elaborate tricks is fooling Abel Drugger about how to best organize his tobacco shop to attract the most customers. Subtle’s suggestion that Drugger should place a man “whose name is Dee” (Jonson, II.vi.20) by the door to his shop is an unsubtle jab towards the old alchemist. As Dee kept a private library and laboratory in order to tutor and train scholars in science and mathematics, this allusion compares Dee’s sharing of knowledge to Drugger’s peddling of tobacco and suggests that, during his life, Dee further inseminated England with a farcical interpretation of alchemy that continued the degradation of London society.

*The Tempest*, while also partly “founded on that sort of philosophy which was practised by John Dee and his associates, and has been called Rosicrucianism” (Luce, x), takes an entirely different approach towards alchemy and its presentation on the stage. Yates suggests that, as the two plays were written about the same time, *The Tempest* may serve “a vindication of Dee, a reply to the censure of James,” (*Shakespeare’s*, 96), and a rebuttal to Jonson’s work. *The Tempest* presents an entirely different Dee in the magician and former noble Prospero. Like Dee, Prospero is enveloped in his work and studies to such an extent that he no longer properly contributes to the government: “The government I cast upon my brother / And to my state grew

stranger, being transported / And rapt in secret studies” (I.ii.75-77). Both are dismissed and exiled for their obsession in their own work, yet Prospero has the opportunity for redemption, while Dee dies in poverty. Through Shakespeare’s hand, Dee experiences the forgiveness that was never presented during his life. Furthermore, applying Leech’s argument regarding the speaker of the epilogue and the dramatist to *The Tempest* implies that Shakespeare saw himself as Prospero, a puppet-master who, through the magic of alchemy, was able to provide one more happy ending before his retirement. Known for his mentorship and willingness to allow students access to his personal library (Yates, *Theatre*), Dee served as somewhat of a guide for a future generation of thinkers. As *The Tempest* was one of Shakespeare’s last plays, Shakespeare may have wanted to move towards that same role as Dee, a mentor for rising playwrights.

While Jonson was determined to make his opinions regarding the alchemical process as clear as possible, Shakespeare employs a still recognizable but subtler approach to alchemy and its process while embracing the illusive, magical, and transportive elements that alchemy provides. Utilizing the alchemical representation of the tempest as the *nigredo* (Abraham), the tempest transports the audience to this magical island—“an image of the place of pure fantasy, set apart from the surrounding distances’ (Greenblatt, 158)—to watch the play unfold. Prospero sets in motion an alchemical process in order to bring about a chemical wedding and transform himself in the process.

Each of the characters experience some form of alchemy throughout *The Tempest*. Before the events of the play, Prospero has experienced the transformative powers of the island upon his shipwreck and recognition of his errors: “Me, poor man, my library / Was dukedom large enough” (*Tempest*, I.ii.109-110). Miranda and Ferdinand are the objects of the *opus alchymicum* through which the chemical wedding can occur. Ariel and Caliban both represent alchemical

spirits. In particular, Ariel, whose name translates to “green lion,” a term covering a range of alchemical terms from ore to *prima materia* to mercurial waters, is key to the entire alchemical process. Trinculo and Stefano experience a perverted form of the process due to their treatment of the alchemical spirits. Gonzalo, the old, kind lord who aided Prospero to the island, has already helped Prospero along in his process of transformation. Finally, Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian each undergo various degrees of transformation due to their fears and experiences on the island.

Three moments in particular highlight the alchemical process as presented within the play and by the play. The first occurs in Act III, Scene iii, in which Ariel, in the form of a harpy, descends upon Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian and demands “hearts’ sorrow / And a clear life ensuing” (III.iii.83-84). Before this moment, these characters do not know the cause of their entrapment on this island, yet this moment signals Alonso’s complete degradation into the *prima materia*, as he believes his plots against Prospero have resulted in the death of his son: “Oh it is monstrous, monstrous.../...It did bass my trespass. Therefore my son i’ th’ ooze is bedded” (III.iii.97,101-102). The banquet in Act III, Scene iii serves as the best example of the technological representation of this transportive process that is so integral to *The Tempest*. The elaborate direction of the scene suggests a form of staging never before seen in the Elizabethan stage: “Enter ARIEL, like a harpy, claps his wings upon the table, and, with a quaint device, the banquet vanishes” (III.iii.52sd). As proposed by John Adams, the word “quaint” along with the unique description suggests a method much more complicated and groundbreaking than a simple trap: “A *quaint device* suggests a new and ingenious property, specially designed for this scene, and unlike anything normally used in the playhouse” (407). Adams argues that Ariel’s entrance and exit from the play, accompanied by thunder and lightning, was precarious for an actor

wearing “wings some four feet long and two feet wide” (409), because of the precision required by the actor and the small window of time that required great unison by all involved. This technological feat serves the alchemical goal by enhancing the transportive nature of theater so that the audience may experience the same breakdown as Alonso and participate in this alchemical process.

Another alchemical moment occurs in Act IV, Scene i, in which Prospero unites Ferdinand and Miranda in the presence of Iris, an alchemical symbol for the peacock’s tail, denoting that the work of the alchemist is almost complete (Abraham, 141). These few lines, while not technologically innovative, provide a needed transition back to the goal of the process and begin the *albedo*, during which the goddesses Ceres and Juno serenade the couple and prepare them for the chemical wedding, during which Iris calls for the unification of opposites:

You nymphs, called naiads of the windring brooks,  
 With your sedged crowns and ever-harmless looks,  
 Leave your crisp channels and on this green land  
 Answer you summons, Juno does command.  
 Come, temperate nymphs, and help to celebrate  
 A contract of true love. Be not too late.  
 You sunburnt sicklemen of August weary,  
 Come hither from the furrow and be merry.  
 Make holiday. Your rye-straw hats put on,  
 And these fresh nymphs encounter every one  
 In country footing. (IV.i.128-138)

The mercurial nymphs and sulfuric fieldworkers then join in dance, as noted by the stage direction: “*Enter certain reapers, properly habited. They join with the nymphs in a graceful dance*” (IV.i.138sd). This unification of opposites, which “celebrate[s] / A contract of true love” (IV.i.132-133) signifies the success of the chemical wedding, the completion of the *rubedo*, and the end of Ferdinand and Miranda’s alchemical journey.

However, Prospero’s journey is not yet over. One of the most important measures of alchemical success is the transformation of the alchemist himself. While in Act III, Scene I, Prospero declares, “So glad of this as they I cannot be / Who are surprised withal. But my rejoicing / At nothing can be more” (III.i.95-98), he does not change because of his creation, the happy couple. Instead, Prospero’s transformation, the final alchemical moment, occurs when he chooses to end the torture and suffering of Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian:

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th’ quick,  
 Yet with my nobler reason ‘gainst my fury  
 Do I take part. The rarer action is  
 in virtue than in vengeance. (V.i.25-28).

Prospero’s decision to spare those who have wronged him demonstrates a change that the audience has not yet seen within him, one spurred by a member of the alchemical process, Ariel. Through this transmutation, Prospero the tortured alchemist dies, a death that gives birth to Prospero the literary alchemist. Prospero will spend the rest of his days recounting “the story of [his] life / And the particular accidents gone by / Since [he] came to this isle” (V.i.306-308), encouraging in others that same transformation.

However, this continuation of transformation depends on the audience. As with *The Alchemist*, the play ends with an Epilogue, a plea from Prospero and Shakespeare himself:



But release me from my bands  
 With the help of your good hands.  
 Gentle breath of yours my sails  
 Must fill, or else my project fails,  
 Which was to please. Now I want  
 Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,  
 And my ending is despair,  
 Unless I be relieved by prayer,  
 Which pierces so that it assaults  
 Mercy itself, and frees all faults. (Epilogue, 9-13)

In the Epilogue, Shakespeare directly asks for transformation in the audience, for the success of the play depends on the audience and their applause. Whether they found error in their ways like Alonso, love in their hearts like Ferdinand and Miranda, or forgiveness in their souls like Prospero, Shakespeare hopes the audience can empathize with these characters enough to perform one more act of transformation upon Prospero, send him home, and allow him to continue to share his story. In this moment, the audience becomes the alchemist, as prayer, also considered a transformative process, allows Prospero the peace for which he longs. Through Prospero's Epilogue, Shakespeare acknowledges and reaffirms his investment in *The Tempest*, the theatre, and the audience, hoping that he has sparked something within the audience that will "set [him] free" (Epilogue, 20).

