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The Unlovely: Disease, Consumption and Sex in Alasdair Gray's Lanark

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UNLOVELY

"Love is an evil God," the unlovely say.

"She will not warm or kiss or serve us."

"She does not deserve us."

And so they turn to words and wealth and war
and other murderous games which losers play.

The unlovely are special people. They only unite to kill.
They build big pedestals to justify standing apart,
but love is the ardour of a gentle mind.
Lovers give by allowing, and their taking is kind.
It is easy to know the others. We are shrill.

Saying undoes me. Seeing will not let do.
Things numb the hands. Words deafen. Visions blind.
What the mind grasps stuns and deludes the mind.
To say, see, think and feel are all ways
of not having you.

Alasdair Gray, 1961–1971



The Unlovely: Disease, Consumption and Sex in Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*



Julianne Smith
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BEGINNING



LANARK IS A NOVEL OF SPLITS. Much of Alasdair Gray's work is occupied by dualism; be it within a a character, inherent to the narrative, or drawn clearly in his visual art, his work often exists in its opposing balances. *Lanark* is also complicated by its parts being strewn about within its cover's confines: Books One and Two are encased by Books Four and Three. The novel in its duality and fragmentation tries, in part, to illustrate what it means to be a Scottish subject in the mid to late twentieth century, both in the harsh and often dull reality of Scottish life as depicted by Duncan Thaw in books One and Two, as well as Lanark's often hideous, splintered dystopian mirror in books Three and Four. *Lanark* is an (arguably) postmodern science fiction bildungsroman, edified by and aware of canonical history, but choosing to question and subvert it at every opportunity. Although it can be argued, and Gray himself argues against it (Böhnke 45),

I'm of the position that despite its being his *magnum opus* and a narrative of huge implication and proportion, it is a comely example of Lyotard's *petits récits* (Lyotard 41) as Lanark/Duncan Thaw, and *Lanark* itself, are representations of a historically and politically marginalized culture at a specific moment in time and literary style.¹ The novel is also an expression of many trappings of literary postmodernism with narratological and formatting fragmentation, narrative framing, the breaking of the fourth wall, an index of plagiarisms, amongst others. It is a long, dense book. It is the sort of book that one could write a book on. Instead, being more limited in space, I will choose moments in the text to x-ray, exposing bits of bone, guts or machinery in the bodies and spaces that comprise the whole.

In the first section of my thesis, I will explore the etiology of Duncan Thaw/Lanark's near inability to connect in meaningful ways with other people in terms of Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*, and what the damaged body will do to an individual's capacity to engage meaningfully in culture and with other bodies. In Thaw/Lanark's case, I believe that violent childrearing as described by Joseph Zornado is the most common and silent perpetrator of this damage, and I will discuss the adversarial structures in Thaw's childhood and adolescence that break him, causing him to be unable to love and therefore to seek permanent escape.

Thaw's neuroses are translated through his suicide to Lanark in the form of the literal-metaphorical disease dragonhide. The population of Unthank, a thinly veiled mid-century Glasgow, is festering with diseases that come in multifarious revolting forms. In the second section, I build on the groundwork from section one to closely read the diseases of Unthank in

¹ For more on the subject of Gray and postmodernism, see Dietmar Böhnke's *Shades of Gray: Science Fiction, History and the Problem of Postmodernism in the Work of Alasdair Gray*.

that each one is an expression, at the deepest level, of the same broken bodily-affective being. It is as if the body's link with its affect is broken, and so like Thaw's asthma, the outward expression is loss of control over one's own body. I will also explore how the diseases can be gendered and in these cases may have manifested not necessarily because of childhood violence (as it is not extant in the text), but from patriarchal violence.

Finally, with excerpts from *History of Sexuality* and *Discipline and Punish*, I explore how these diseased bodies are commodified by the existing political system, which is a modern and postmodern expression of the Leviathan in which power is no longer a towering location of authority, but distributed into the population. The political system both propagates and profits from the culture of violence that leads to the split of the body from the affect, and in this way it is preoccupied with the body and its sexuality. I realize that Merleau-Ponty and Foucault are in some ways at odds, because for the former, sexuality is irreducible, and for the latter as an exploitable political construct, it is anything but. I do believe that each is able to converse with the other as Merleau-Ponty is interested in the cultural ramifications of a damaged sexuality even if he believes that sexuality is a primacy.

Ultimately, I argue that postmodern society is collapsing because it is bad at loving. Ideologically sanctioned violence breaks the body from its affect at the earliest age, and in turn that same system, an entity comprised of bodies itself, must consume those that are irrevocably unable to exist in society to perpetuate itself. In some ways, this is a condemnation of late capitalist political structure and the disjointed, inimical interrelationship it sustains with postmodernity. In a seemingly endless cycle of birth, consumption, disease and death, Lanark as a character and *Lanark* as an imagined object exist to rebel against the diffuse hegemonic

structures between individuals that permeate contemporary culture. Like Duncan Thaw, “I object to it! I object! I object!” (296).

DISCLAIMER

I feel the rebelliousness of Gray’s work cannot be seen or studied without also at times rebelling from typographical and formatting norms. He himself is incredibly fastidious in personally formatting the layout of his books and plays as well as being judicious with placement of his artwork. To write a drab and ragged paper would be a disservice to his visual brilliance; likewise, being married to a specific format would be incongruous with the deliberate disorderliness of *Lanark*. I do not wish to break rules, only bend them, and so in this paper I have attempted to be as intentional in where to bend and upkeep format as Alasdair Gray is with his own work. This paper, while certainly academic, is also a personal and in some ways creative reaction to *Lanark*, a novel with which I have a long and profound history. I stand by my departures, and will continue to do so in the future, for as much as is fiction, scholarly work is a genre worth imaginative, visual beauty.



MIND IS A SKY-MACHINE

KEPT STABLE BY THE BREEZE OF BREATH:
A RACKETY SLIPSHOD THING OF GUT AND
NERVE,
PATCHED TUBE AND TWISTED CABLE.
THE ENGINES OF THE HEART AND LUNG SUSTAIN
ITS WINGS ABOVE THE BASEMENT OF A VOID.
BOXED IN ITS SKULL,

BRAIN IS THE ANEROID BY WHICH WE GAUGE
A LEVEL THROUGH THE PRESSURE OF OUR PAIN
AND STRUGGLE HARD FOR SOME
DEGREE OF STABLE EQUILIBRIUM.

DUNCAN THAW DROWNS HIMSELF. His earliest experiences are defined by his interactions with his parents, a relationship that is complex and political, and so familiar to denizens of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that it is often invisible. *Lanark* does not chronologically begin with Thaw's, and ultimately Lanark's, childhood and his body, but as chaotic as it is, the narrative is more logical and accessible than it may appear. I have chosen to begin with Thaw's childhood because Gray also does. It just takes a quarter of the novel for him to get there.

