

PALACKÝ UNIVERSITY OLMOUC
PHILOSOPHICAL FACULTY

Department of English and American Studies

Matrimony and Parenthood in Alasdair Gray's novels

Lanark: A Life in Four Books and Poor Things

Manželství a rodičovství v románech Alasdaira Graye

Lanark: Život ve čtyřech knihách a Chudáčci

Diploma Thesis

By

TEREZA HONSOVÁ

(English Philology)

Supervisor: Mgr. Ema Jelínková, PhD.

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The aim of this thesis is to research the concepts of matrimony and parenthood appearing in Alasdair Gray's novels *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* and *Poor Things*. Initially, certain autobiographic features of Alasdair Gray included in the novels along with their potential relation to both examined phenomena will be taken into consideration. Consequently, both matrimony and parenthood will be examined separately in both works, alongside with possible negative side effects the characters of both works were marked with for the rest of their lives due to bad parenting/mothering.

I confirm that I wrote the submitted thesis myself and integrated corrections and suggestions of improvement of my supervising professor. I also confirm that the thesis includes complete list of sources and literature cited.

In Olomouc

CONTENT

Introduction.....	5
I. Alasdair Gray-Life in Ink	8
II. Lanark: Life in Four Books – Parenthood.....	12
2.1. Poisonous Pedagogy	12
2.1. Dragonhide.....	17
2.2. Parental alienation.....	19
2.3. Religious upbringing.....	21
2.3. Lanark as a father.....	22
III. Lanark: Life in Four Books - Matrimony.....	27
3.1. Mrs. Thaw aka Amy Fleming (Gray).....	27
3.2. Lanark and Rima (aka Alasdair and Inge)	30
III. Poor Things – Parenthood.....	36
Motherhood and maternal role	37
Reversed social & parental roles.....	43
Producers of poor things	45
IV. Poor Things – Matrimony.....	50
Matrimony as a business contract	50
Conclusion	53
Resumé.....	58
Bibliography.....	60
Anotace	62
Annotation.....	63

Introduction

As Roderick Watson states in his work *The Literature of Scotland* (2007), the aim of Scottish writers of the early twentieth-century Scottish Renaissance was to think of Scotland as a treasure chest that could contribute with its richness and uniqueness something of immense value to the world. In compliance with this nationally proud image of their motherland, it is plain enough that most of their literary works were concerned primarily with political and linguistic nationalism as well as with overall exploration of Scottishness as such. Their aim was to accomplish a perfect unification and combination of personal, national and even global elements. Nevertheless, as Roderick Watson indicates, the second generation of the Scottish Renaissance writers showed certain tendency to break away from the tradition of their predecessors, pursuing a completely different objective in their literary works:

As a general rule, indeed, the Scottish writers of the second half of the century have been less inclined to pursue their precursor's large-scale system-building ambitions. In their place have come the exploration of personal identity and works of psychological interrogation, or works that dare to confront the modern realities of economic oppression, cultural hegemony, environmental exploitation or urban breakdown.¹

Alasdair Gray himself may be deemed a member of this tradition, particularly due to his literary socio-political focus. Nevertheless, it seems to be a quite complicated task to assign him to a specific tradition. Watson himself considers Gray to be a valid representative of the third generation of the Scottish Renaissance proceeding far beyond the abovementioned literary movement, marked with specifically given area of focus and lasting till late 1940s, the second generation even till the 1960s. Simultaneously, however, he also mentions the possibility outlined by some critics claiming that the publication of Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* (1981) and Edwin Morgan's collection *The Second Life* (1968) may be perceived as markers of a completely new, contemporary literary scene in Scotland with no affiliation to the previous movements.

¹ Roderick Watson, *The literature of Scotland* (Basingstoke New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2.

Just like Alasdair Gray himself, even his magnum opus *Lanark: a Life in Four Books* seems to be of very complex and unclassifiable nature. It started as “a realistic *bildungsroman* with a strongly autobiographical element,”² consequently integrating features of realism and fantasy along with postmodernist playfulness. Gray’s semi-autobiographic *Lanark* provides the readers with double perspective, which as Cairns Craig states in *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (1998), “relates the novel fundamentally to the schizophrenic tradition of Scottish writing.”³ Moreover, its “spheres of fantasy and reality might be read as the continuance of the ‘Caledonian Antisyzygy’, but are better counted as representing a predominant mode of the Western postmodern novel, where uncertainty and skepticism about both personal and social worlds are writ large in the late twentieth century.”⁴ Despite the novel’s unique complexity and elaboration, complicating its classification, there is a unifying permanently invariable element in *Lanark*, which is the eponymous character himself functioning as the author’s, Alasdair Gray’s alter ego.

This thesis is interested primarily in the fragmentation of the abovementioned protagonist living two lives throughout his literary lifetime, specifically in the way the author’s own life and personal experience intertwine with that of the protagonist and how the literary text itself reflects their mutual suppression of emotions toward their family members and consequently even toward their future partners. These findings are essential in order to achieve the objective to examine the concepts of matrimony and parenthood in Gray’s *Lanark* and *Poor Things* (1992). Whereas *Lanark* provides deep insight into the male’s (Gray’s) perspective of the examined phenomena, “the ‘woman question’ was to be explored further in a wittier and less rawly exposed fashion in Gray’s third major novel *Poor Things*.”⁵ Particularly due to the portrayal of the female

² Roderick Watson, *The literature of Scotland* (Basingstoke New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 218.

³ Duncan J. Petrie, *Contemporary Scottish fictions : film, television and the novel*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 51.

⁴ Gerard Carruthers, *Scottish literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 129.

⁵ Roderick Watson, *The literature of Scotland* (Basingstoke New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 227.

protagonist, Bella Baxter, being both her own mother and child at the same time, Gray plunges into a vast exploration of female perception of matrimony and motherhood as well as “the limits of male intellectual arrogance, emotional possessiveness — and perhaps delusion — in all that follows.”⁶ Therefore, *Poor Things* has also been selected as a literary source for the examination of the abovementioned phenomena with the intention to complete the whole image of matrimony and parenthood as perceived from the perspectives of both genders.