In comparison to Shakespeare, Jonson appears to oppose advancements in English thought and theater, and for this, among a myriad of other reasons, he has been looked upon in a negative light for much of English history: "When scholars write a narrative of English drama,

Shakespeare is the protagonist, but an important secondary character, Shakespeare's foil as it were, is Ben Jonson" (Teague, 165). Yates claims that Jonson "achieves this [calculated ridicule of alchemy] through coarse misrepresentation of the religious aims of pious alchemists, and through total lack of understanding of science, for example of Dee's mathematical science" (*Shakespeare's*, 119). While each of these arguments has merit, they feel shortsighted.

Throughout the reading, it is clear that Jonson has an incredible grasp on the science, processes, and imagery of alchemy. Through subtly encouraged costume changes of the characters, expertly executed staging and setting that required little "'shop-philosophy' fit only for 'Whirling his Whymseys' and a 'puppet-play'" (Turner, 253), clear presentation of major alchemical themes, and incredibly shrewd allusions to relatively unknown alchemical practices, Jonson displays a mastery of alchemy on a similar if not higher level than Shakespeare. Jonson employs alchemy in *The Alchemist* partly to critique it but also because he "did believe in the power of metaphor, and he was not about to pass up the opportunity to work within such a complex system of belief because of his own skepticism" (Flachmann, 260). And ultimately, Jonson works within this system with good intentions, similar to that of *The Tempest*. Instead of trying to transport the audience to a remote island faraway from reality, Jonson wants the audience to see what he sees occurring in London at the time: the transmutation of wealth from one individual to another with no suggested benefit for the now poorer individual. Furthermore, it is not only the trickster or alchemist that is at fault. Every single dupe, from Dapper to Abel Drugger to Sir Epicure Mammon to Tribulation Wholesome and Ananias to Kastrill and Dame Pliant, is "revealed in their most profound corruption" (Flachmann, 270), and several of these characters will further this alchemical rot of "the age he lives in" (Prologue, 13). *The Alchemist* serves not as a rant or

admonition but as a plea to return to England, to see the corruption Jonson believes so prevalent, and to correct it.

Though each playwright engages in literary alchemy with different intent, both Shakespeare and Jonson display mastery over the science and what they believe to be its intentions. *The Tempest* transports the audience through significant alchemical imagery and the full possibility of the Elizabethan stage, shows the power of transformation and repentance, and brings one man back from the dead to rewrite a history that neglected him. In an age in which theater was evolving, *The Alchemist* is a masterpiece of Neoclassicism that also brutally and effectively tears down the new wave of English academia and its perceived negative effects that permeated English society. Beyond their individual successes, the plays also work in tandem together, to comment on “the peculiar form that man’s madness took at a unique moment in history that would be [otherwise] irrecoverable” (Rabkin, 143) and preserve one particular permutation of the ever-changing transformative process.

*Albedo: Refining Literary Alchemy through Frankenstein*

1823 saw the first adaptation of Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* with Richard Brinsley Peake's stage play, *Presumption: Or the Fate of Frankenstein*. Mary Shelley even attended a performance of the play, which became so successful that it spawned the publication of a second English edition of the novel. Stephen Behrendt notes that "many audiences in the 1820s made their first acquaintance with *Frankenstein* not through the printed text of Shelley's novel but rather one of the staged versions." The play differs greatly from the novel, including musical numbers, pantomime, and the first appearance of the hunchback assistant Fritz. However, one aspect of the novel that remains constant and actually is amplified in the stage adaptation is Victor Frankenstein himself, an obsessed, broken man investigating the creation of life, confident in his genius and right to play god: he is suspected of "raising the Devil" (I.i); he abuses Fritz, whom he hired only because "he thought [Fritz] looked so stupid" (I.i); he may or may not be pursuing "the art of making gold" (I.i). Clerval even suspects that he is an alchemist: "Your master is a studious Chemist—nay, as I sometimes suspect, an alchemist" (I.i). Peake's adaptation amplifies the subtle yet consistent message that persists throughout the novel, a warning against these appropriating and dehumanizing alchemical pursuits for no purpose other than glory for the self.

In the original novel, M. Waldman, a professor at Ingolstadt University and mentor to Frankenstein, declares the following in regards to the works of alchemists whom Frankenstein has idolized for years: "'The labours of men of genius, however erroneously directed, scarcely ever fail in ultimately turning to the solid advantage of mankind.'" (Shelley, 54) Waldman fails to realize that he has "decided [Frankenstein's] destiny" (54) that very day—a destiny that demonstrates early Romantic views of scientific progress, represented once again by the dangers

of improper alchemy, and proves the goals of the latter both impossible and futile. After introducing the novel's frame narrative as a form of alchemical transmutation of storytelling, this chapter will expand Waldman's pronouncement to analyze Frankenstein's position as the perverted alchemist and scientist that is reflected in the ideals of the early Romantic period. In particular, his three erroneous suggestions—the definition of genius; the infallibility of genius; and the cost of genius—result in the corruption of the alchemical process that reflects the dehumanization that Romanticists feared by these “men of genius.”

Transformation and adaptation are integral to literary alchemy, as the transmutation of previous stories allows the reader to better understand both the alchemical process and the underlying meaning of the new interpretation. *Frankenstein* demonstrates a corrupted alchemical transformation through the frame narrative, a literary technique in which a central story is repeated by a narrator or teller with a framing device that opens and closes the work. Critics such as Beth Newman believe that frame narratives share in common “the idea that no story exists apart from a shaping human intelligence, and that every story bears the mark of this shaping intelligence” (142). Such a description aptly applies to *Frankenstein*, as each narrative is manipulated by each subsequent narrator. The novel contains at least 5 frame narratives that follow the pattern of *giver of narrative* → *receiver of narrative*: Saville family → reader, Robert Walton → Mrs. Margaret Saville, Victor Frankenstein → Walton, the creature → Frankenstein, Felix/Safie → the creature (through letters). Within each of these accounts, there are miniature frame narratives: letters from Elizabeth Lavenza; letters from Alphonse Frankenstein; Justine Moritz's account of William Frankenstein's murder; the magistrate's account of Henry Clerval's murder; the monster's recount of *Paradise Lost*, *Plutarch's Lives*, and *The Sorrows of Young Werter*; the monster's recount of Frankenstein's notes in the months leading up to his creation;

and more. However, despite all of these different narrations, they rarely differ in tone or style, suggesting a homogenization by each successive narrator.

This homogenization of narrative expands in light of the personality of each character. Placed in chronological order, the narrators themselves become increasingly homogenous in personality and attitude towards the story they are reciting. Concerning the five major frame narratives, each successive narration is motivated by increasing selfishness and demonstrates decreasing regard for the previous narratives: the love for one another → engendering sympathy in order to create a companion → a glorified preservation of self → one-sided companionship and compromised accomplishment → wealth. Felix and Safie love each other, yet their love results in the abandonment of one family and the imprisonment and successive impoverishment of another. The unhappiness in which the De Lacey family dwells is palpable, and though love is a noble endeavor, notions of selfishness drive Felix's actions. The creature, reading the story of the two and witnessing Felix and Safie's life, wants that for himself. Thus, he uses their lives and their story for his own benefit. The creature “hasten[s] to the more moving part of [his] story” (Shelley, 106) in order to describe Felix and Safie's love, yet the story is not his. He only hopes that, by claiming this story, Frankenstein will sympathize with his plight and build the companion that he believes he needs to be happy. Even when the creature applies an external text, such as *Paradise Lost*, he interprets the epic in a way that supports his reality and his narrative.