Thaw's earliest memory is of the childish, unassuming order of a landscape; he "drew a blue line along the top of a sheet of paper and a brown line along the bottom" (121). When his father sees it and tries to explain difficult scientific concepts such as "*Grrrrrrrr*avity is what keeps us on the earth. Without it we would fly up into the air," this rationale confuses and ultimately bores Thaw. Their exchange is as expected as an exchange can be between a non-religious adult and a developing young child, yet it hints at both the nature of Thaw's imaginative development and the damaging relationship he will come to have with his parents, particularly his father. As

phenomenology will help to explain, the body and the mind are an interplay of systems, each perpetually changing and edifying the other. Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the relationship between sensual perception and the world in *The Phenomenology of Perception*:

As I contemplate the blue of the sky, I am not *set over against* it as an acosmic subject; I do not possess it in thought, or spread out towards it some idea of blue such as might reveal the secret of it, I abandon myself to it and plunge into this mystery, it “thinks itself within me,”² I am the sky itself as it is drawn together and unified, and as it begins to exist itself; my consciousness is saturated with this limitless blue. (249)

This lyrical passage describes neither Thaw’s early understanding of the sky as a blue line, nor Mr. Thaw’s understanding of it as a “geographer’s or astronomer’s sky,” which he appears to understand as “existing for itself” (249) as separate from the body in his modern scientific terms. Instead, this quote is describing in metaphor the way in which Thaw and Mr. Thaw’s body are at the same time distinct and inseparable from their lived environments as well as their minds. This passage calls into suspicion the basis for both big and little Thaw’s experience in that their bodies are somehow *apart* from the world and others and apart from itself, and also grounds my reading squarely in the experiences and politics of the body.

Thaw’s mother and father, in that they exist in a specific historical era and are subjects and perpetrators of their culture, enact practices on their son that deny his bodily needs and

²Translator’s note: “en soi se pense et convient a soi-même”; “in itself it is thought to be oneself.”

thereby his emotional (and in Thaw's case significantly willful and imaginative) inner life. The body perceives and is its emotional self: abuses to the body equate to abuses to the mind and the affect, and Thaw is a product of what many childhood theorists call the "poisonous" or "black" pedagogy. In enacting this concept, the adult claims power over the child's body and mind by both verbal and physical violence, often through manipulation and deception and shows of hierarchical force, to subdue creativity, will, and vitality for the counterintuitive goal of creating well-adjusted, independent adults. In *Inventing the Child*, Joseph Zornado writes:

The black pedagogy describes the relationship between adult and small child as a battle of good versus evil The child comes into the world in desperate need of reform, and reform comes at the hands of the adult, often through violence. The violence is always the child's fault, however, for the child's willfulness, and not the adult's ideological assumptions about child-rearing, is the chief cause of it (79)

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Thaw are religious, yet their parenting style smacks of Scottish Calvinism, pointing to seventeenth-century Scottish religious reform as culturally permeating and enduring into the modern era. The Reformation, not just in Scotland, continues to have a strong hand in defining European and American ideologies on childhood. Although the Thaws are not "evil," per se, they are ideological subjects performing a politic of the body on their young son. They are complicit with this ideology as to them their behavior is normal and acceptable; to them, the ramifications are invisible. They cannot abide willfulness or spontaneity in their son and react to it predictably based on Calvinist childrearing notions: with violence and spectacles of authority.

Like so many children, Thaw detests his mother's cooking, and "refused shepherd's pie or any other food whose appearance disgusted him: spongy white tripe, soft penis-like sausages, stuffed sheep's hearts with their valves and little arteries" (123). In a picture that is at the same time endearingly and horrifically familiar, Thaw refuses to eat the sheep's heart his mother has prepared for dinner, and when limited coaxing ("Taste just a wee bit. For my sake" 123) does not work, the war between Thaw and his mother and father begins; first with threats ("You'll sit at this table until you eat every bit" or "Just wait until I tell your father about this, my dear."), then imprisonment ("... he would be shut in the back bedroom . . .") to spitefully await his father's return, ("He would . . . feel so lonely and magnificent that he considered opening the window and jumping out. It was a bitter glee to imagine his corpse thudding to the ground . . ."), at which point the battle of wills would escalate:

"Tell her you're sorry and you'll eat what you're given."

Then Thaw would snarl "No, I won't!" and be thrashed.

During the thrashing he screamed a lot and afterward stamped, yelled, tore his hair and banged his head against the wall until his parents grew frightened and Mr. Thaw shouted "Stop that or I'll draw my hand off yer jaw!"

Then Thaw beat his own face with his fists, screaming, "Like this like this like *this?*"

On the advice of a neighbour they one day undressed the furiously kicking boy, filled a bath with cold water, and plunged him in. The

sudden chilling scald destroyed all his protest, and this treatment
was used on later occasions with equal success. (123-124)

Thaw's only offense was to be suspicious about consuming a stuffed and roasted image of his own little heart. Hardly any of his ordeal with his mother and father was related to the actual "transgression"; the real offense was to be headstrong. Thaw's parents never give consideration to Thaw's preferences or anxieties and instead choose to ignore his emotional self and posit him, always, in terms of selfishness and ownership: "Her son," and "For my sake"; "Aren't ye ashamed of yourself?" Their final exoneration comes in the aftereffects of Thaw's ice baths: "Before sleep he lay stunned and emotionless while his mother tucked him in. Sometimes he considered withholding the goodnight kiss but could never quite manage it" (124). Children have no recourse within the powerful reign of their parents, and Thaw has no choice but to endure the damage they inflict.

Along with this injury to the body comes suppression of the affect. What happens to the child's mind changes the child's body, and vice versa, and early in his childhood, Thaw learns unconsciously that in order to live in a world where his parents have absolute authority over his physical preferences and desires, he must deny his inner *and* outer self. The child, then the adolescent, becomes defined, as Zornado tells us, by adult hegemonic thinking, and becomes divided within himself. As much as there is risk for it, however, Thaw's vivid imaginative life is not quelled by his tension with his parents. That aspect of his world flourishes despite (or possibly because) of their attempts to subdue his willfulness: "Apparent life was a succession of dull habits in which he did what was asked automatically, only resenting demands to show interest. His energy had withdrawn into imaginary worlds and he had none to waste on

reality” (*Lanark* 157). Thaw’s parents were unable to create an automaton to authority, but he does not otherwise escape the damage done to him. His creativity is intact, but the violence of his childhood has produced a rift between his body, his affect, and the ability to connect with others’ bodies and emotions that reveals itself during his adolescence.