⁶ Roderick Watson, *The literature of Scotland* (Basingstoke New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 227.

I. Alasdair Gray-Life in Ink

As Rodge Glass, Gray's biographer states in his work *Alasdair Gray: A Secretary's Biography* (2009), Alasdair Gray identifies himself as an introvert, who has been having difficulties to communicate with other people and being understood in a way he wished to throughout his entire life. As early as his childhood, young Alasdair experienced certain emotional detachment from his mother's side. Amy Fleming (then Gray) is being entirely omitted from Alasdair's memory narratives throughout his biography sessions with Glass and when asked about her, Alasdair only comments on the relationship with his mother saying "If you are lucky enough not to be separated from your mother, it is difficult to describe her character, because she is the climate in which you live...but...and Mora and I have discussed this...she was, physically slightly cold."⁷ His observations of Amy Gray lack any traces of emotions whatsoever, unlike his sister's depictions suggesting, in Glass's words, a "more personal, alive, believable home life than Alasdair's version."⁸ In her perspective, Amy Gray is portrayed as being a good confidante and a competent manager with respect to being in charge of the house as "she controlled finances, dad came home with his pay packet every week, handed it over – and then she would give him his "pocket money" for the week!"⁹

As Glass further on observes "it was considered disgraceful of a woman to work in those days, so she was confined to duties at home – that is how he saw her, the person who fed him, clothed him, and sent him off to school."¹⁰ Such emotional detachment from the maternal figure, as demonstrated in Alasdair's description of hers, might have taken part in Alasdair's inability to express his own emotions or even to connect with other human beings, especially with women in his later life, as he experienced multiple unsuccessful relationships.

⁷ Rodge Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 31.

⁸ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 37.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid 32.

As an alternative, Alasdair Gray sought comfort in self-realization, which he experienced first as a child via art, enabling him both to express and at the same time conceal his emotions in it. His propensity to art soon outgrew into certain kind of vocation as he went to study at Glasgow School of Art and decided to work for free on murals on the ceiling of Greenhead Church in Bridgeton in Glasgow. As Sludden, a character from Gray's literary semi-autobiography *Lanark: Life in Four Books* (1981) states: "Art is the only work open to people who can't get along with others and still want to be special."¹¹ This was the case with Alasdair Gray, an introvert figure, who has never been understood in a way he wished to.

Similar comfort was provided also with the process of writing, which was not perceived only as a way to earn one's living, it served him both as a retreat and a way to project his feelings. As Alasdair Gray himself admits, in one of his meetings with Rodge Glass, it has always been quite difficult for him to connect with other people, especially on emotional level, saying "I exist at a certain...distance...from my own feelings...in that...there are many feelings that I have that...don't reach my consciousness."¹² Apart from certain emotional mediator, writing along with painting seemed to help him dealing with multiple relationship problems as well as health issues throughout his life, including severe eczema or strong asthma attacks accompanied with frequent fits of panic. Alasdair Gray decided to confront his real life struggles in his literary worlds.

Eventually, Alasdair's two passions, art and writing, appeared to be in certain harmonious relationship, as he slowly began to "blend picture into word into picture."¹³ Not only did he started to illustrate his own pieces of writing in pencil, turning them into works of art, at the age of eighteen, he also triggered the process of turning his "soul into printer's ink."¹⁴ What Alasdair Gray himself refers to in this way, are his very first drafts on what later became

¹¹ Alasdair Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007), 6.

¹² Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 33.

¹³ Ibid 75.

¹⁴ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 195.

Lanark: Life in Four Books. Alasdair's novel was an influential piece not only for many fellow writers of that period but also even for the younger generation of writers such as Ron Butlin or Brian McCabe. *Lanark* also represents Alasdair's surrealist semi-autobiographic piece mapping his life for over the period of thirty years, which is exactly how long the journey from the very first ideas to the actual publication took. After being rejected by Curtis Brown literary agency in London in 1963, its eventual publication triggered unforeseen emotion in Alasdair Gray as he literally felt that "each copy was his true body and his soul inside."¹⁵ So deep was the connection between him and his semi-autobiographical masterpiece, him and his alter ego Duncan Thaw aka Lanark.

Reflections on Gray's life are to be seen especially in Book One and Book Two of the novel, concerned with the life of Alasdair's literary alter ego Duncan Thaw. Book Three and Book Four are set in a not further specified time, in a surrealist dystopian world, specifically a city named Unthank. These parts of *Lanark* are focused on the eponymous protagonist, who is in fact the afterlife realization of Duncan Thaw, living his second life in aforementioned Unthank, a dystopian version of Glasgow. He is trying to learn from his previous mistakes and reach what he desires most, which is "a little brightness, a little affection, and occasional peaceful contentment."¹⁶ Many of the characters appearing in *Lanark* are based on real people from Gray's vicinity such as Duncan's sister Ruth being a literary projection of Mora Jean Gray, Alasdair's younger sister or both his parents being represented by Mr. and Mrs. Thaw. Even Gray's ongoing health issues such as the aforementioned asthma and eczema are being dealt with in *Lanark* as well, so are the difficulties in his first marriage with his former wife Inge. As Alasdair Gray admits in one of the meetings with Rodge Glass:

In 1969 or 1970-my marriage was in a very bad way...It was then I wrote "The Institute" chapters of Book Three of Lanark. The cannibalism. The dragonhide. ...When I was writing these hellish

¹⁵ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 166.

¹⁶ *Ibid* 161.

sections...it was the only time I felt quite sane and straightforward and happy!¹⁷

Before the publication of *Lanark*, there had been many predecessors of Duncan Thaw, Alasdair's first attempts of literary alter egos. Three years before the very first drafts on *Lanark*, specifically in 1951, a character named Obbly-Pobbly, an "asthmatic glum hero whose heroism and asthma derive from his being an extra-terrestrial agent sent down by a higher authority to save the world,"¹⁸ appears in his notes. Nevertheless, it is Lanark, described by Rodge Glass as being "a very disagreeable, humourless intellectual, self-pitying in the extreme, and is often too self-obsessed to even notice other people coming and going from his life"¹⁹ who eventually gets the credit for being a truthful even though a bit exaggerated literary version of Alasdair Gray himself.