This homogenization continues with Frankenstein. While recounting his interactions with the creature, Frankenstein cares little for the actual events in the creature's narrative and even less for Safie and Felix. Frankenstein narrates the tale of the creature to demonstrate the abilities of his creation and prove his status as creator. Furthermore, while he claims to be recounting his

tale to “not lead [Walton] on, unguarded and ardent as [Frankenstein] then was, to [Walton’s] destruction in infallible misery” (57), Frankenstein revises and corrects Walton’s notes in order to ensure that his version of events “should go down to posterity” (179). Frankenstein does not care for Walton; Frankenstein desires immortality. Walton, on the other hand, is lonely. He acknowledges that, as a result of his ambitions, he has “no friend” (31). As such, he is writing these letters for himself, to an imagined version of his sister. Walton has no means of mailing these letters, nor can he expect any response. This one-sided correspondence with a silent, submissive sibling provides Walton the satisfaction he desires. Concerning his treatment of previous narratives, Walton does not mention Felix or Safie once in his own writing, and he provides little commentary on his interaction with the creature. However, he adores the “glorious spirit” (185) of Frankenstein, a being with whom he talks and in whom he, wishfully, sees himself. Walton records Frankenstein’s story for his own benefit: if his current exploration were to fail, he would at least have contributed to something great. Walton would benefit by association, by being the man who knew the man who created life. The Saville family, the characters most removed from any events of the novel, publish these letters, for wealth and their own posterity. Each narrative serves only to further mistreat the narrative prior and utilize it for personal benefit. As allusion to previous work is a tenet of literary alchemy, *Frankenstein* differentiates adaptation and appropriation of the alchemical process and storytelling itself. *Frankenstein*’s frame narratives demonstrate a corrupted transformation, one in which the narrator—in the place of the author—displays little reverence or care towards the prior work.

Shelley’s use of the frame narrative also reflects Romantic ideals. In part a response to the “heavily secularized, mechanistic outlook of Enlightenment philosophy [that] was increasingly seen as a threat to existing human values” (Knellwolf, 50), Romanticism favored the

“individual, subjective, irrational, imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the emotional, the visionary, and the transcendental” (“Romanticism”). The methods with which Shelley implements the frame narrative—homogenization of the narrative and homogenization of the narrator—depicts fears associated with the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution: erasure of the individual in order to achieve some ambiguous and unfulfilling advancement. The homogenization of narrative results in a forced unity of storytelling. Such a unity is already dangerous in and of itself, as it disallows the originality and creativity that was cherished among Romantic thinkers. This unity becomes even more precarious as a result of the latter form of homogenization. The homogenization of narrator is dangerous because it is the result of certain individuals, most commonly “men of genius,” hijacking and commanding the narrative with no consideration for the people they may hurt or stories they may destroy solely because, as Walton puts it, they “deserve to accomplish some great purpose” (Shelley, 29).

The novel also demonstrates the ambivalence Romantic authors felt towards science, rationalism, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution. While ultimately critical of the impact such advancements had on individuals, Romantics were not oblivious to the immense power and potential benefits exhibited by developments of the time period and the awe they could imbue. Christa Knellwolf and Jane Goodall suggest that William Wordsworth’s *The Excursion* exemplifies the struggle of balancing the “intellectual mastery exercised / O’er the blind elements” and the “darker side / Of this great change (8). Similarly, the devotion to intellect and knowledge displayed in *Frankenstein* acknowledges the beauty that naturally results from the evolution of thought. Before his interactions with Walden, for example, Frankenstein experiences a natural thirst for knowledge and recognizes the beauty of that acquisition: “Curiosity, earnest research to learn the hidden laws of nature, gladness akin to rapture, as they



were unfolded to me, are among the earliest sensations I can remember” (Shelley, 44). However, while intellect and knowledge in themselves do not tread on the “darker side,” the narrators of the novel distort that beauty and manipulate it for a purpose that is ultimately not beneficial to anyone other than themselves.

*Frankenstein* uses a perverted alchemical process to present industrialization as dehumanization. Human beings and their stories become mere cogs in a machine, and nature becomes both a means of escape and a product itself, as this manufactured quality of nature raises questions concerning its benefit and purpose. Shelley admonishes those who exhibit this thought, one that claims that the ends justify the means without knowing the benefits of those ends or whether they are even achievable. For Frankenstein, the process itself is doomed from the very start, the moment in which he hears the declaration from his mentor that decided his destiny: ““The labours of men of genius, however erroneously directed, scarcely ever fail in ultimately turning to the solid advantage of mankind,”” (54), a line that exemplifies the bastardization of learning, achievement, and advancement that Romanticism feared, a grotesque misunderstanding of “genius” that results in the destruction of the human spirits not only of Frankenstein but also the world around him.

The first error in regards to Waldman’s sweeping statement is his use of the phrase “men of genius.” Britannica suggests that “Among the characteristic attitudes of Romanticism w[as] a preoccupation with the genius, the hero, and the exceptional figure in general, and a focus on his passions and inner struggles” (“Romanticism”). Examining the definition and interpretation of genius in the time period provides a set point through which Frankenstein’s alignment can be established. In his book *Divine Fury: A History of Genius*, Darrin McMahon notes that the modern interpretation of the word did not arise until the Renaissance and is actually a conflation

of two separate Latin words. The first, *genius*, was the Roman word for the guiding spirit, unique to every individual, that attended one from birth. The second, *ingenium*, was a noun that referred to an individual's natural talent, internal disposition, and other qualities. However, McMahon notes that "this evolution doesn't explain why those who had it—men of genius—were so widely hailed in the eighteenth century, celebrated as new models of the highest human type" (71-72). This interpretation fits with Waldman's proclamation. McMahon acknowledges a host of factors—industrialization typified by the French *ingénieur*; originality by the creator now reliant on the proceeds of their work instead of a benefactor; the withdrawal of God, begun by Protestant critique and Renaissance philosophy and continued in the Enlightenment—that had two consequences: an entirely new kind of power in the individual by means of "human agency" (74) and a "haunting sense of loneliness and abandonment" (74). In particular, this withdrawal of God left a hole in society, one in which the genius could assume position: "For the genius's exception to equality was a product of his exceptional nature, his rare endowment as a being who walked where the angels and god-men once trod" (76). This dual-natured interpretation of *genius*—one that arose in the midst of economic, religious, and intellectual change—is an apt description of Victor Frankenstein's obsession to fulfill that position of a man of genius, an endeavor that ultimately expresses the danger of claiming genius and depicts the destruction of the men who do. Waldman, at least in the encounter in the novel, fails to provide him any direction as to what genius means in this context, but Frankenstein, eager to learn and achieve, defines it himself.

The first several chapters of Frankenstein's narrative introduce Frankenstein's life and his academic career prior to and including what he believes will be his defining achievement. Frankenstein understands genius as the advancement of oneself beyond others through the

hoarding of knowledge. The first hint of this belief occurs during his youth. Deep in his studies of famed alchemists Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus, Frankenstein, alongside his family and a “man of great research in natural philosophy” (Shelley, 48), witnesses a lightning bolt destroy a tree. Unaware of the powers and laws of electricity, Frankenstein is dismayed when the natural philosopher lectures him and criticizes without remorse the men whose work Frankenstein worships. At that moment, instead of seeking guidance from this natural philosopher or even exploring further how the knowledge had changed or evolved, he abandons all he knows, “set[ting] down natural history and all its progeny as a deformed and abortive creation, and entertain[ing] the greatest disdain for a would-be science which could never even step within the threshold of real knowledge” (48). This quick acquiescence suggests that he never cares for the knowledge itself, only the advancement that it will provide him. In Frankenstein’s realization that he trails far behind others because of his knowledge of natural philosophy, he quickly transitions to other fields, claiming they are “worthy of [his] consideration” (48).

Waldman’s message, however, encourages him to reengage his efforts in natural philosophy, which reveals the second half of his definition of genius: the hoarding of knowledge. Through this hoarding, people themselves cease to exist and are instead reduced to the knowledge they have obtained. Upon discovering the process of creating life, Frankenstein acknowledges his surprise that, “among so many men of genius who had directed their inquiries towards the same science,” he “alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret” (56). In his mind, he has surpassed these other men of genius, because he has discovered what they could not. As such, Frankenstein realizes that he must retain this “power” (57), not share it. This decision is reflected throughout the novel. Although he claims that his “present attempts

would at least lay the foundations of future success” (58), Frankenstein’s refusal to share his secret with Walton and his secrecy concerning the mere existence of the creature suggest that these future successes would be entirely his own, and, as established, his unreliability towards his own narration further brings such plans into question. Such an attitude is reminiscent of several declarations by and communications among alchemists, who claimed that symbolic language and secrecy was a necessity in order to keep their work sacred. However, these academics were often in communication with each other. Their desire to learn and to grow extended to others in the community, and, although they excluded a large portion of their population from their work, there was still community. To return to Wright’s *The Alchymyst*, the alchemist in question is not alone in his efforts; he is shadowed by two eager apprentices. Frankenstein, on the other hand, focuses only on the exclusion of knowledge and, in fact, takes one step further. As he describes his internal debates, attempting to decide what to do with his newfound knowledge, not once does he consider sharing that information with anyone—information that could alter the course of humanity, save lives, and end death as we know it. Instead, he believes that he is in a race against other “men of genius” who may stumble onto his secret and steal his status, so Frankenstein makes critical changes to his plan in order to enhance his “speed” (Shelley, 58).