In addition to the upbringing that leads to the split self, Thaw is brought up almost entirely ignorant of sex, even in the simplest scientific terms. He is unaware of the functions of his genitals even in terms of masturbation, and so the connections between sex, birth, and love are, for his early adolescence, lost on him:

Sex was something he had discovered squatting on the bedroom floor. It was so disgusting that it had to be indulged secretly and not mentioned to others. It fed on dreams of cruelty, had its climax in a jet of jelly and left him feeling weak and lonely. (165)

His relationship with sex is just as disjointed and filled with distrust and antagonism as his earliest and most important bodily relationships with his parents. His sexual fantasies are more about power relations, about sex as domination rather than the sensuous pleasure of another body. Thaw cannot connect healthily with his own body, so he is unable to have any semblance of natural emotional or sexual connection with anyone else. The older he gets, the further he spirals inward into his cognitive illnesses and anxieties in an attempt to exist in a society that has little use or tolerance for his talents and idiosyncrasies. He later becomes a neurotic but visionary visual artist and rejects Mr. Thaw’s and Scottish society’s understanding that “Unless [men] learn to work obediently because they’re told to, and for no other reason, they’ll be unfit for human society” (168). He becomes a dissatisfied teen who constantly wages inner battles, and suffers

from severe asthma, which is commonly known to be psychosomatic, and so has both physical and mental remedies. He lives in an era with few medical treatments for his attacks, but even with treatments, Thaw's illness plagues more than just his lungs: he lies awake racked by anxious thoughts and the threat of suffocation. He battles it through sexual fantasy and masturbation, finding that these help him breathe easier: ". . . his mind gripped the image of the woman once more and a tingling chemical excitement spread again through his blood, widening all its channels and swelling the penis below and air passages above" (179). His asthma is conflated with dark, sluggish thoughts in which he sees beautiful growing, living things like gardens and hedgerows as "half withered by the grasses pushing up among them" (181), but it eventually comes to the point that sexual thoughts can no longer be used as a weapon against his disease.

Thaw's anxiety and asthma persist throughout his adolescence and punctuate his time at art school, but his real challenge comes in the form of love. He is able to make a few male acquaintances, but he fails in terms of heterosexual impulses. Merleau-Ponty again becomes helpful in his concept of "the body in its sexual being" (178) in which an individual's sexual/affective (in the case of the sexual being, these terms are in constant conversation) life is the very basis for his interactions with the culture in which he exists. Merleau-Ponty is interested in a particular case study of a man who sustained damage to his occipital region and suffered thereby a variety of psychosocial problems, one of which is his deadened sexuality. The subject, Schneider,

. . . can no longer put himself into a sexual situation any more than
generally he occupies an affective or ideological one [He]
hardly extends his sphere of human relationships at all, and when

he makes new friendships they sometimes come to an unfortunate end: this is because they never result . . . from a spontaneous impulse, but from a decision made in the abstract. (181-182)

I see a parallel between Thaw and Schneider not in their specific ways of attempting to meet the world, but particularly in the way in which they abstract their relationships with the people around them. Thaw's relationship with his father and somewhat-sweetheart Marjory, the two most prominent figures in his adolescence, are lived primarily in his imagination. This is especially true for Marjory as he barely ever touches her, and when he does, he reacts with either extreme of becoming happier and more productive in his art than ever before, or getting caught up in the physical awkwardness of his own body. The former is a briefer time for Thaw, but "when their bodies accidentally touched a current of stillness and silence flowed in from her and felt that before touching Marjory he had never known rest" (269). All of his discordant, plaguing thoughts are allayed by her touch in short, connected moments. Thaw's relationship with Marjory is always tepid at best, however, she being put off by this "clever peculiar boy" (270) and his asthma, eczema and paint-stained clothes; those few moments of bliss he experiences early on are countered by her ambivalence, and by his own sexual discomfort, such as when "At the garden gate she tilted up her mouth. He brushed his cheek on hers and murmured, 'We're not mature enough for mouths. Mine hardens when I touch you with it'" (287). This awareness is evidence of his divided self, for he rarely ever allows his body to become lost in its own perception as he exists in his abstractions. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, like Schneider's, Thaw's ". . . sexuality is not an autonomous cycle. It has internal links with the whole active and cognitive being . . ." (182). Because in these terms sexuality is not isolated and is rather a part of

the dynamic bodily-affective system, Thaw is never “whole,” that is, his system has been compromised: his earliest notions of love are violent and polarized, and so he has turned into an inwardly violent, polarized young adult. While for the case study Schneider the “world is emotionally neutral” (Merleau-Ponty 182), and for Thaw the world is emotionally charged, they both suffer from damage to their affect based on injury to their bodies. Both of these men make pitiful attempts to love, but each meets failure and retreats to stunted inner abstractions.

Marjory ultimately breaks up with Thaw after he asks to paint her nude (perhaps even indicating trouble with Marjory’s relationship between her own body and sexuality); Thaw had made a genuine attempt to love and connect with her despite his illnesses and her tepidity, and this split is both physically and emotionally catastrophic for him. Afterward, he sees “nothing in his pictures but a tangle of ugly lines” (292) and he wonders “why his thoughts were so full of a girl who had given him so little” (293). He descends into his most intense bouts of asthma and anxious cycling thoughts and ends up in the hospital for an extended stay. He is released and takes the opportunity to paint a mural at a church, where his neurosis worsens and he continues to conflate his failures at love and artistry with Marjory:

“This is not art,” he shouted, bending his head and wildly scratching. “Not art, just hungry howling. Oh why did she hunt me out? Why didn’t she stay? How can I make her a beautiful world if she refuses to please me? Oh God, God, God, let me kill her, kill her! I must get out of here.”

Of course, he is not far from the truth. Though the blame is not Marjory’s, Thaw is right to trace much of the cause of his psychological stress, especially at this point in his life, to his broken

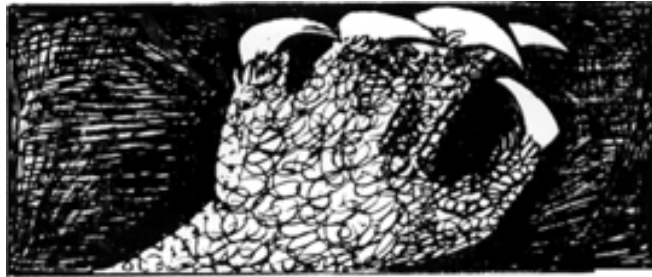
affect. He cannot love a common woman, he cannot even indulge his isolated bodily impulses with a prostitute for her horror at his eczema; in turn he cannot finish the mural he continually repaints, cannot engage interpersonally and withdraws wholesale from society. As Merleau-Ponty has told us, engaging affectively and ideologically require a whole active being, and Lanark, abused from his earliest memories, is in pieces.

In a chapter of hallucinatory disjointedness and fragmentation both of Thaw's self, he wanders around Glasgow, eventually courts Marjory again while his face and limbs, unbeknownst to her, turn to stone. He cannot feel her as he rubs his senseless granite body against hers. He kills her³ and blacks out. Thaw absconds to the sea where he continues to drift desultorily across the wild Scottish landscape. He removes his clothes and steps feet first into the cold northern waves:

He wallows under, gasping and tumbling over and over in a salt sting, knowing nothing but the need not to breathe. A humming drumming fills his brain, in panic he opens his eyes and glimpses green glimmers through salt sting. And when, at last, like fingernails losing clutch on too narrow a ledge, he, tumbling, yells out last dregs of breath and has to breathe, there flows in upon him, not pain, but annihilating sweetness. (354)

³ As the Oracle later tells Lanark, it is narratological conjecture whether Thaw kills Marjory, or merely imagines killing her in his madness. Either way, this final mental breakdown leads Duncan to drown himself in the sea, as Gray describes in the passage above this footnote.