In the first edition of *Lanark*, a bookmark appeared, mentioning a highly contagious disease named *lanarcosis illustratus*, also referred to as Gray's Syndrome. Symptoms of this incurable social disease include, among other things, an extreme reluctance to open one's heart to neither close, nor distant relatives. Further on, as a way of coping with this social disease it is suggested to "drink heavily and not to worry"²⁰ which might be a reference to Alasdair's slight drinking problems, described among others by his former partner Bethsy Gray (no family relation), blaming his excessive drinking problems for the end of their relationship.

This diploma thesis is about to take into consideration Alasdair Gray's autobiographical features included in the examined works *Lanark: Life in Four Books* and *Poor Things* (1992). Their relevance to the examined phenomena of matrimony and parenthood is based on firm connection between Alasdair Gray's life experience and the content of his oeuvre as it was demonstrated in this chapter.

¹⁷ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 111.

¹⁸ Ibid 51.

¹⁹ Ibid 161.

²⁰ Ibid 165.

II. Lanark: Life in Four Books – Parenthood

Alasdair Gray's *Lanark: Life in Four Books* does not follow chronological order of events in the life of the protagonist. It opens up with Book Three, which is already concerned with Lanark's afterlife experience. Therefore in order to examine his childhood and family relationships it is crucial to concentrate on the storyline of the second fourth of the work, which in fact is designated as Book One.

2.1. Poisonous Pedagogy

Similarly to his creator Alasdair Gray, also young “Duncan finds relief in the solitary pursuit of his art.”²¹ In fact, the earliest memory that Duncan Thaw has of his childhood is the one of painting as he “drew a blue line along the top of a sheet of paper and a brown line along the bottom.”²² Nevertheless, he is immediately confronted by his father questioning the lines representing sky and ground, yelling at him “But the sky isnae a straight line, Duncan!”²³ and immediately lecturing him about to a child unintelligible terms such as horizon and gravity. Duncan cannot even pronounce the words correctly when asking “What’s ga...gavty?”²⁴ This enrages Mr. Thaw even more. Duncan’s father shows no effort to engage in his son’s play of wandering what might be on the other side of the sky, naturally unfolding his child imagination. On the contrary, Mr. Thaw keeps correcting the inaccuracies of his picture, suppressing Duncan’s artistic self-realization, which ends up in Duncan lying to his father about the content of his picture exchanging a giant with a captured princess in a sack for “a miller running to the mill with a bag of corn”²⁵ and feeling ashamed. This particular moment depicted in *Lanark*, as Rodge Glass states, is based on a real event from Alasdair Gray’s own childhood that he confided to him with. Glass

²¹ Roderick Watson, *The literature of Scotland* (Basingstoke New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 218.

²² Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 121.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

himself also refers to this event in *Lanark* as a “description of Alasdair’s first experiences of lying, shame and confusion.”²⁶

What Duncan Thaw aka young Alasdair Gray experiences could be called the practice of what Katharina Rutschky, a German educationalist, designated “schwarze pädagogie” (literally black pedagogy), further on elaborated also by Alice Miller and called “poisonous” pedagogy. As Joseph Zornado explains in his work *Inventing the Child, Culture, Ideology, and the Story of Childhood* (2001) the primary aim of this parenting method is to control and dominate the child, all for its own good. Duncan’s mother and father live in a specific historical era, in the interwar years after World War 1 and consequently in the war years of World War 2. When the Thaw family moves into Glasgow the year the war ended, Duncan’s father is fired from his work at the now defunct Ministry of Munitions, and highlights the importance of good education to his son so that he can become independent and well-adjusted for life. He lectures Duncan that in order to do well in life you need certificates and the highest possible education. Duncan, however, wants to pursue the career of an artist, which is an insecure job to say at least in the eyes of his parents, so they want to set him on the right path, which is why they are trying to nip his childish illusions of a pursuit of his dreams right in the bud.

As Zornado states with respect to child-rearing, “the child according to the black pedagogy, 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.”²⁷ Such attitude may be spotted in *Lanark* Book One, when dealing with Duncan Thaw’s refusal to eat almost anything his mother cooked including “shepherd’s pie or any other food whose appearance disgusted him: spongy white tripes, soft penis-like sausages, stuffed sheep’s hearts with their valves and little arteries.”²⁸ This sort of behaviour and repulsion to certain types of food from his mother’s cuisine is a trait shared by both Alasdair’s alter

²⁶ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 23.

²⁷ Joseph Zornado, *Inventing the child culture, ideology, and the story of childhood* (New York: Garland Pub, 2001), 79.

²⁸ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 122.

ego Duncan and Alasdair Gray himself. As he recalls, in one of his sessions with Rodge Glass, his mother “didn’t cuddle us much, but I remember always having a good night kiss, even after we had argued – usually about food she had prepared that I wouldn’t eat. Our arguments were always over food that repelled me. She found that very hard to take.”²⁹ Due to his health issues, namely asthma and severe eczema, described in his later years by Rosemary Hobsbaum to be aggressive to such an extent that “you used to have to take a Hoover to the floor when he left the room,”³⁰ Alasdair was on a strict diet, which his mother tried to abide conscientiously, even despite her son’s strong antipathy.

Alasdair’s alter ego Duncan Thaw, shows his antipathy to his mother’s cuisine quite openly as he refuses the food without even tasting it first. This behaviour enrages Mrs. Thaw and after short unsuccessful persuasion to “taste just a wee bit. For [her] sake,”³¹ she approaches to more drastic means including threats saying “You’ll sit at this table till you eat every bit”³² or “Just wait till I tell your father about this, my dear.”³³ Nevertheless, even this method turns out to be unsuccessful, since Duncan was forced to reluctantly “put piece of food in his mouth, gulp without tasting and vomit it back onto the plate.”³⁴ Duncan then hides himself in his bedroom and is deaf to his mother’s subsequent attempts of non-violent pleas, feeling cruel for doing so. This unfortunately held minor dinner dispute has transformed itself into what Zornado calls, within the frame of black pedagogy, a “battle of good versus evil.”³⁵ This is what the relationship between the adult and the child strongly resembles at this stage, with parents being put into in the position of victims and Duncan into the position of the sole wrongdoer, as Mr. Thaw tells to his son “You’ve behaved badly to your mother again. She goes to the bother and expenses of making a good dinner and ye

²⁹ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 31.