Frankenstein chooses to sacrifice the quality of his creation, the manifestation of his genius. But why? At this point, Frankenstein has achieved what he so desperately desires, to be a “man of genius.” He has discovered how to create life, a power sought by alchemists for centuries. Frankenstein has technically completed the alchemical process; he should be content in bestowing his knowledge and power among others. Isaac Newton, an alchemist himself, acknowledges that “if I have seen further it is by standing on ye sholders of Giants.” While

Frankenstein is more than willing to stand on the shoulders of those who preceded him, he refuses to continue or acknowledge this tradition of genius. By his own definition, Frankenstein cannot share that knowledge with others, lest he no longer be a genius. As such, he is not able to complete his version of the process. Thus, he must follow another, more dangerous path, in order to find catharsis: glory.

“The intoxicating draught” (38) of glory provides the second of Waldman’s errors: the infallibility of genius. Waldman suggests that, no matter the direction of genius, it is almost always beneficial to mankind. Frankenstein internalizes this assumption, one that allows him to assume infallibility in his actions and pursue satisfaction through glory without remorse for his misdeeds. Having achieved the powers and ability of creator, Frankenstein views himself infallible. With the work he has achieved—the power he has gained—he can do no wrong. In particular, the creation of his creature and the creature’s companion present two separate and equally damning cases of Frankenstein’s hubris.

Frankenstein’s desire for glory begins in typical youthful innocence: “what glory would attend the discovery if I could banish the disease from the human frame and render the man invulnerable to any but a violent death!” (47). This benevolent medical goal is a noteworthy achievement. However, by the time he has garnered this ability and discovered the secret that has eluded man for ages, Frankenstein loses such beneficence. Frankenstein’s goal in animation and bestowing life has changed: “A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs” (58). From this point forward, Frankenstein does not consider another in his actions, nor does he attempt to provide any explanation as to how his work will benefit mankind. He does not have to; he has ascended above all others.

Instead, he only sees the power in relation to himself and how he can wield it for his own benefit. As he cannot obtain glory through his fellow academics or family without sharing his genius, he chooses to create his worshippers, ones who will place him on the pedestal he so desperately desires.

To obtain this glory as quickly as possible, Frankenstein makes a grave mistake: one that ruins his work, his creation, and his life. He decides to make not a human, but a creature: “As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of a gigantic stature, that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionally large” (58). Frankenstein acknowledges that this was not his original plan, but he does not question his ultimate decision nor considers the consequences of this alteration. As a man of genius, he does not have to, and, in desperation for glory, he chooses not to. As a result, the monstrosity of the creature he has created is entirely his fault. The alienation felt by the creature is not by chance, it is by design. Moreover, this error could have been avoided. Alan Rauch notes that “Although the reader never learns the details of Frankenstein’s science or the degree of the creature’s ‘monstrosity,’ one thing is clear: the monster, whatever else it may be, represents a remarkable ‘body’ of knowledge” (228). The intelligence and knowledge with which Frankenstein works is lost on no one, and Frankenstein acknowledges that he could have created a more humanoid creature if he so chose. But, in order to see returns and achieve the glory for which he yearns, he barges ahead with his plan, unaware of the possibility of experimenter error that he once noted when he was following the alchemical process of his predecessors. At this point, Frankenstein has taken their work and forced it into his own vision of his future, a narrative in which he has become a god.

As such, this bastardization of the work of his predecessors is reflected in his own. Frankenstein begins to despise the process of his project, as he believes it only an obstacle to both glory and happiness. He describes his work and research as “labour,” “toil,” and “anxiety.” (Shelley, 46, 57, 60), one that eventually fills him with dread at the prospect of returning to it: “I was unable to overcome the repugnance of the task which was enjoined me” (132). Frankenstein’s contempt for his work reflects his inner-state, one he refuses to acknowledge. As a “man of genius,” he must labor, toil, and suffer for his work, and any failure must be that of the process and the work he is doing, not a failure of himself. Frankenstein’s actions are grotesque appropriations of the alchemical process, appropriations that Frankenstein blindly continues because he believes himself both more intelligent than his predecessors, incapable of failure, and immune of the consequences.

Frankenstein’s perceived infallibility reaches its climax in the creation and subsequent destruction of the creature’s companion. There is no consensus as to the reasoning behind his destruction of the creature. Frankenstein could be truthful when he claims to have questioned the consequences of his actions: “Had I right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?” (144). Lisa Jacobson argues that “his refusal to create a mate signifies the beginning of Frankenstein realising that lack of reflective forethought and responsibility is what caused him to attempt to form a being in the first place. This recognition, late as it may come, prevents Frankenstein from repeating his mistake” (11). However, Frankenstein’s unreliability, suggested by his conflicting actions in Walton’s letters, raises the question of whether such a realization actually took place. Instead, if one is to assume the truth in Walton’s letters that Frankenstein has not changed, Frankenstein’s decision to destroy the creature’s companion becomes all that more sinister. The creature orders Frankenstein to create a female

companion “of the same species...with the same defects” (Shelley, 128). Frankenstein fails to complete this task. Instead of working at Ingolstadt, using his current knowledge of biology, chemistry, and natural philosophy, Frankenstein travels: first to London to obtain new information from natural philosophers, then to “some obscure nook in the northern highlands of Scotland” (140). Considering the low population of the surrounding area, Frankenstein is incapable of creating “the same species” demanded of him: there are few graves to rob for body parts, which he did for the original creature. Thus, one can assume that he is using entirely alchemical means to create this companion, an action similar to the alchemical creation of the homunculus. Frankenstein further describes packing his alchemical “instruments” (140) for the trip and cleaning the “apparatus” (148) after destroying the creature. Frankenstein relies entirely on alchemical tradition, despite his refusal to participate in the alchemical transformation himself. Frankenstein eventually realizes the obvious futility of his efforts with “forebodings of evil that made my heart sicken in my bosom” (144); he destroys the companion, not for the benefit and safety of mankind, but because he cannot stomach the reality that he, an infallible “man of genius,” would not succeed.

If Frankenstein destroys his companion to preserve his genius, then his reason to pursue a different means of creation comes becomes clear. Frankenstein cannot fathom not improving on his own work, outdoing himself and others, and furthering his genius and his glory. As such, even though he notes that the process itself could “quickly be achieved” (134), he spends months in London learning and the islands of Scotland laboring, not to create a companion “of the same species...with the same defects” (128) but a companion of a better species with no defects. Comparing Frankenstein’s treatment of the companion to that of the Earth Mother, the original alchemical ideology mentioned in the introductory chapter, complicates this point. The Earth



Mother, whose womb grew and birthed the ores for transmutation and the secrets to immortality, was sacred to the blacksmiths and early alchemists. Because she provided them with such gifts, the tools with which they could replicate her process, the alchemists treated her with reverence in the form of internal growth and respect for her process: “Man fe[lt] himself able to collaborate in the work of Nature, able to assist the process of growth taking place within the bowels of Earth” (Eliade, 47). Frankenstein, on the other hand, in all of his efforts throughout the novel, “pursue[s] nature to her hiding-places” (Shelley, 58). This assaultive and sexual perversion of nature suggests Frankenstein’s egotistical ownership of nature, one that reflects general fear by the Romantic movement: “Dismissing nature by substituting its life-giving capabilities with his own scientific abilities forms a parallel with the change of society due to the Industrial Revolution” (Jacobson, 9). Instead of expressing thanks and gratitude by carefully following the rules and laws of nature or even acknowledging its beauty in his work, Frankenstein rapes, murders, and wrongly assumes the position of the Earth Mother.

When Frankenstein realizes that this position will not grant him the success he desires, he destroys both the companion and the Earth Mother, two of many who suffer as a result of his deeds. This realization concludes the last of Waldman’s errors, the suffering of genius. In his message, Waldman suggests that it is the men of genius who labor, toil, and suffer in order to achieve something from which all else shall benefit. However, two truths arise from this false claim: men of genius performing these “labours” (Shelley, 54) are not learning correctly, and, as they perform these misaligned attempts to advance mankind, they leave a wake of suffering behind them.