DISEASE



“You see, I loved the human image and I hated the way people degraded it, overdeveloping some bits to gain temporary advantage and breaking others off to get relief from very ordinary pain. I seemed surrounded by the leeches, using their vitality to steal vitality from others, and by sponges, hiding behind too many mouths, and by crustaceans, swapping their feelings for armour.”

THAW IS REBORN AS LANARK INTO THE SUNLESS WORLD OF UNTHANK. His life in this claustrophobic city mirrors that of Thaw's self in mid-century Glasgow, but the mirror is dirty, warped, and in pieces. Thaw's and Lanark's lives are like two broken mirrors facing one another; each is damaged and chaotic, creating a mise-en-abyme of contorted reflections on the other; endless self-referentiality with little discernible structure. Each image is more bizarre than the next in Unthank, and like Lanark, it is easy for readers to lose footing in this city which lacks

even such presumed structures as the rising and setting of the sun. In Unthank, “The majority have forgotten the sun; moreover, they have rejected the clock. They do not measure or plan, their lives are regulated by simple appetite varied by the occasional impulse. Not surprisingly nobody is well there” (78); it is dark and stagnant, its population small, and its inhabitants are apathetic. Lanark spends his “days” on the gloomy balcony of the hellish Elite Café awaiting the appearance of the missing sun; like Thaw, he is searching out meaning and some sense of personal order in a place that appears to have none. Unlike Thaw, however, he is stripped of his imagination and his neuroses, and is remarkably straightforward in his intentions.

Although he lacks the imagination and the psychological agony of Thaw, Lanark’s still-damaged bodily-emotional system continues to attack him from the outside in; here, there is another mirrored moment, in that Thaw’s illness was both internal and external, as we have seen how his mind and his body worked in malignant harmony to destroy him. For Lanark instead, his affect and his body are conspiring, but the illness is concentrated externally. Thaw’s narrative is primarily internal, and the reader experiences his inner self in great depth and detail. This, as I have mentioned, is stripped away in Lanark as we learn little of his inner self. His emotional state is often expressed through dialogue or short narrative phrases, and the externality of Lanark’s character does not change throughout his Books, and can even make the character read as mostly lacking emotion. This is only partially true, for his dragonhide is indicative itself of the presence of his affect, and, if we look at it from a certain angle it is a map of his emotional illness. The reader is still positioned with Lanark, but we are now spectating his body instead of his inner neuroses.

Dragonhide is a freakish representation of Thaw's eczema. Whereas for Thaw, asthma was frequently his greatest physical adversary, as well as being directly psychosomatic, his eczema (though contributing to his awkwardness) was not debilitating, and only by the end did it truly hinder his sexual intentions. For Lanark, however, dragonhide becomes a spectacle of his inner self, and is both a harmful affliction and a source of admiration, "It looked diseased because it grew on a man, but considered by itself the glossy cold hide, the thorny red knuckles and elbow, the curving steel-blade claws looked very healthy indeed" (41). Lanark, likewise, is fascinated by the same disease in others, which points to his having some sense of it being a representation of his personality. Some know dragonhide as "crabs" or "crustaceans" (31), and allude to certain personalities expressing it: "'The crustacean isn't a mere mass of sentient acquisitiveness, like your leech or your sponge. It has a distinct shape. But the shape is not based on a backbone, it derives from the insensitive shell which contains the beast'" (31).

Many (if not all) of the other denizens of Unthank suffer from similar literal manifestations of their psychic-affective maladies; Lanark comes to find, sometimes to his horror, that each person he encounters is diseased. Each of these physically corresponds to something that is broken about their emotional state, but unlike Thaw/Lanark, I am only able to make conjecture about the childhood etiology of other characters' diseases, and so will be positioning my interpretation squarely in their affect and in their politicized bodies. Likewise, Lanark's etiology is both in Thaw's childhood and the events that led up to his suicide, as well as his political body in the semi-dystopia of Unthank. Neither is Lanark the only one that suffers from dragonhide: Rima, a member of Sludden's clique (the magnanimous ringleader and morally reprehensible representative of Unthank's dystopia) is also afflicted. Not unlike Lanark she keeps

to herself, but she is cold and capricious in contrast to Lanark's quiet, but ultimately well-meaning idealism. Lanark is fascinated with Rima's dragonhide as it is similar to his own, but she only returns his affections with ambivalence at best, and cold indifference at worst. As hardhearted as Rima is, and as contrasted as she is with Lanark, their diseases are coming out of similar places: they are both very bad at loving. Rima, like Lanark, is: "Also obstinate, also suspicious, with a cleverness which only reinforces a deep, deep, immeasurably deep despair" (67), and this despair-disease will come very near to destroying them both.

Lanark's dragonhide grows from that patch on his elbow to cover much of his right arm. It is without feeling, and in its early stages it is a locus of strength and cold. Both Rima and Lanark have created behavioral barriers in order to keep others at a distance, and their disease is a physical signal of this, an expression of their sad desperation for closeness. Although Lanark has not made this connection as concretely, he understands his reclusive behavior as a way to avoid others: "Admit!" he told himself, "You watched the sky because you were too cowardly to know people" (14). Lanark's intelligence is high but narrow, and usually lacks depth and complexity. His lack of life experience and amnesia regarding Thaw comes with lack of the general ability to look inward, and so the root cause of his cowardliness is lost on him. He does sometimes recognize the outward expressions and reasons for some of his behavior, but as we will later see, he is hopeless at piecing together the larger structure of his existence.

One of the ways Lanark is ignorant to his inner self is his dragonhide as an expression of his body in its sexual being. For as I have already established, love, sex and the ability to love others is an essential foundation for human existence. Dragonhide, and the other diseases that plague Unthank residents, are in many ways synonymous with Merleau-Ponty's case study: they

are people whose sexuality and affect has come to be so damaged as to make them nonfunctioning. Their outward diseases are visual and audial indicators that their inner life has been in some way compromised. In Lanark's case, the connection between his dragonhide and his sexual/emotional state becomes clear when the power of his arm begins to mix with violent sexual fantasies (41); the more intensely he is fascinated by his limb, the more he is intoxicated by its implications:

“Once he discovered himself stroking the cold right hand with the fingertips of the left and murmuring, ‘When I am all like this . . .’ But if he was all like that he would have no feeling at all, so he thought of Rima and her moments of kindness . . . these memories were too feeble to restore human feeling, and he would return to admiring the feelingless strength of the dragonish limb until he fell asleep” (42).

Rima had been extremely ambivalent toward Lanark, most certainly a mirror of Marjory. This, as with Thaw, unhinges Lanark, who again appears in this moment to succumb to his numbness. Lanark so hopelessly desires Rima's love, but he lacks the ability to express this to her outwardly. His feeble attempts only provoke in her cynicism and scorn, which in a terrible cycle forces his (and also presumably her) dragonhide to spread and become dangerous. It threatens to entrap their soft, feelingful bodies under coats of unfeeling armor.