³⁰ Ibid 116.

³¹ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 123.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Zornado, *Inventing the child culture, ideology, and the story of childhood*, 78.

won't eat it. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"³⁶ The desired effect of such strategy is meant to be an apology and the child's acknowledgement of his misdemeanour, however, in this particular case it does not come. Mr. Thaw eventually chooses to discipline his son in a different way, via corporal punishment. The only response to this approach, however, is Duncan's consequent self-abuse and intractable temper tantrum of rage as "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."³⁷ Both Duncan's mother and father did not know how to calm him down and make him stop hurting himself without undoing the justice of punishment. Mr. Thaw eventually resorted to handling the situation of Duncan's tantrum with a threat of more corporal punishment. Such practice is something Alasdair Gray himself is well acquainted with, as he confided to Roger Glass in one of their sessions:

It's shocking to recall now but not only did my father beat me, but he also beat my sister – with a leather belt. I didn't think of it at the time, but that strikes me as horrible and sinister. But it was the done thing in those days. Mother was in charge of the house, Father was in charge of disciplining us. That meant the belt.³⁸

Nevertheless, in Duncan's case this authoritarian attempt to achieve discipline via punishment backfires and causes even more self-abuse behaviour:

Mr. Thaw shouted, "Stop that or I'll draw my hand off yer jaw!" Then Thaw beat his own face with fists, screaming, "Like this like this like *this*?"³⁹

After several of such unmanageable tantrums the Thaw family is advised by a neighbour to undress the furious boy during his tantrums and plunge him into a bath filled with cold water. This treatment turned out to be successful, since it seemed to have "destroyed all his protest,"⁴⁰ nevertheless, later on when

³⁶ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 123.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 34.

³⁹ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 123.

⁴⁰ Ibid 124.

Duncan is put into bed to sleep, this drastic method leaves him lying completely “stunned and emotionless.”⁴¹

Alasdair Gray experienced similar cold baths of water himself as a child, as his parents performed them, on advice, when they were desperately trying to calm him down during severe asthma attacks. Nowadays, this practice, as Alasdair’s sister Mora admits, “would be considered child abuse,”⁴² but eczema and asthma were not well understood in 1950s Glasgow and no proper medical treatment known. Gray’s asthma attacks were supposedly of psychosomatic origin, since similarly to his alter ego’s tantrums, they followed immediately after an excessive amount of stress and fear. As Alasdair Gray’s sister Mora remembers “the connection between mental stress and physical illness has always been a close one for him.”⁴³ It is unfortunate that the abovementioned cold bath treatment eventually did more harm than good, since as Mora states “they made him more isolated, more distant, harder to live with.”⁴⁴

As was demonstrated in this chapter, both Alasdair and his alter ego Duncan Thaw experienced throughout their childhood certain level of authoritarian child-rearing methods bordering with black pedagogy. It also included lack of parental affection, namely from their maternal figure, and negligence toward their avocations, which only contributed to a higher amount of stress, anxiety and consequent worsening of their health conditions. In *Lanark* the reader becomes acquainted with the information “that there may be a psychological factor—the illness first appeared at the age of six, when the family was split by war.”⁴⁵ This was the first time both Duncan and Alasdair Gray experienced psychological stress, which acted as a trigger of the disease.

⁴¹ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 124.

⁴² Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 43.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 300.

2.1. Dragonhide

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Alasdair Gray's health condition of asthma and eczema both in the real world as well as projected into *Lanark* seem to be of psychosomatic nature. Not only Duncan Thaw, but also Lanark, Duncan's adult reincarnation in Book Three and Book Four, suffers from visible bodily manifestations of inner uneasiness, a dragonhide disease. It appears for the first time simply as a minor "hard patch" on his right arm and upon a doctor's advice he ignores it. Nevertheless, as time goes by and the disease is spreading, he starts to become more concerned about it:

My one worry is the scab on my arm. There is no feeling in it, but when I grow tired, the healthy skin round the edge starts itching and when I scratch this the scab spreads. I must scratch in my sleep, for when I waken the hard patch is always bigger.⁴⁶

With time, Lanark's hand transforms completely, as it is covered in dark green scales and his fingers are turned into giant claws. I believe that what Lanark experiences is a physical manifestation of Wilhelm Reich's emotional armoring. Wilhelm Reich, Australian psychoanalyst and contributor to the body-mind sciences of the early twentieth century, works with the proposition that "the body's outward appearance is an accurate reflection of what's happening inside."⁴⁷ On the basis of Reich's body armor theory (also called character armour theory), the dragonhide disease is nothing but projection of what Lanark feels inside, specifically all the emotional deficiencies he brought within himself from his previous life as Duncan Thaw caused by emotionless child-rearing. The lack of affection and understanding in the Thaw family, which eventually left him emotionally reserved, introverted and distant from other human beings is in compliance with one of Reich's functions of body armor, which is that it "wards off emotions of others."⁴⁸ Later on in the story, the reader is also acquainted with the information that the dragonhide scaly skin feels cold when touched by

⁴⁶ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 23.

⁴⁷ Victor Daniel, "Lecture notes on Wilhelm Reich and His Influence," *Victor Daniel's Website in The Psychology Department at Sonoma State University*, last modified May 10, 2008, <http://www.sonoma.edu/users/d/daniels/reichlecture.html>.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

bare hand, which again supports the theory of being emotionally cold toward others alongside with above mentioned symptom of insensitivity of the claw.