Beginning with the suffering of men of genius, Frankenstein gains a tremendous amount of knowledge and intelligence throughout his life; however, it appears that his learnedness and

health is inversely related. What begins as a boy motivated by “curiosity” and “earnest research” (44) devolves into a man “destroyed by misery” (37) motivated by “revenge alone” (172). Frankenstein begins to “abhor society” (139), for his manufacturing of the creature has ruined his relationship with man. Similarly, whenever Frankenstein turns to nature for comfort, he finds both respite from and a reminder of the suffering in his work:

“Some turn in the road, some new object suddenly perceived and recognized, reminded me of days gone by, and were associated with the lighthearted gaiety of boyhood. The very winds whispered in soothing accents, and maternal Nature bade me weep no more. Then again the kindly influence ceased to act—I found myself fettered again to grief and indulging in all the misery of reflection. Then I spurred on my animal, striving so to forget the world, my fears, and more than all myself—or, in a more desperate fashion, I alighted and threw myself on the grass, weighed down by horror and despair” (90).

Frankenstein has taken advantage of both man and nature. Other than several moments of peaceful existence within nature, Frankenstein, focused on his past and future, is unable to exist in the world that is present around him. Having taken advantage of and brutalized both man and nature in his process, Frankenstein no longer can find the joy and pleasure he once found in the majesty of Mount Blanc or the company of society.

Frankenstein exemplifies both the isolation that Romantic authors feared would result from the increasing individualism encouraged by the Enlightenment and a dehumanization implied by the Industrial Revolution and scientific advancement. In his work, Frankenstein turns downward and inward, only turning upward and outward in moments of reprieve or to carry something or someone else into his masochistic degradation. Frankenstein’s father, worried about his son, sends him a letter concerning his absence: “I know that while you are pleased with

yourself you will think of us with your affection,” (59), yet Frankenstein, too obsessed with his work to consider the fairness of his father’s letter, believes that he must continue this “loathsome” work in order to achieve his glory. He recognizes his suffering yet believes it only temporary, not realizing that such actions have ramification on his creation.

The creature is a product of his master and the most direct sufferer from his master’s actions. The creature undergoes a similar suffering in his own learning. The more that he learns about himself and the world around him—recreating the birds’ song, witnessing his reflection in the pond, interacting with others—the deeper his grief becomes. Only by shadowing the De Lacey family for a long time does he begin to recognize their sadness and internalize that emotion himself. By reading *Paradise Lost*, a volume of *Plutarch’s Lives*, and *The Sorrows of Young Werter*, he learns “an infinity of new images and feelings” (115), and, while they “sometimes raised [him] to ecstasy,” they more often than not “sunk [him] into the lowest dejection” (115). The creature is forced to turn inwards and downwards by his master’s decision to create him as “a gigantic creature” (58). Furthermore, because the creature is unique, unlike any other, he does not know how to exist in a world, that to him is homogenized in a manner reminiscent of the novel itself. He clings to isolation because of the inhuman nature of his existence, an existence that is both a representation and product of the dehumanizing nature of this individualism. The consequences of Frankenstein’s labors extend beyond himself and his creation to include his family and friends.

The suffering of Elizabeth, Frankenstein’s adopted cousin and destined bride, epitomizes Frankenstein’s bastardization of the alchemical process. Upon the destruction of Frankenstein’s second project, a companion for the creature, the creature delivers the following threat: ““It is well. I go; but remember, I shall be with you on your wedding night”” (146). In response to this

farewell, Frankenstein notes, “That then, was the period fixed for the fulfillment of my destiny. In that hour I should die and at once satisfy and extinguish his malice” (147). Frankenstein makes it clear that he believes the creature will murder him on his wedding night, yet the creature does not grant him that release. Instead, the creature strangles Elizabeth upon their marriage. This unsuccessful chemical wedding demonstrates Frankenstein’s failure as both a man of genius and an alchemist.

Some critics believe Frankenstein’s statement regarding his wife’s murder and argue that, as a result of his selfishness, Frankenstein “perceive[s] only menace to himself” (Brooks, 598). However, Frankenstein’s unreliability as a narrator and history with Elizabeth suggest that he knew what would occur on his wedding night. To begin, Frankenstein’s love for her is not his own, and he has little say in the matter of their union. Frankenstein’s mother, on the eve of her death, anoints their partnership for them: “She joined the hands of Elizabeth and myself. ‘My children,’ she said, ‘my firmest hopes of future happiness were placed on the prospect of your union. This expectation will now be the consolation of your father’” (Shelley, 49). Frankenstein has no choice. He must marry Elizabeth: his mother all but demands it as her final wish before she passes. Frankenstein recounts this day as “the first misfortune of my life...an omen, as it were, of my future misery” (49). However, he also notes that she dies quite peacefully and that her demeanor is quite calm. Instead of referencing his mother’s passing in this lamentation, Frankenstein could be acknowledging his mother’s final action that traps him in a love that is not his own.

While his mother’s death technically serves as the death necessary for the chemical wedding, Frankenstein is unwilling to participate and reconcile with Elizabeth. Frankenstein’s behaviors, or lack thereof, force the reader to question his love for Elizabeth. He rarely writes to

her or responds to her throughout the novel, despite her continual attempts to communicate with him. The two hardly interact with each other, and Frankenstein actively takes steps to distance himself from her. Frankenstein continually delays the marriage between them. On multiple occasions both Elizabeth and his father question his desire to go through this marriage, not because of his preoccupation, but because of his hesitation. In his responses to such questions, Frankenstein does not lavish Elizabeth with love or assure his father that Elizabeth is meant to be his wife. Instead, he barely musters emotion or passion beyond ““admiration”” and ““emotion”” (133), even in his own version of the narrative.

Furthermore, if Frankenstein is the genius that he claims to be, he certainly deduces that, if the creature whose *companion* Frankenstein effectively murdered were to visit him on his *wedding* night, his wife would be in more danger than he. This lapse in logic continues on his wedding night. His reasoning to abandon her and roam the castle—“how fearful combat which I momentarily expected would be to my wife” (167)—does not make sense. Furthermore, Elizabeth only exhibits fear as a result of Frankenstein’s actions: “there was something in my glance which communicated terror to her” (167). Of course, it is possible that Frankenstein—in his sickness, delirium, and selfishness—does not realize that the creature means to murder his wife. However, it is also possible that Frankenstein—in his sickness, delirium, and selfishness—realizes that the creature means to murder his wife and that, upon her death, he may complete the cycle of death and be freed from the wedding forced upon him by his mother.

Frankenstein’s appropriation of and disregard for others, a fear by the authors of the Romantic period, comes to light through this failed alchemical wedding. The *conjunctio* in the *rubedo* is the realization and completion of the alchemical process. It is also incredibly difficult to achieve. At the beginning of the novel, before his destiny had been decided by this warped

interpretation of genius, Frankenstein acknowledges the alchemical process when he approaches his projects with care and reverence: “if my incantations were always unsuccessful, I attributed the failure rather to my own inexperience and mistake” (48). However, once he believes himself this “man of genius,” in which he is infallible, he can find no fault in his actions, his knowledge, or himself. As such, there is a reason Frankenstein never experiences the chemical wedding; he is never purified and prepared by the *albedo*. In fact, Frankenstein never passes beyond the *nigredo* and instead is continually “stripped of every form by putrefaction” (Abraham, 153). Frankenstein’s fate is foreshadowed in his dream the night before completing the creature: “I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her, but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms” (61). Frankenstein’s self-centered, glory-seeking approach to alchemy and genius, reflective of Shelley’s fears of continued dehumanization, results in not only his suffering but also the suffering of the creature, his wife, his brother, his family’s caretaker, his best friend, his father, and everyone tormented by his creation.