The diseases of Unthank also represent a loss of control over the body. The unfeeling limb pre-empts Lanark's movements and needs, such as when “he would find it holding a glass of water to his lips and only then notice he was thirsty” (40), and later it begins to attack him in

his sleep: “A ragged wound had been torn in his side through the pyjama jacket, blood from it flooded the blankets. He bit the thumb knuckle of his left hand to prevent further screaming and glared at the bloodstained claws of the right . . .” (42). This is a superficial metaphor for Thaw’s asthma and its gripping assaults, and is another depiction of Thaw’s earliest confrontations with his own abused body; like seeing his heart on a plate and being meant to eat it, Lanark’s unconscious need to wound his own body has been cultivated by the trauma of social-political childrearing. There are few instances of loss of agency and exploitation of vulnerability as extreme as the beaten child, and those profound moments of lost agency based on physical violence determine the development of the adult. Thaw subsequently was never able to exercise control over his own self, inner or outer.

Each disease’s emotional source is politically linked. If we look again at the body of the child, in this case Thaw/Lanark’s, it is an historically positioned object of politics and culture, and in his historical-cultural moment, Thaw’s body was created for a political use; first, it is for obedience to the parents; then, it is for compliance in school (which in mid-century Scotland operated on intimidation and violence toward the child⁴); and then after school, even for Thaw, the Scot is expected to find work where he needs to submit to authority and toil. Scotland’s own otherized and bullied political position, however, both abuses its own people, and is often complicit in its own oppression: for even while it resists the outward abuse, it cannot help but replicate it. On some semi-conscious level, Thaw and Lanark seem to recognize this pattern, and are of the few that object to and defy the established hegemony (modern and postmodern

⁴ Gray’s *1982, Janine* has a narrative arc based on this fact. For more on Scottish politics and education, see the aforementioned and Gray’s *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland*.

Western politics are, we will later see, inherently hegemonic; I do not use this term lightly) by behaving against its value system and seeking escape. However, though Thaw and Lanark *attempt* escape, their material conditions do reflect a loss of control over the body to political power. Even Thaw's suicide does not ring, for me, as an act of rebellion, or even agency. His death, like patriarchally ruined Ophelia⁵, dragged under and drowned while singing to the breeze, was a semi-oblivious incident. It is unsurprising that in Unthank, Lanark still has little control over the events of his life, and comes even to have very little control over what his body and mind conspire to do. Thaw and Lanark's struggle are in part about their controlled subject positions and the struggle to be free from the oppressive structure.

As I alluded to earlier, Lanark and Rima are not the only citizens to suffer from a disease. These afflictions permeate the entire population of Unthank. When Lanark overhears two businessmen talking, he learns that "the population is growing smaller every day" (46), and there are mysterious and chilling disappearances everywhere. The city is emptying. At a party, he also experiences a disease other than his own kind for the first time. In this late stage, it is terrifying:

Gloopy stood grinning emptily in the doorway. His legs were together and his arms were pressed to his sides, his oiled grey hair and silver jacket glistened wetly. He took a few steps nearer, walking as if his thighs were glued together, then fell forward with

⁵ In the "Index of Plagiarisms" located in the Epilogue, Gray tells us "Books 1 and 2 owe much to the play *Hamlet* in which heavy paternalism forces a weak-minded youth into dread of existence, hallucinations, and crime" (496). Ophelia's death is obviously not the only comparison to be made to this play.

a sudden slap. He lay in the posture in which he had stood, except that his face was tilted so far back that it grinned blindly at the ceiling. Without moving his limbs he suddenly slid an inch or two toward Lanark along the polished floorboards, and then the light went out. (33)

Although there is no official taxonomy for these diseases, here Gloopy has just fallen into the final stages of what would likely be called a “leech,” or “a mere mass of sensitive acquisitiveness” (31). Previously, he had been an empty sycophant preoccupied with gaining the superficiality of acquaintance with anyone that passed along and Lanark, searching out significance and order, had little to do with his energy-sucking vapidness. The personality traits and experiences that result in Lanark’s dragonhide seem to be the opposite of what drives Gloopy’s illness. Lanark withdraws and forms his scaly armor based on his inability to love and engage in meaningful physical or social contact with others (though is full of desire for it), while Gloopy’s body stiffens and contorts because he is hollow. He is bereft of personality and desire for deep attachment, and needs to feed superficially off of the affect of others. Because of this, Lanark is disgusted and terrified of what happens to Gloopy. He is unable to relate as their outer diseases and outer expression are too dissimilar, but in Gloopy’s and Lanark’s constant search for love and affection from others they are both sad, empty, and internally destroyed. Why Gloopy is a leech, and not a crab, or another Unthank disease, is based on the outer layer of his personality, but the core of it is the same as Lanark. ““Problems take different forms but they’re all caused by the same error”” (63); something in each of their experiences has broken each of their inner

emotional selves, and so they are both blighted and disintegrating in the darkness and deafening silence of Unthank.

The horror does not stop with Gloopy's disturbing disappearance. When Lanark later encounters Gay's disease outside the Elite,

. . . surprise gagged him. He had expected dragon claws like his own, but all he could see was a perfectly shaped white little hand, the fingers lightly clenched, until she unclenched them to show the palm A mouth lay on it, grinning sarcastically. It opened and said in a tiny voice, "You're trying to understand things, and that interests me." It was Sludden's voice. (45)

Lanark's disgust comes partially out of his difference, as it did in Gloopy's case. Her disease is one of openness and vulnerability while his is one of solidity and encasement. His dragonhide manifests in part because he is aloof, while her mouths belies a personality in which dependence exists deeply. Christie March, in her article "Bella and the Beast," explores some of the bodies of Lanark in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque, and so I take Gay's openness and vulnerability from her reading, particularly in that "Gay is reduced, literally, to a mouthpiece for Sludden's purposes" (March 13). Indeed, we will find out later, that Nan, another of Sludden's girlfriends, also suffers from mouths, and her condition, a great deal worse than Gay's, is an expression of the same loss of agency. In the case of Gay and Nan their lack of control exists and is caused by both the macrostructure of Unthank (which I will talk about extensively in the next section), and the microstructure of the gendered and embodied relationship each of them has

with Sludden. Their diseases, like those of Lanark, Rima and Gloopy, do come out of the split self and the broken affect, but again, the surface cause for the metaphor differs.

Particularly in Gay's case, it is easy to see the historically typical woman consumed by male will. She is complicit in Sludden's ownership of her, and the way he appears to believe he has ownership over the other women in his clique:

“Who will we give to him? . . . I'll take Nan and Lanark can have you. How would you like that?”

Gay leaned toward Sludden and kissed him daintily on the cheek.