When the disease consumes the host entirely and the transformation into a dragon like creature is complete, what happens next is that the host explodes from inside emitting incredible heat when his existence ends, as it is described in one of the Institute scenes in *Lanark*:

Then the figure became one blot of gold which expanded into a blinding globe. There was a crash of thunder and for a moment the room became very hot. The floor heaved and the lights went on.⁴⁹

Accumulation of all of the emotions an individual feels and not being able to express them and ease the tension inside that consumes him is also one of the functions of body armor that Reich aptly describes as keeping “potentially explosive emotions in.”⁵⁰ It does not have to necessarily mean only positive emotions expressing affections to others, such as the case of love deprivation from the maternal figure and consequent inability to express love yourself, but also negative emotions such as rage, fear or stress, which might eventually explode and manifest themselves as tantrums or psychosomatic asthma seizures.

Reich also states that it is very problematic to take this armor off, since the individual easily gets accustomed to it and wants to continue in the suppression of feelings and emotions. That is what happens to Duncan aka Lanark and even Alasdair Gray himself later on in their lives as the effects of affectionless parenthood keeps on haunting them even in their adulthood. None of them is capable of contact with other human beings on emotional level, neither of maintaining a healthy relationship with women, as will be further on explored in an individual section of this thesis concerned with the concept of matrimony as depicted in Alasdair Gray’s *Lanark*.

⁴⁹ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 68.

⁵⁰ Victor Daniel, “Lecture notes on Wilhelm Reich and His Influence,” *Victor Daniel's Website in The Psychology Department at Sonoma State University*, last modified May 10, 2008, <http://www.sonoma.edu/users/d/daniels/reichlecture.html>.

2.2. Parental alienation

The bond between Alasdair Gray as a child and his parents Amy Gray and Alexander Gray seems to be of an unequal nature. There is certain inclination to the fraternal figure rather than the maternal one, which is also manifested in *Lanark*. As Rodge Glass points out Duncan's "father in *Lanark* emerges as an almost saintly figure, and in descriptions of Alasdair's early life he makes regular, influential appearances."⁵¹ His mother, on the other hand, is initially omitted from his narratives entirely or appreciated only with respect to proper management of the household, controller of finances and a regular good night kisser. Apart from this, there is not much information shared about Amy Gray by Alasdair during his sessions with Glass. Even Glass himself observes certain alienation of Gray from his mother at least with respect to his memories:

Seen in isolation, this lack of reference might not seem so strange – not all children are highly influenced by their parents ... but considered alongside Gray's other descriptions of events in his life, this almost complete omission of Amy Gray from the narrative seems curious. The praise heaped on her husband is consistent and almost uncritical.⁵²

As for the literary world of *Lanark*, there is an apparent strong influence Mr. Thaw has over his son. He actively seeks a "keener intimacy with his son,"⁵³ and as a result of it Duncan seems to open up to him more than to his mother. The bond between them is still very complex and Duncan still suffers from multiple unmanageable tantrums of rage and consequent cold bath treatment, but still from time to time Mr. Thaw can reach to his son in ways that Mrs. Thaw is unable to. Whenever there is a minor issue with her son's behaviour or a disagreement over some trifles, she calls her husband to deal with it, giving up the parental role to him entirely.

Upon not wanting to go to school and faking illness, which was a frequent issue with Duncan, Mrs. Thaw quickly resigns saying to her husband

⁵¹ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 27.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 136.

“You deal with this, Duncan, it’s beyond me.”⁵⁴ It is not her, but her husband, whom their son eventually shares the true reason for faking being ill with:

Mr. Thaw took his son into the bedroom and said, “Duncan, there’s something you haven’t told us.” Thaw started crying and said what the matter was. His father held him to his chest.⁵⁵

Mr. Thaw not only figures out what the matter is with his son, he also stands in for the emotional deficiency of maternal touch as he embraces his son to calm him down. Duncan communicates with him openly, unlike his previous responses to his mother consisting mostly of short sulky sentences. He even lets his emotions take over him and starts crying. Considering there are only several occasions when Duncan lets someone see his true self, his vulnerability, this is a huge gesture toward his father. Mr. Thaw teaches his son how to box and defend himself from the bigger school boy, who is hazing Duncan and as a result of his intervention, Duncan eventually goes to school the other day.

The only time Duncan Thaw can relate to his mother in some way is when she eventually reaches her end of days. There is an entire chapter dedicated to Mrs. Thaw’s last days as she struggles with cancer, a disease that Alasdair Gray’s mother died of as well, when he was eighteen. As the health condition of Mrs. Thaw worsens, Duncan is desperately trying to connect with her. He visits her bed every day, provides her with a white lie, saying there might be an afterlife waiting for her, even though he himself does not believe in it, and he is also boasting about his final exams, he knows, unlike him, she cares so much about. He whispers into her ear “Mum! Mum! I’ve passed in English. I’ve got higher English.”⁵⁶ That very same afternoon Duncan passes also his Art and History exam, however, Mrs. Thaw is already indifferent to this great news, as it “did not reach the living part of her brain.”⁵⁷ This particular scene offers certain correlation between what happened in *Lanark* - Mrs. Thaw dying in peace, her last knowledge of his son being passing a final exam and the real

⁵⁴ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 133.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid 198.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

world, where Amy Gray died knowing her son failed his test from Latin. As Rodge Glass states this was a major disappointment for her and a memory Alasdair himself firmly tries to suppress.

After Mrs. Thaw's death her son Duncan finds a letter in her stuff written during the time of her illness, intended for a woman's magazine correspondence page, where she depicts her memory of a six year old Duncan as he kept on confusing names of stars his father taught him. She states that she finds "main pleasure nowadays in memories like these."⁵⁸ Upon reading the letter "grief pulled at an almost unconscious corner of his mind like a puppy trying to attract its master's attention by tugging the hem of his coat."⁵⁹ The same reaction is to be found even with Alasdair Gray himself as he confined to Glass that he did not cry over his mother's demise either for many years until one day he did and "it was like releasing an unmelted iceberg of tears."⁶⁰ Her death must have affected him, even though his grief seems to be rather desired than actually present. I believe both Alasdair Gray and his alter ego Duncan Thaw wanted to have a strong emotional bond with their mother, but this attempt failed as she had changed and grown considerably cold to everyone during her marriage. Reasons for such demeanour and sudden transformation are about to be explored in an independent section of this thesis.