Frankenstein states that, while in his early studies, he had “entered with the greatest diligence into the search of the philosopher’s stone and the elixir of life; but the latter soon obtained my undivided attention” (47). With *Frankenstein*, he finally achieves the genius, glory, and immortality that he so desperately desires. In its first ten years, the novel sold approximately seven thousand copies, and to this day remains one of the best-selling gothic novels of all time (Frost). *Frankenstein* has been adapted into over sixty films and cartoons and a countless number of stage adaptations ranging from high school drama to university opera to Broadway productions. However, despite all of this success, the genius, glory, and immortality that is

associated with his work is not truly his own. In the world of the novel, his notes, taken by the creature, are never recovered. Moreover, Frankenstein's narrative is told by Walton, in Walton's voice, by means of a letter, which Walton himself claims is "a poor medium for the communication of feeling" (31). Finally, in the world of the reader, he is no longer the bearer of his significance and identification. Audiences, readers, and the general public alike still name the creature "Frankenstein," not the creator. Frankenstein, though immortalized and glorified in his literature, is known not for his advancements in science but for his "fiendish adversary" (164), the abomination that—in Frankenstein's search for glory, delusions of infallibility, bastardization of alchemy, and contagious suffering—represents all of his failures as a "man of genius."

*Rubedo: A Conclusion through Harry Potter, Jung, and Nostalgia*

J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, a seven-book children's fantasy series published between 1997 and 2007, became a sensation upon the release of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* on June 26, 1997. Twenty-three years later—five hundred million copies sold in seventy-three different languages; seven billion, seven hundred million dollars grossed worldwide by the mainline films; multiple spin-offs in film, theatre, video games, and literature—the series has made a lasting impact not only on children's literature but also on pop culture as a whole. *Harry Potter* serves as the conclusion to this specific alchemical journey and a representation of the current state of literary alchemy before it transmutes once more into whatever form it may take in the future. Rowling stated the following in an interview merely a year and a half after the publication of the first novel in the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*: “I've never wanted to be a witch, but an alchemist, now that's a different matter. To invent this wizarding world, I've learned a ridiculous amount about alchemy. Perhaps much of it I'll never use in the books, but I have to know in detail what magic can and cannot do in order to set the parameters and establish the stories' internal logic” (Simpson). Applying a post-Jungian interpretation of alchemy to the core seven novels highlights the current permutation of the pseudoscience, one that presents a nostalgic view towards alchemy in a postmodern society.

Rowling's own experiences in the five years she spent planning the seven novels and writing *Philosopher's Stone* reflect a nostalgia that lends itself to a Jungian-oriented alchemical interpretation. As Simpson notes, Rowling's own life mirrors “Harry's experience of loss.” In a biographical piece for *The Herald*, Simpson recounts her history:

In 1990 [seven months after Rowling began writing *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*], at the age of 45, Rowling's mother died after suffering from multiple sclerosis



for 15 years. Rowling herself was 25 and likens the bereavement to a depth charge.

"Everything tottered. One night she just went to bed, and an hour later my father went up and found her dead. We had no idea the end was so close, but I think we were all in gross denial about how ill she was." During the following six months that tragedy was intensified by Rowling losing her IT job through redundancy, and by being burgled three times, the thieves making off, on one occasion, with all her mother's jewellery. She had trained as a teacher, and, desperate for a new beginning, she headed for Portugal, staying there for three-and-a-half years. She married a TV journalist and gave birth to her only child but later, with the marriage in ruins, Rowling and the baby made for Edinburgh where her sister was living. (Simpson)

In another interview, Rowling notes that she took her manuscript to Portugal, and, as she wrote, her "'feelings about Harry Potter's parents' death became more real to [her], and more emotional'" (Riccio). She also reveals that the first chapter that she wrote in Portugal, her favorite in *Philosopher's Stone*, was "The Mirror of Erised." In this chapter, Harry, "desperate for a new beginning" (Simpson), decides to stay at Hogwarts for Christmas break instead of returning to his abusive adoptive family. He spends the chapter wandering the empty castle and searching for the identity of Nicholas Flamel—a historical alchemist famous for his supposed discovery of the philosopher's stone and, in the series, "work on alchemy with his partner" (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 103) Albus Dumbledore. One night, Harry accidentally stumbles onto the titular Mirror of Erised, a mirror in which Harry sees his parents for the first time since their death in his infancy. He spends multiple nights, staring into mirror, seeing what his life with his parents could have been. This magical mirror reappears later in the novel, as Harry finds that it is the hiding place for the philosopher's stone, the ultimate achievement of the alchemical process.

Reflective of Rowling's experiences, the wistful nature of "The Mirror of Erised" presents Harry lost to what psychologists describe as nostalgia. Derived from the two Greek roots "nostos" meaning to "return to one's native land" and "algos" meaning "pain, suffering, or grief" (Holak and Havlena), nostalgia refers to a "longing to return home or to one's native land; homesickness...an intense yearning for the members of one's family. It is related to the dread of being alone...it is not the home itself to which one desires to return, but to somebody in the home dear or emotionally bound to the individual" (Zwingmann, 189). The fictional Mirror of Erised found in *Philosopher's Stone* provides him "a powerful kind of ache inside him, half joy, half terrible sadness" (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 209) reminiscent of a "helplessness and need for protection" (Zwingmann, 183) that characterizes nostalgia.

Examining nostalgia within a postmodern society connects this psychological concept to the interpretation of alchemy presented by Jung. According to Nicholas Albanese, nostalgia within a postmodern society has evolved and transitioned from mere homesickness towards land, family, or community into something more ethereal:

Indeed, Pollack (2007) asserts that nostalgia is "culturally helpful" as it helps maintain cultural identity when the "present is in crisis" (p. 121). In the past, the individual would be more attached to his community where he would learn social norms. However, in present times one is much less tied to his community, and much more tied to technology, such as media. It is in this realm where cultural mores are transmitted, allowing the customs and values of society that make up one's identity to be maintained. These cultural mores take the form of iconic stories or concepts, which can also be called grand narratives. (12)

Harry's nostalgia permeates *Philosopher's Stone*. Unaware that he is a wizard, Harry has not successfully adapted to his life as the adopted son of a non-wizarding family. "The problem was, strange things often happened around Harry" (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 24), and he never feels a sense of belonging in the world around him. Similarly, in his early days at Hogwarts, Harry is embarrassed by his lack of knowledge concerning magical sweets, quidditch, and the everyday magic that children have witnessed from their parents since birth. Harry's nostalgia also reflects Rowling's own nostalgia while planning the series and researching alchemy. While experiencing this nostalgia, Harry turns towards the wizarding world, which, as Rowling states, contains a "ridiculous amount" (Simpson) of alchemy. Therefore, alchemy serves as Harry's "grand narrative" and postmodern treatment of nostalgia, a claim supported by a Jungian interpretation of alchemy and the series itself.

Jung published *Psychology and Alchemy* in 1944, and much of his subsequent work focuses on the relationship between psychology and alchemy. Through analyses of hundreds of patients' dreams as well as close readings of texts such as Goethe's *Faust*—"an alchemical drama from beginning to end" (Jung, 67)—Jung argues that "strictly speaking, projection is never made; it happens, it is simply there" (245). As such, in all actions, the actor sees his or her *self*. One of Jung's four archetypes, the *self* is the state of being "we are throughout our life trying to achieve" (Allport, 380) and a "unity of experience" (McLeod). Jung relates the *self* to the alchemical process by arguing that alchemists turned towards alchemy as a means of understanding themselves: "He experiences his projection as a property of matter; but what he was in reality experiencing was his own unconsciousness" (Jung, 245). Jung claims that alchemists continued their work long after the chemistry was disproven specifically for this reason: "While working on his chemical experiments the operator had certain psychic

experiences which appeared to him as the particular behavior of the chemical process” (245).

According to Jung, this adaptation of alchemy, which he argues arose from the inadequate states of being provided by Christianity, allows a wholly more complete collective unconscious through which each individual develops his *self*.

Applying Jungian alchemy as depth psychology to Harry’s turn toward some grand narrative or collective unconscious, compounded by Rowling’s utilization of alchemy to determine “what magic can and cannot do in order to set the parameters and establish the stories’ internal logic” (Simpson), allows an analysis of *Harry Potter* as more than alchemical imagery but also literary alchemy. Harry only begins to realize his full *self* through the wizarding world and its alchemical nature: he learns of his true power; he makes friends and finds love; he connects to the family that he never got to have in the Muggle (non-wizarding) world; and he starts his own family. Beyond this, Harry is the ultimate *self*—“a union of opposites *par excellence*” (Jung, 19).