He said, “No. We'll give him Rima.” (7)

Sludden conflates love with domination when he says it is a “way of mastering other people” (6); it is clear that in this cult of personality, the women are particularly susceptible to his authority. Nan, a “small shy uncombed blonde of about sixteen,” is “crazy” about Sludden, and each other woman, including Rima, has had sexual liaisons with him. Like Gay, the other women in the group collude in his ownership, though Sludden “owns” Gay in the traditional sense in that they are engaged. She obliges his ownership moreso than the other women because of their closeness, which leads to the ultimate breakdown of power over her own body as represented by her disease. Not only do her natural mouth and the mouth in her hand become mouthpieces for Sludden's voices and opinions, she loses all control over her body as a whole:

[Lanark] saw that the soles of her feet were an inch above the pavement. Her body dangled before him as if from a hook in her brain, her smile was vacant and silly, her jaw fell and the voice which came from the mouth was not formed of tongue or lip.



Though it had a slightly cavernous echo it was Sludden's voice, which said glibly, "It's time we



got together again, Lanark," while a tiny identical voice from her left hand cried shrilly,



"You worry too much about the wrong things."

...

"Like something sliding on a wire she quivered and moved backward, too, slowly at first, then



accelerating till he saw her emptily grinning face recede and dwindle to a point in the direction of the cafe" (46).

Gay not only lacks control over her individual body, but she lacks control over her social and political body. The body can be a point of agency, but for Gay, it is vulnerable to and taken over by Sludden's superior male sociopolitical position.

The openings of the mouths lead to other possibilities of penetration, and we find vulnerability especially in the case of Nan, who Lanark later encounters:

“I began to grow mouths, not just in my face but in other places, and when I was alone they argued and shouted and screamed at me. Sludden was very good with them. He could always get them singing in tune, and when we slept together he even made me glad of them. He said he’d never known a girl who could be pierced in so many places” (360).

By being controlled so entirely by one man, Gay’s and Nan’s emotions are split from their own bodies as well as removed from the ability to connect in any significant way with anyone else. The nature of their entrapment also keeps them from having any political agency. March sees the potential procreative power of Nan and Gay as potential political power (14), and defines their eventual pregnancies as reclaiming the control formerly held by Sludden. In some ways, I agree. Nan’s moments of emotional and bodily control in a world dominated by Sludden were during her pregnancy: “the baby would move inside me and I would suddenly feel calm and complete” (361); I argue, however, that her pregnancy was not a moment of true agency, but a shift of agency. All of the orgiastic and non-procreative sex of small and stagnating Unthank has managed to result in Nan’s pregnancy, and in that she has the significant choice of either aborting or keeping the child, she does reclaim some control over her own body. She breaks away from the shackles of Sludden, but we will see soon, that that does not mean she truly exercises agency.

In horror at Gay’s mouths, Lanark runs. “His wish to leave the city was powerful and complete and equalled by a certainty that streets and buildings and diseased people stretched infinitely in every direction,” and he yells “from the centre of his soul, ‘Let me out! Let me out! Let me out!’” (46). In the Necropolis on a hill, a mouth appears on an obelisk and tells him that it

is the way out: “The edges of the lips were shaded lightly on the snow but curved steeply down to the projecting tips of the perfect teeth. From the blackness between these rose a cold wind with the salty odour of rotting seaweed, then a hot one with an odour like roasting meat” (47). In this image is the conflation of birth and consumption. It



evokes the vagina with its lips and salty sea smell, and the mouth of the digestive system with the scent of roasting meat. It tells Lanark to come “Naked and head first” (47), but he leaves his trousers on and places his



feet first.



He is eaten by and born into the Institute.



CONSUMPTION



REPRODUCTION



LANARK WAKENS TO FIND HIS
DRAGONHIDE IS GONE. The institute
seems to be a hospital of sorts; like Unthank,
this place is sunless and built on

contradictions of the familiar and the unsettling. There are nurses and doctors, but the food is strangely monotonous, there is a 25-hour clock on the wall, and there is a blind-covered window on which there is cast an eerie “pearly mobile light” (50) suggestive not of familiarities like sunlight or traffic. We learn that it is where all of Unthank’s diseased have been disappearing. At first, it seems a reprieve to Lanark. He searched for escape and found some form of it: he was appalled at the claustrophobia and disease, and instead of dreading and actively avoiding his disappearance/death/birth, he again causes it. Lanark is a consistently subversive figure in the narrative as he objects to the damage inflicted upon him, and in his horror, searches for ways to exercise agency. The institute, however, is not any more the way out than was Unthank, and despite Lanark’s relative peace and his newly fully human body, the institute is the underbelly; the invisible political body that underlies what appears to be some version of Europe in modernity.

I see *Lanark’s* institute as the postmodern, poststructural vision of Hobbes’s premodern Leviathan. With the advent of European democracy, power has been shifted from the vast, visible monarch to diffuse and invisible loci of power, a power that Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* would say is “rarely formulated in continuous, systematic discourse; it is often made up of bits and pieces . . . a micro-physics of power, whose field of validity is situated in a sense between these great functionings and the bodies themselves” (26). In this I see the very image of Gray’s modern into postmodern-era commonwealth Leviathan, a body made of bodies, both whole and in pieces. This model of political entity is no longer the eye-in-the-sky, but the mouth in the ground, metaphorically and literally subterranean. While the institute itself, and those bodies comprising it, still carry vestigial signals of British monarchical power, it is a representation of

the fragmented location of power as found in the modern clinic or prison (both of which the institute resembles). In this type of system, Foucault tells us,

the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. This subjection . . . may be calculated, organized, technically thought out; it may be subtle, make use neither of weapons nor of terror and yet remain of a physical order . . . this knowledge and mastery constitute what might be called the political technology of the body. (26).

This “technology of the body” is synonymous with what I am calling consumption, as in *Lanark*, the body is both subjected and productive. The institute employs both Foucauldian technology, in that the body is used for signals of political authority, and also literal technology, in that the body is scientifically exploited to fuel an actual (though surreal and embodied) building, as well as an abstract political system. Despite the institute’s having healed Lanark’s dragonhide, he learns that its true function is not to heal the diseased, but to use the energy expelled at their deaths to perpetuate and expand itself.

This bodily iteration of the Leviathan (the institute and its second half, the “council,” both comprising the whole and interchangeable for my purposes) closely monitors its constituent bodies to discern how they are best useful to the perpetuation of its subtle authority, and non-institute ordained sexuality poses an inner and outer threat. In the world of *Lanark*, this is literalized in the way in which the political structure consumes the sexually/affectively diseased to survive, and also with the way the institute privileges those that are reproductively viable and complaisant with their power. I have already clarified the connection between the

phenomenological body and the affect, or how cultural abuses done to the physical body in turn create sexual/affective infirmity. In *Unthank* this damage is made literal by physical deformities that represent the nature of the individual's distinct affliction. Now, with *Lanark's* consumption by the institute, the way in which and *why* political power permeates cultural practice that leads to disease (in *Thaw's* case, psychic, in *Lanark's*, physical) becomes conspicuous.