2.3. Religious upbringing

When Mrs. Thaw is gone, the relationship between Mr. Thaw and his son deepens even more. At one point, when Mr. Thaw is taking care of Duncan who is having another severe attack of asthma, he shares with his son his own memories of childhood and parents, his father being an industrial blacksmith and an elder in Congregationalist church in Bridgeton, his mother being a needlewoman. They were struggling with their financial situation, as his father's work for the church was unpaid and "at the foundry he was paid less the more he aged, but [his] mother helped the family by embroidering tablecloths and

⁵⁸ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 203.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 32.

napkins.”⁶¹ Both of them were pious people and often found consolation and strength in their prayers. Mr. Thaw himself was raised to be of religious belief, but he was unable to feel the ease provided by prayer:

Every night we all kneeled to pray in the living room before going to bed. There was nothing dramatic in these prayers. My father and mother clearly felt they were talking to a friend in the room with them. I never felt that, so I believed there was something wrong with me.⁶²

As Glass points out in the biography, even Alasdair Gray’s father Alexander just as Mr. Thaw experienced religious upbringing, including grace before every meal and daily lessons from Bible. Even though, he did not follow the religious ways himself as an adult, “he considered his parents to be the model of honourable, good behaviour, a sound example of parenthood.”⁶³ He also decided not to get rid of the religious background of his childhood, but to pass it on to his own son Alasdair as “he is largely credited with upbringing his son up with an understanding tolerance of religion.”⁶⁴ In *Lanark*, however, Mr. Thaw does not raise his son in the same way. Religion is not a part of his parenthood methods and the first time they come across it is after the death of Mrs. Thaw during one of Duncan’s seizures, which his son vehemently thinks are a punishment from God for his self-abuse. Mr. Thaw then asks his son “Is it God you want?”⁶⁵ and Duncan answers “Yes. Yes, it’s a big continual loving man I want who shares the pain of his people. It’s an impossibility I want.”⁶⁶ This dialogue expresses both Duncan’s inability to believe in the soothing power of religion, even though he desperately wants to, just as it projects his desire for continuous unconditional supply of love.

2.3. Lanark as a father

The last but not least portrayal of parenthood projected in *Lanark* is from the perspective of the eponymous character, when he himself becomes a parent.

⁶¹ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 296.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 16.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 296.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

After his previous rather not successful life as Duncan Thaw, full of “violent confusion of sexual attraction, self-disgust and mental breakdown that may or may not have resulted in the death of a girl, followed by his decision to drown himself,”⁶⁷ Lanark seeks his chance for a better life in the afterlife. He meets an interesting blonde girl named Rima in Elite Café in Unthank, whom he is about to have a baby with later on in the novel. The pregnancy of Rima is rather an unexpected one, since both of them find out about it when travelling through an Intercalendrical Zone, where time seems to vastly accelerate. When Lanark eventually notices that certain changes are happening with Rima’s body, she is already in an advanced stage of pregnancy:

Rima stood still and said desperately “I can’t go on. My back hurts, my stomach’s swollen, and this coat is far too tight.’ She unbuttoned it frantically and Lanark stared in surprise. The dress had hung loose from her shoulders, but now her stomach was swollen almost to her breast and the amber velvet was as tight as the skin of a balloon.”⁶⁸

Lanark is apparently immensely happy about the news of becoming a father soon since “he struggled to keep serious and failed. His face was stretched by a huge happy grin.”⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the contentment is not mutual. On the contrary, Rima is rather hysterical and keeps accusing Lanark of hating her, since otherwise he would not be showing such elation over her having horrible pains and maybe dying in the process of giving birth. Her demeanour upon finding out about being pregnant is of panic nature as “she knelt on the grass, covered her face and wept hysterically while Lanark started helplessly laughing, for he felt a burden lifted from him, a burden he had carried all his life without noticing.”⁷⁰ This scene examined from the perspective of Lanark projects not only his joy over having an offspring, but also certain level of relief, as if there was something preventing him from becoming a parent one day. I believe this matter is connected with his inner feeling of deficiency with respect to sexual

⁶⁷ Roderick Watson, *The literature of Scotland* (Basingstoke New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 218–219.

⁶⁸ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 385.

⁶⁹ *Ibid* 386.

⁷⁰ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 386.

attractiveness, which will be explored in more detail in this thesis in the section concerned with matrimony.

The relationship of Lanark and Rima gradually reaches the verge of collapse, since both of them fell for each rather hastily and now they have nothing in common, except for Alexander, their son. His birth, however, just like the birth of Alasdair Gray's own son Andrew in 1963 "did not have positive effect on the state of his parent's marriage."⁷¹ Rima leaves Lanark taking their son Alexander with her for the reasons specified and explained in the following paragraphs but also in the section of this thesis concerned with matrimony, since these two matters are closely related.

Lanark's parental attitude toward his son seems to be quite similar to the attitude of Mr. Thaw to his son Duncan aka Lanark as a child in his previous life. He loves his son immensely, but at the same time he is unable to connect with him on the emotional level. Just like Mr. Thaw he lectures his son rather than respecting his vivid imagination and dreams, which is why Rima is certain that taking her son away from him to her new partner Sludden is the right thing to do saying "I'm sure Alex will benefit too. Sludden plays with him. You would only explain things to him."⁷² This scene in *Lanark* is very emotional, since the eponymous rather standoffish character lets his affection toward his son reach his consciousness and fully manifest. When he realized he was losing his son, he suddenly "stopped with open mouth, for heavy grief came swelling up his throat till it broke out in loud, dry choking sobs like big hiccups or the slow ticking of a wooden clock. Wetness flooded his eyes and cheeks."⁷³

Nevertheless, Rima has even stronger arguments for leaving Lanark and taking her son out of his reach, not only his emotionless over-intellectual approach to upbringing but also suspicion of drinking problems. Lanark seems to be losing track of time quite frequently, especially after the birth of his son. He misses his son's christening, even name giving, since he is nowhere to be

⁷¹ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 93.