The “evolution of personality” (35) that Harry undergoes to become this ultimate *self* begins before *Philosopher’s Stone*. The Dark Lord Voldemort, the antagonist of the series, murders Harry’s parents and attempts to murder him. However, Voldemort’s curse does not work on Harry. Voldemort is defeated, but he leaves a scar on Harry’s forehead in the shape of a lightning bolt. At this moment and, importantly, without Harry’s or the reader’s knowledge, Harry encounters his *shadow*, an unconscious part of one’s personality that is largely viewed as negative due to lack of awareness by the individual (Young-Eisendrath, 319). This event occurs before the events of the novels, as “without the experience of the opposites there is no experience of wholeness and hence no inner approach to the sacred figures” (Jung, 20). Before Harry or the reader understand the nature of Harry’s relationship with Voldemort, Harry already

serves as a “union of opposites” (19), another phrase for the alchemical wedding. The opposing forces within Harry are demonstrated throughout the novel. Having spent most of his life at number four, Privet Drive, Harry becomes a union of the Muggle world and the wizarding world once he is introduced to the magical marketplace of Diagon Alley. His friends—Ron Bilius Weasley, a fiery, energetic red-head who represents alchemical sulfur, and Hermione Jean Granger, the cool-headed, intelligent spirit who represents mercury—join him on this alchemical development of *self*.

The first novel also asserts Voldemort as the enemy to the alchemical process, an obstacle to the development of the self, and ultimate *shadow*:

“That is because it is a monstrous thing, to slay a unicorn,” said Firenze. “Only one who has nothing to lose, and everything to gain, would commit such a crime. The blood of a unicorn will keep you alive, even if you are an inch from death, but at a terrible price. You have slain something pure and defenseless to save yourself, and you will have but a half-life, a cursed life, from the moment the blood touches your lips.” (*Sorcerer’s Stone*, 258)

Jung spends forty pages in *Psychology and Alchemy* analyzing the unicorn as an alchemical symbol and traces its representation through Western Christianity, Gnosticism, ancient Egyptian religion, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Jewish tradition, and ritualism within Confucianism in order to establish the unconscious as a “matrix of symbols” (Jung, 432) that provides guidance to the growth of the *self*. As the reader learns, the monstrosity that committed this “crime” was Voldemort. This declaration of *self* and *shadow* in regards to the alchemical process strengthens the opposing forces of Harry and Voldemort. Thus, the unicorn directly ties *Harry Potter* to this development of the *self* as reflected in the alchemical process.

Beyond this declaration of *self* and *shadow* within the fiction, the first four novels engender a relationship between Harry and the reader so that the reader may participate in this development. The limited, third-person omniscient perspective implemented in most of the series connects the reader to Harry: the reader knows what Harry knows, and Harry knows what the reader knows. As a portal-fantasy narrative, Harry and the reader learn of the wizarding world at the same time and, thus, begin their development of *self* at the same time. The first four novels also prepare Harry and the reader and teach them the “internal logic” (Simpson) of alchemy, the wizarding world, and the alchemical and psychological procedure on which they are about to embark. Bruno Bettelheim writes that it is important that “cultural heritage” be transmitted in the correct manner to children, and that “When children are young, it is literature that carries such information best.” After the first four novels—the slow and deliberate introduction and reveal of the wizarding world, Harry and the reader’s realization of his importance in this world, the beauties and dangers of magic—the preparation stage concludes with the return of the Lord Voldemort in *Goblet of Fire*, an event producing a unifying goal that Allport notes as “Unity as Striving” (380). As a result of the first four novels, Harry and the reader are ready to “integrate [their] energies” in “the pursuit of some goal” (380), defeating the *shadow* of Lord Voldemort and achieving the *self*. The death of Cedric Diggory, a fellow student of Harry’s, marks the end of this introduction. Thus, when the Dark Lord returns, Harry and the reader are ready to learn how to “bottle fame, brew glory, [and] even put a stopper on death” (*Sorcerer’s Stone*, 137).

Rowling begins the *nigredo*, or black stage, with *Order of the Phoenix* so that the reader may be “killed, putrefied, and dissolved into the original substance of creation” (Abraham, 135). Jung associates the *nigredo* with the encounter with the *shadow*. Harry witnesses the return of the Dark Lord at the end of the fourth novel, but, because the public does not want to

acknowledge Voldemort's existence, Harry is ignored and ridiculed. Throughout this novel, the reader witnesses Harry's breakdown: the wizarding world dubs him insane, his love life is in shambles, he is banned from the quidditch team, and his only true friends are chosen to be prefects above him. Harry is sidelined during the hunt for Voldemort by those who do believe him, a decision he views as ludicrous concerning their past interactions. Hogwarts, Harry's only reprieve from the hatred of his adoptive family and the evil of Lord Voldemort, is no longer an enjoyable place: Dolores Umbridge, a professor who usurps Albus Dumbledore and claims herself headmistress, fires and expels any teacher and student who dares challenge her authority. Finally, at the end of the novel, Voldemort makes a public return to the wizarding world, and Harry loses "the closest thing to a parent" (*Order of the Phoenix*, 824) that he has ever known. At this moment, his frustrations come to a head, his breakdown complete: "“THEN—I—DON'T—WANT—TO—BE—HUMAN!...I'VE HAD ENOUGH, I'VE SEEN ENOUGH, I WANT OUT, I WANT IT TO END, I DON'T CARE ANYMORE”" (824). His breakdown, and thus *nigredo*, is finally complete upon the second confrontation of his shadow and the death of his godfather, Sirius *Black*.

The second step of the process, the *albedo*, "leads the adept out of the black night of the soul into the dawning of consciousness" (Abraham, 5). *Half-Blood Prince* leads Harry and the character out of the despair of *Order of the Phoenix* and prepares them through education and learning. In *Half-Blood Prince*, Harry begins to recognize the path that he must take in order to defeat to his *shadow*. The teen-angst and rage that pervades *Order of the Phoenix* is absent, replaced by drive and determination. Furthermore, education, specifically the sharing of knowledge, is key in this book. Dumbledore, having regained his position as headmaster, schedules regular sessions with Harry in which he shares information by means of a Pensieve, an

artifact through which one can experience the object memories of others. However, one such memory has been tampered with, but Harry, through consuming an incredibly difficult-to-make potion resembling “molten gold” (*Half-Blood Prince*, 187), is able to discover the truth, a microcosmic alchemical process. Through these sessions and this new information, Harry learns the truth about Voldemort and how to defeat him. Concerning the classes Harry takes this year, special attention is paid to Transfiguration, the complete transformation of objects, and Potions, the creation of life-benefiting and life-taking elixirs. Specifically, in Potions, Harry picks up a used Potions textbook that has been annotated by hand by the “Half-Blood Prince,” who has improved upon almost every published recipe. These annotations correct a commonly-accepted past that had turned out to be wrong, but, instead of sharing the truth, the “Half-Blood Prince” had placed it in a “corner cupboard” (184). Harry and the reader, upon finding it, have unleashed the truth so that any character or reader may create the “molten gold” (187) and participate in the alchemical process. The purifying preparation stage ends with the death of another mentor, yet Harry is no longer filled with the rage or emptiness between which he oscillates after the death of his godfather in *Order of the Phoenix*. Instead, Harry, purified and prepared by the *albedo*, is determined to embark on his mission after the death of *Albus* Dumbledore.

*Deathly Hallows* brings a conclusion to the alchemical process with the *rubedo*, in which “form is bestowed upon the pure matter of the Stone” (Abraham, 174). Rowling begins *Deathly Hallows* with two epigraphs, the only time in the series to do so. Because of the unique structure of the epigraphs, I have included them, as they appear in the novel, below:



Oh, the torment bred in the race,  
 the grinding scream of death  
 and the stroke that hits the vein,  
 the haemorrhage none can staunch, the grief,  
 the curse no man can bear.

But there is a cure in the house  
 and not outside it, no,  
 not from others but from *them*,  
 their bloody strife. We sing to you,  
 dark gods beneath the earth.

Now hear, you blissful powers underground –  
 answer the call, send help.  
 Bless the children, give them triumph now.

Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers*

Death is but crossing the world, as friends do the seas; they live in one another still. For they must needs be present, that love and live in that which is omnipresent. In this divine glass they see face to face; and their converse is free, as well as pure. This is the comfort of friends, that though they may be said to die, yet their friendship and society are, in the best sense, ever present, because immortal.