Lanark's dragonhide had not been in a late stage when he was eaten, and so despite injuries from his foot-first descent, he is mysteriously cured. The logical conclusion is that the function of the institute is to heal. Indeed, *Lanark* becomes a "doctor" as the only prerequisite is to have survived his disease, but it quickly becomes clear that "healing" is just a way to hasten deterioration. There are several "patients" with dragonhide, and they are all in the latest stage: "Some had glossy hides, some were plated like tortoises, some were sealed like fish and crocodiles. Most had quills, spines or spikes and some were hugely horned or antlered, but all were made monstrous by a detail, a human foot or ear or breast . . ." (66). *Lanark* and his overseeing doctor, Ozenfant, are about to observe an individual in the final cataclysmic stage of dragonhide when he whispers in *Lanark's* ear:

"Like nations losing unjust wars they [dragons] convert more and more of themselves into armour when they should surrender or retreat. So someone may start by limiting only his affections or lust or intelligence, and eventually heart, genitals, brain, hands and skin are crusted over. He does nothing but talk and feed, giving and taking through a single hole; then the mouth shuts, the heat has no outlet, it increases inside him until . . . watch, you will see." (68)

Here Ozenfant further confirms my suspicion that there is a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the damaged sexuality and dragonhide; not only that, however, but he gently hints at the political relationship, likening the subjection of a nation-body to war to the subjection of the human body to disease. In that comparison is the implication of the ultimate consumption of the body for political use, which continues to become more and more explicit as Lanark is inducted into the power structure of the institute. He watches with excitement and dread as the dragon goes “salamander,” exploding in an astronomical fury. When the phantasmagoria ends, Ozenfant says:

“Not quite a million megatherms, but it will suffice for a month or two.”

Lanark said sharply, “The heat is used?”

“Of course. Somehow we must warm ourselves.”

“That is atrocious!”

“Why?”

Lanark started stammering then forced himself to speak slowly.

“I knew people deteriorate. That is dismal but not surprising. But for cheerful healthy folk to profit by it is atrocious!”

“What would you prefer? A world with a cesspool under it where the helplessly corrupt would fall and fester eternally? That is a very old-fashioned model of the universe.” (69)

The advising doctors outwardly justify this practice to Lanark in terms of necessity and cleanliness. According to them, in order to heal a few, many must be sacrificed. They seem to

even have justified their attempts at healing as genuine, though both Munro, a “rigorist” and Ozenfant, specializing in dragons, are humorously yet unsettlingly ineffective at healing. The doctors are complicit with the institute’s ultimate goal of commodification of the diseased, as they speak of their work more in terms of profit than treatment, and are entirely nonplussed by what horrifies Lanark.

Ozenfant tells us calmly and concretely about the rigors who “crumble into crystals essential for making communication circuits” (70), and we know of the dragons who provide the heat of their pent up passions. Later, we most distressingly learn about the source of the food from the “catalyst,” a female doctor whose specialty is to push far-gone cases over the edge:

“You *know* nobody is ever cured, that the treatment only keeps the bodies fresh until we need fuel or clothes or food.”

Lanark looked at her, said, “Foooo?” and dropped his spoon in the plate.

“Of course! What did you think you’ve been eating? Have you never looked in the sink? Has nobody ever shown you the drains under the sponge-wards?” (89)

These are all examples of Foucault’s “body technology” made literal, where micro forms of power focused on the deteriorating body within the institute allow the entire system to function, both its whole and its human components. Also, being a modern Foucauldian hospital, the building, the body of the institute, promotes little privacy, and is panoptic in the sense of constant surveillance. There are “viewing lenses,” mirrored seemingly private bedrooms in which women “go blank” when not watched (91); there are open cathedrals and all different manner of

architectures designed for observation of patients and staff alike. This is in direct opposition to the premodern prisons and forms of contagion-containment in which isolation and non-visibility was key; of course, it is also, as Ozenfant reminds us, not a premodern hell where the tortured body was a spectatorial event, but a modern hell in which authority over and use of the body is civilized, dispersed, fragmented and all for “good housekeeping” (68). The doctors and magistrates of the institute would have us believe that this system is humane and essential, but Lanark senses that despite its sterile appearances and its use of the diseased, the shift was only a shift-- authority remains centered on *use*. Part of the reason for this is that more generally, the institute is a broad political entity that reinforces the culture that causes the diseases to occur, as both within and without the institute, it is promoting affective disease in order to consume.

Lanark’s original dismay at the source of energy and the consumptive nature of the system turns into outright repulsion in regard to the food. Because of his narrow intelligence, he never seems to be able to piece together the entire picture. He rejects the institute’s food and thereby the institute, displaying a simplicity in his comprehension of his situation, which continues until his end. This is another expression of positing the reader with the protagonist: although eventually the political anatomy is laid bare in the late chapter “Explanation,” Lanark and the reader are until then unsure of the entire structure, capturing snippets of conversations and events, left only to react and speculate. Still, Lanark’s choice to rebel against the established system is significant to his character, and becomes even more so later with the birth of his son, as I will discuss.

A curious expression of the Leviathan, the institute has a body and a consciousness of its own. We have already encountered one of its mouths, but in other forms it has guts, skin and

voice, and what seems to be a semi-consciousness. Lanark's "locker" is covered in a "paper-thin membrane" and "though he stood back and ran his shoulder into it several times it only quivered and rumbled like a struck drum" (75). In the dark, tubular corridors, "the usual laws governing the motion of bodies seemed not to apply here. If you leaned backward against the force of the current you were certain to fall, but the farther you bowed before it the faster it carried you with no danger of falling whatsoever" (76). Later, Ozenfant sends Lanark to the staff club: "Go to the nearest hall and enter any lift. If you ask it nicely it will bring you direct" (76); in one case, and most explicitly, Lanark has a full conversation with a lift:

"Is it you, Gloopy?"

The lift said, "No, only part of me."

"Which part?"

"The voice and feelings and sense of responsibility. I don't know what they've done with the rest." (86)

Gloopy is the same personality and quite happy with his situation without the hindrance of a disintegrating body and social/physical expectations that are attached to it. The institute is the huge human image of the Leviathan, while parts like Gloopy and its innards, limbs, patients and doctors are the constituents. It is easy to read *Unthank* and the institute as dystopian and oppressive, but it is only grisly because it is the representation of the inner structures of late capitalism exposed. It is as if with his literal metaphors the author has stripped away flesh and skin and exposed the sinews, pulsations, and organs that were hitherto hidden by the appearances of progress such as representative democracy and secular humanism. Foucault reminds us that we must not backslide into periodizing for we run the risk of seeing our present political power

structures as superior to those past (Foucault 7). Indeed, our bodies today are just as exploited and dominated; only the titles, costumes and locales of power have changed.