⁷² Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 458.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

found. He is also confronted by Rima for this behaviour in an argument, which follows immediately afterwards:

“Why couldn’t you wait for me? Why the bloody hurry?”

“We waited as long as we could – why didn’t you come when we called?”

“You never called me!”

“We did. Jack went to the tower when you started your row and shouted up the ladder, but you wouldn’t come down.” “Were you drunk?” asked Rima.

“Of course not. You’ve never seen me drunk.”

“Perhaps, but you often act that way. And Ritchie-Smollet says a bottle of cooking sherry vanished from the kitchen.”⁷⁴

This pattern of disputed manifestations of alcoholism is also present when Lanark is supposed to take care of his newborn son and take over the maternal role when Rima is going out for the evening. He is unable to sooth Alexander and make him go sleep as he keeps on screaming and crying all night. At one point Lanark is even visited by one of the neighbours complaining about the noise. The man sympathizes with Lanark, he himself being abandoned by his wife and he encourages Lanark to consume alcohol in order to deal with his current troubles saying “Do me a favour, pal. Give yourself a holiday. Have a drink.”⁷⁵ It does not take long and Lanark succumbs to the temptation as he “glanced at the brown bottle held toward him, then took it and swigged.”⁷⁶ From this moment on the track of time is blurred and what started as one evening of looking after Alexander changes into months. Lanark realizes that something is wrong only after Alexander starts screaming again complaining “They’re biting me!”⁷⁷ This way he is referring to the first teeth growing inside of his mouth. The only reaction of his father to this fact is his astonishment upon aging so quickly in the world of Unthank. The true reason for his twisted perception of time, however, has nothing to do with accelerated aging. It is the alcohol intoxication he indulges to so often. The one time taste of the brown bottle was not the last one, even the neighbour himself tells Lanark that “[he] have emptied

⁷⁴ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 425.

⁷⁵ Ibid 428.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

the bottle.” As was demonstrated in the previous chapter of this thesis, not only Lanark but also Alasdair Gray himself has a past full of excessive drinking problems, which seem to be reflected also into *Lanark*, haunting his literary alter ego as well.

III. Lanark: Life in Four Books - Matrimony

Alasdair Gray's *Lanark: Life in Four Books* depicts three generations of Thaw's family. The reader becomes acquainted with Mr. Thaw's parents, Mr. Thaw's own marriage with Mrs. Thaw and consequently the relationship of Lanark (the afterlife adult manifestation of their son Duncan Thaw) and Rima, the mother of his son Sandy. This section of the thesis is to be concerned with the latter two couples with respect to the concept of matrimony.

3.1. Mrs. Thaw aka Amy Fleming (Gray)

Up to this point Mrs. Thaw's aka Amy Fleming's life has been discussed in this thesis from the perspective of her parental role to her son. In the literary world of *Lanark*, she is depicted as a somewhat emotionally reserved person to her close ones, who nonetheless cares for her family needs with respect to everyday management of the household. It is not until after her demise that her son Duncan gets to see her from an entirely different perspective. One day on a tram home he meets a former best friend of his mother, who shares with him her memories of the erstwhile Mary Needham, who used to be a completely different person before her marriage, stating that "Mary was a wild one too in her day."⁷⁸ She used to be going out with several different lads at the same time, to simply just fully make use of her free time, one of them being Duncan's father. The unknown lady presenting herself as Mrs. Thaw's best friend also comments on the marriage of Mary's, which apparently she did not expect to happen at all:

Nobody was more surprised than me when Mary Needham married Duncan Thaw. Well, she learned. ... He was the last man I'd have thought she'd marry. Four years passed before you appeared on the scene.⁷⁹

Back home Duncan cannot resist but to go through some of his mother's things to look for potential evidence that would confirm or disprove whether what he has just come to know about his mother is true. He starts with

⁷⁸ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 315.

⁷⁹ Ibid 315–316.

examining of the sheets with lyrics of her favourite songs and eventually moves to the wedding photograph standing on a mantelpiece:

His father (shy, pleased, silly and young-looking) stood in arm with a slender laughing woman in one of the knee-length bridal dresses fashionable in the twenties. Her high-heeled shoes made her look the taller of the two. Thaw could think of no connection between this lively shop girl full of songs and sexual daring and the stern gaunt woman he remembered. How could one become the other? Or were they like different sides of a globe with time turning the gaunt face into the light while the merry one slid round into shadow?⁸⁰

In *Lanark*, this is the moment when Duncan eventually experiences a belated flood of grief upon his mother's demise. He came to know the other more joyful side of hers, which nobody in his family knew about and which would be forgotten for good:

He thought, 'Oh no! No!' and felt for the first time in his life a pang of pure sorrow without rage or self-pity in it. He could not weep, but a berg of frozen tears floated near his surface, and he knew that berg floated in everyone, and wondered if they felt it as seldom as he did.⁸¹

Even Alasdair Gray himself admits to Rodge, "My mother was a good housewife who never grumbled, but I know wanted more from life than it gave – my father had several ways of enjoying himself. She had very few. They were, from that point of view, a typical married couple."⁸² In Amy Gray's case matrimony seemed to suffocate all of her opportunities of self-realization, self-expression or personal growth. As Rodge points out, the image of a working woman at the period Amy lived in would be considered disgraceful, so her personal growth with respect to having a career of some sort was not an option. In the inter-war period, by the 1930s only about one tenth of married women worked. Many factors were against the employment of women, among others, the introduction of the marriage bar (proposing that married women should resign from their jobs), social norms of that time, which depicted women as dependent on men, therefore there was no need for their employment, and unequal salary for men and women, as female employees were often paid less

⁸⁰ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 316.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 27.

even when doing the same work as their male counterparts. With the unfortunate prospects for female aspirations, all that was left for Amy Gray were her duties at the household and her involvement in the Church of England Women's Institute. Before her marriage to Alexander Gray, Amy Fleming enjoyed singing, playing the piano, going to opera and she even joined the Glasgow Orpheus Choir. Just like Mrs. Thaw when young, she was an intelligent, energetic woman with multiple hobbies and ways of self-fulfillment. Nevertheless, Marry Needham aka Amy Gray never got a chance to continue her studies, even though she showed significant academic potential during her studies at Onslow Drive Public School. Her marriage put an end to all of her previous aspirations.