William Penn, *More Fruits of Solitude*

While the structure of the epigraph normally follows the formatting of the original text, *Deathly Hallows* begins with a concrete dedication—a seven-part dedication in the shape of a lightning-bolt that contains foreshadowing of Harry’s ending—that trains the reader to take note of the shape of the two epigraphs. John Granger argues that the structure of the epigraphs resembles smoke rising from a slab or altar, a form of “sacrifice to the Muses” (“The Aeschylus”), yet, in keeping with alchemical inclinations, the latter epigraph serves as a cauldron, flask, or alchemical apparatus into which the former epigraph flows or out of which it vaporizes.

Each epigraph acknowledges the aid provided by the dead to the living, a theme consistently revisited throughout the series. While multiple characters exist after death and aid

Harry in his journey, two deaths in particular signify the importance of these passages. The deaths of Harry's parents—James, “the name of the patron saint of alchemists” (Granger, *How*, 33), and Lily, “a symbol of the pure white elixir and stone attained in the *albedo*” (Abraham, 117)—occur in the first chapter of the series, yet their presence is felt throughout. Harry's interaction with his parents, who understand and have gone through the same challenge he has against the Dark Lord, furthers Harry's connection with Jung's “collective unconscious,” a knowledge partly derived from ancestral memory. They visit him through the Mirror of Erised in *Philosopher's Stone*, and he realizes that their companionship is the “deepest, most desperate desire of [his] heart” (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 213). In *Goblet of Fire*, Lily and James aid Harry in his first encounter with Voldemort, protecting him and “shielding Harry from [Voldemort's] gaze” (GoF). Finally, by using the Resurrection Stone, Harry has a final conversation with his parents, and they comfort their son in his impending death in *Deathly Hallows*:

“‘You'll stay with me?’

‘Until the very end,’ said James.” (*Deathly Hallows*, 700)

The specific reference to Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers* is important once one recognizes that the series as a whole, *Deathly Hallows* in particular, is an adaptation and transformation of the Greek tragedy. *The Libation Bearers* follows Orestes, a young man with a scar on his forehead, as he returns from exile to avenge the death of his father, not unlike Harry, a young man with a scar on his forehead, who returns from exile to avenge the death of his father (and mother). Along the way, Orestes is helped by Electra, who is represented by Hermione. Orestes is also accompanied by Pylades, played by Ron. Each of these characters play an important role in the success of Orestes's and Harry's missions, whether it be planning said missions or providing them the resolve to fulfill their deeds. Two pivotal scenes complete this

comparison of story and character. In one scene in *The Libation Bearers*, Orestes recognizes that, in order to “triumph,” he must play the fake role of a messenger arriving to tell his mother of his own death. Similarly, in *Deathly Hallows*, Harry realizes that a fragment of Voldemort’s soul exists within him and that he must die so that he can defeat Voldemort and complete the *rubedo*.

Jung describes the *rubedo* as the “ultimate phase of the work to the union of opposites in the archetypal form of the *hierosgamos* or ‘chymical wedding’” (Jung, 37). With his mission set, Harry, importantly joined by Ron and Hermione, set out on their final journey to complete the *opus alchymicum*. This golden/fiery stage is apparent, with some version of the word “gold” appearing approximately one hundred and twenty-three times in the text. Within this stage, multiple literal and figurative alchemical weddings take place: Bill Weasley and Fleur Delacour’s wedding begins the novel, Ron and Hermione’s bickering and union throughout the book, and the final climax when Voldemort and Harry finally unite in combat, resulting in a “fierce new sun dazzl[ing] the windows” of the destroyed Hogwarts castle (*Deathly Hallows*, 744). After spending months on the run—hunting, hiding, facing incredible temptation and hardship—Harry returns Hogwarts to complete his task at the Battle of Hogwarts. Just before the death of Hogwarts professor and Harry’s sworn enemy, Severus Snape, Harry learns from him that he must sacrifice himself in order to ultimately defeat Voldemort and complete his task: “Part of Voldemort lives within Harry, and it is that which gives him the power of speech with snakes, and a connection with Lord Voldemort’s mind that he has never understood. And while that fragment of soul, unmissed by Voldemort, remains attached to and protected by Harry, Lord Voldemort cannot die” (*Deathly Hallows*, 686). Upon realizing that yet another mentor and pseudo-father has been captured, Harry realizes that he must travel into the woods and face Voldemort to complete the *rubedo* and prevent the death of *Rubeus* Hagrid. This confrontation

between Harry and Voldemort, through which Harry and the reader realizes that Voldemort is a projection of himself, allows Harry a final confrontation of his *shadow*, an ultimate union of opposites, an alchemical wedding, and a better *self*. Also, the reader, having participated in this “Unity as Striving,” collective unconscious, and development with Harry from the very beginning, has experienced this same alchemical achievement of *self*.

Neither this chapter nor this thesis as a whole is meant to suggest alchemy as the supreme metanarrative or monomyth. I am neither intelligent nor educated enough to make such a claim, and proving said claim seems neither possible nor fruitful. Nor am I arguing that each of these works themselves are grand narratives for everyone. Jung himself states that “it is a great nuisance that mankind is not uniform but compounded of individuals whose psychic structure spreads them over a span of at least ten thousand years. Hence there is absolutely no truth that does not spell salvation to one person and damnation to another” (30). However, in the case of the works I have chosen—stories that are revisited, reinterpreted, appreciated, and adored—I wanted to know if and why alchemy was involved at any deeper level. In particular, *Harry Potter*, the origin of this thesis, intrigued me. *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text* is a podcast by two graduates of Harvard Divinity School, whose goal is to analyze the works of J.K. Rowling as a sacred text. Realizing that millions have read the series, *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text* attempts to breakdown why people repeatedly return to the *Harry Potter* series in times of pain, hardship, or celebration, and why it has become the *one of* the “iconic stories and concepts” (Albanese, 12). What makes a narrative grand or a story great is unique to the individual, but it is truly exciting when millions of people come together to celebrate that narrative. As Allport states, “Love of learning, to take an example, is a unifying force” (183). In these cases, the learning of alchemy—whether it be unconscious or conscious—can serve as that unifying force.

Whether it be the evolution or preservation of Elizabethan thought, retaining humanity in an age of dehumanization, or processing grief and nostalgia in a postmodern society—literary alchemy, in whatever form it may take, can serve as a tool through which one learns, experiences, and reads.

Alchemy has also evolved beyond these works into the twenty-first century. Regarding symbolism found in the quintessence alone, I have found several examples in children's entertainment that continue that transformative tradition of literary alchemy by adapting the interpretation employed by *Harry Potter*. *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005-2008) and *The Legend of Korra* (2012-2014) both demonstrate the strength and power of the quintessence. *Avatar* presents a powerful boy who has mastered only one of the four elements of nature and must travel throughout the world in order to bring peace to the land. The original series also covers topics such as totalitarianism, genocide, and free choice. *The Legend of Korra* follows this boy's successor, who, having mastered three of the elements, needs the final one to assume the position of leader. As she proceeds in her journey, the show discusses race, gender, sexual orientation, political unrest, terrorism, and spirituality during modernization. *Frozen 2* (2019) makes direct reference to the danger associated with an imbalance of the elements and claims that only through unity of earth, air, fire, and water into a fifth spirit can there exist a unification between nature and its people. The setting of upcoming action-adventure videogame *Godfall* (2020) reportedly contains five different worlds: Earth, Air, Water, Fire, and Spirit. As the game has not been released, it is impossible to know exactly how these worlds connect, but alchemical logic suggests that there is one that exists above all others. Each of these works utilize alchemy in their own way in order to deepen the experience of the viewer or player to entertain, to teach, and to instill.

This thesis has explored the history of alchemy and presented three of the many permutations alchemy and its literary counterpart have undergone over the years. Examining these texts—specifically how they both acknowledge the concept of alchemy known in the particular time period and apply that concept to entertain, to inform, to warn, and to transform—demonstrates alchemy’s potential and power as a method of storytelling. Alchemy has undergone many transmutations. It began in the forge, progressed into a science, developed religious thought, and sparked artistic creativity. It has been adapted, changed, and transmuted in order to continue as powerful symbolism, a thought-provoking ideology, and an effective method of storytelling. The future of alchemy remains a mystery, but, above all, one will remain constant: transformation.

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