While the institute favors the diseased for obvious reasons, it also appears to privilege the reproductively viable female body. Christie March argues that the reproductive woman is a point of subversion in the text, for in the case of Nan's pregnancy, she was able to find escape from Unthank and Sludden's repressive, sexist behavior. Sludden was also the political figurehead for Unthank, representing the structure of the council and the institute. Nan's moments of peace, we will remember, were tied to her unborn infant, so like Lanark, she sought a way out. The institute also swallowed her with its mouth, but Nan came naked and head first, and, according to her, ". . . it was easy. It was like sinking through warm dark water that could be breathed. Every bit of me was supported. I still felt the labour pains but they weren't sore, they were like bursts of music" (362). It is as if the man is eaten, digested and defecated, barely alive, while the laboring woman is gently birthed. It certainly does seem a point of privilege, but the institute is always self-serving. As Lanark is finding, there is seemingly no escape: the death-life cycle is continuous, and so for Nan, she escapes Sludden only to find herself still a useful body for the institute mainly because of her ability, unlike Lanark and Rima, to love and reproduce in a culturally normative way. The institute expands both by exploiting the affectively disintegrating, but takes on those who are whole and complicit with the hegemony they continue to comprise.

In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault explores this idea in terms of political preoccupation with the sexual behaviors of populations. This is just another way of interpreting how the institute and the council keep control, but to my argument it is key. Because I believe that every one of *Lanark's* diseases is an expression of the broken link between body and affect, I see that

the political structure has a great deal to gain from setting norms and regulating the sexual behavior of its populations. The institute accepted and was able to subsume Nan and her baby, for instance, for its own purposes, but in the case of Lanark and Rima, it is all too happy to expel them. It is when sexuality grows uncontrollable and unprofitable that the institute has no use for it; as we will see, an instance of truly uncontrolled reproduction poses a threat.

When Lanark cures Rima of her severe (but outwardly beautiful) dragonhide, they fall into, at first, a soft and blissful love. Both Rima and Lanark are transformed, for they are for the first time experiencing their bodies and sexualities as whole. Lanark had been respected amongst the doctors and staff until he cures Rima and decides to abscond. Thereafter Lanark's fellow doctors become dismissive and sour. This is further evidence that the institute is only interested in the individual's use to the system; Lanark uses his newfound wholeness as autonomy and chooses to again rebel, which seldom occurs. Many enter the institute, but few leave, for it is a comfortable position of power, complicit, like Nan, with the status quo.

Lanark and Rima do leave to return to Unthank (ironically and to Lanark's chagrin), and are expelled into the "Intercalendrical Zone," a space/time outside of the institute that does not follow the laws of gravity or time, and is surreal in landscape and perspective. It is here that Rima's pregnancy progresses on a warped and accelerated timescale, which I see as a representation of the uncontrollable nature of Lanark and Rima's reproduction. It is outside of and unsanctioned by the institute, and creates a character in the novel that we later learn is unintentional and unanticipated, whose rapid growth in the womb continues as a rapid growth into adulthood, and stands to challenge both authorial intention and the agenda of the institute, which, we learn from Munro, is planning to consume Unthank wholesale:

“Industrially speaking, Unthank is no longer profitable, so it is going to be scrapped and swallowed. In a piecemeal way we’ve been doing that for years, but now we can take it *en bloc* and I don’t mind telling you we’re rather excited. We’re used to eating towns and villages but this will be the first big city since Carthage and the energy gain will be enormous.” (369)

The newly mobilized Unthank, however, (a thinly veiled post-industrial, postmodern Glasgow), is upon Lanark’s return populated, productive, and political. Someone howls with laughter, crying, “Carthage? What about Coventry?” . . . “Leningrad!” “Berlin!” “Warsaw!” “Dresden!” “Hiroshima!” (414). Clearly this power to consume spans all of Western history and all of modern Europe, but Unthank has finally taken it upon itself to self-govern. They send Lanark to defend the city in a council summit at the mysterious city of Provan while his son Alexander grows up as rapidly as he did in the womb. Here he meets Nastler, the author. He tells Lanark that he has planned a great Revelations-style apocalypse to devour Unthank and the institute and council alike. He is dumbfounded when Lanark asks about what will happen to his son in this grandiose, and in his opinion, “bloody rotten” (497) plot:

The conjuror stared and said, “You have no son.”

“I have a son called Alexander who was born in the cathedral.”

The conjuror, looking confused, grubbed among the papers on his bed and at last held one up saying, “Impossible, look here. This is a summary of the nine or ten chapters I haven’t written yet. If you

read it you'll see there's no time for Rima to have a baby in the cathedral. She goes away too quickly with Sludden." (498)

Despite Nastler's surprise at Alexander's existence, he chooses to write him into the narrative. Nastler is the author, the conjuror, the figure where from rot comes creation, and his own work has the ability to subvert and change his intentions. Instead of THE END, of the death of everything, and the sweetness of oblivion, Nastler, and Gray, decide to write a different kind of hope based on unexpected Alexander. He is the unarmed soldier of the full-scale revolution against the institute and the council. At the end of Lanark's life, when he comes back from Provan unsuccessful and Unthank is under siege, Alexander says to him: "Of course you changed nothing. The world is only improved by people who do ordinary jobs and refuse to be bullied. Nobody can persuade owners to share with makers when makers won't shift for themselves" (554). Clearly here Lanark's son is culturally and politically aware in a way that his father never was. True, Lanark attempted individual escape, but Alexander represents subversion of the modern political system based on profit and exploitation on the global scale. He is the product of unregulated sex and love between two people who were on the brink of consumption, and is harbinger of a new model of the universe that in no way resembles the modern and postmodern Leviathan. Instead of an all-consuming deluge, Gray offers the hope of progressive political metamorphosis. Thaw finds his escape when some version of Gloopy announces his imminent (true) death. In his end, he also found peace and sunlight:

The chamberlain vanished. Lanark forgot him, propped his chin on his hands and sat a long time watching the moving clouds. He was

a slightly worried, ordinary old man but glad to see the light in the
sky. (560)

I STARTED MAKING MAPS WHEN I WAS SMALL
SHOWING PLACE, RESOURCES, WHERE THE ENEMY
AND WHERE LOVE LAY. I DID NOT KNOW
TIME ADDS TO LAND. EVENTS DRIFT CONTINUALLY DOWN,
EFFACING LANDMARKS, RAISING THE LEVEL, LIKE SNOW.

I HAVE GROWN UP. MY MAPS ARE OUT OF DATE.
THE LAND LIES OVER ME NOW.
I CANNOT MOVE. IT IS TIME TO GO.

END



Each of Gray's endings is idealistic. Lanark's escape from his suffering is a miniature of Nastler's great apocalyptic deluge in which all human suffering ceases. That power only ever shifts instead of progresses, and that one half of society feeds on the suffering of the other to exist, leads me to believe that the only authentic moment of agency is, indeed, oblivion. Clearly I am no optimist. If, however, individuals can unlearn their "unloveliness," that is, break the cycle of violence and exploitation of those that they claim to love and embrace the fullness of others' beings, in that they are made up of their bodies, brains, the exquisite

interconnectivity of emotion, sense and flesh; that they recognize their brokenness and therefore do not break others, the exploitation of one another has the potential to cease. From the space my body occupies, from the way that my gaze subtends the curve of humanity, I see an unnerving history of misery and cruelty and of the deceptions of improvement and humanitarianism. Despite my heartache at a species so savage, as I can still see the beauty of a sunlit sky, I can still see the beauty and potential in earnest, gentle love.

GOODBYE

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