As Rodge Glass points out, Amy Gray often used to be “reduced to tears”⁸³ upon listening to Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) read aloud, a story which may resemble her own life story in certain ways. The eponymous character of the book as well as Amy Fleming are both “women of beauty, energy, and intelligence who find themselves trapped between these gifts, the aspirations such gifts justify, and their society's assumptions that respectable women must either be submissive or obtrusively and harmlessly aspiring.”⁸⁴ In this sense Tess Durbeyfield, even though some sixty years apart from Amy Gray with respect to the time setting of the novel, may be perceived as a literary projection of hers and her own tragic fate, which is being a scapegoat of social conventions of the age she lived in. Amy Gray learnt her lesson of proper behaviour of a married woman, just as Mrs. Thaw learnt hers, when their wild ways of life were put to an end and they had to adjust to their new roles of housewives, consuming all of their other desired aspirations in life entirely. I believe this was the true reason for their noticeable aloofness and emotional inhibition toward their families, including their children, who were a blessing for them but at the same time a constant reminder of what they had to give up for them.

⁸³ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 26.

⁸⁴ Chen Zhen, “Tess in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Victims of Social Prejudice and Male Dominance in Victorian Patriarchal Society,” *Ritsumeikan University Website*, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/acd/cg/lt/rb/600/600PDF/chen.PDF>

3.2. Lanark and Rima (aka Alasdair and Inge)

As was demonstrated in the previous chapters of this thesis, Alasdair Gray just like his alter ego Duncan Thaw suffered throughout his childhood and adolescence from a severe eczema condition, which is depicted in Gray's diaries to be of such nature that it "breaks the skin surface of the cheeks, wrists, arms, back of hands"⁸⁵ turning them into "half-dead bark-like not human-looking surfaces."⁸⁶ It was this disease along with his emotional aloofness that over time compromised all of his potential chances of having a romantic relationship. As Glass points out at certain point Alasdair even became utterly "obsessed with his sexual unattractiveness and – after a series of failed (or entirely imagined) brief romantic fascinations – convinced that he'd made a pact with God that exchanged artistic talent for any possibility of love."⁸⁷

During late 1950s and 1960s he kept on falling in love with women, who unfortunately were "attracted by his mind, but not his body."⁸⁸ This frustration and dissatisfaction with his external appearance certainly played its part in the hasty marriage with his now former wife Inge Sorensen, an eighteen-year old Danish nurse. It seemed that the physical element was not an issue for her, but she proposed a rather strict condition for having an intercourse, which was marriage. After a couple of months Alasdair ended up engaged to Inge and as he himself claims "he didn't even know his bride's age when they got married,"⁸⁹ so hasty was the nature of their relationship. The newly married couple hardly knew each other.

The same pattern of such behaviour can be seen even in Gray's fiction, as "all couples are brought together suddenly, unromantically, with brief excitement on the part of the man being followed by frustration with and/or rejection by the woman, who often struggles to tolerate him – the story, as

⁸⁵ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 93.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid* 91.

⁸⁸ *Ibid* 87.

⁸⁹ *Ibid* 92.

Alasdair saw it, of his first marriage.”⁹⁰ Lanark is no exception, the eponymous “emotionally and socially insufficient protagonist”⁹¹ falls in love with a beautiful, but also insufferable blonde girl named Rima, whom he meets only a few times in Elite café in Unthank. After committing suicide and being reborn in the Institute, an underground hospital trying to heal peculiar diseases such as the already mentioned dragon-hide, he is reunited with Rima once again. He cures her dragon-hide via reading to her aloud and falls in love with her immensely. They both decide to leave the Institute for a better place called Provan, where they would live together. However, things get complicated, since there is a special warrant required to be admitted to Provan and in order to obtain it, they have to return to Unthank, a dying city with no sun, once again and be evacuated to Provan.

As Lanark and Rima are traveling to Unthank, they decide to thumb a lift to cover the remaining miles of their journey. They stop a lorry driver and once in the cabin, Rima starts conspicuously flirting with him and mocking Lanark at the same time, showing great deal of contempt for him. Considerably hurt Lanark falls asleep and upon waking up, there is an argument going on in the cabin, which he overhears. The lorry driver is shouting at Rima “Get out! I know a bitch when I see one.”⁹² Not knowing what is happening Lanark is thrown out of the cabin along with Rima to continue their journey on foot. Nevertheless, before leaving both of them behind, the lorry driver tilts to Lanark saying “Take care of yourself, mate. You’ll land in trouble if you stuck with her.”⁹³ This is an interesting moment in the book, when the reader becomes acquainted for the first time quite openly with Rima’s true fickle and vicious nature. She is apparently not content with Lanark being by her side any longer and keeps on searching for a proper substitute.

The character of Rima in Gray’s *Lanark* is supposedly based on his close friend during 1950s, Margareth Gray (no relation), a woman Alasdair Gray

⁹⁰ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 232.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 390.

⁹³ Ibid.

admired very much, but there was never any romantic subtext between them. Nevertheless, her alter ego in *Lanark* seems to be of hybrid nature, especially toward the end Book Four when her behaviour resembles more likely a different prominent female figure in Gray's life, his wife Inge. Even her attitude toward her husband was of scornful nature, as Glass points out "even in the portraits that Alasdair did of her during the early parts of their marriage her face is always portrayed in a surly, disapproving expression, as if she is struggling to control her contempt for him."⁹⁴

Things get even tenser back in the literary world of *Lanark*, when Rima gives birth to her son Alexander. She immediately abandons her maternal duties of taking care of the newborn and starts going out late at night with complete strangers. What is quite interesting factor is that Lanark does not seem to have the strength to confront her about her frivolous behaviour. He only asks her in a resigned manner where she is going, upon which she answers derisively, "We're going dancing. We're going to get ourselves picked up by a couple of young young young boys. You don't mind, do you?"⁹⁵ also adding "Oh, but we'll flirt with them too. We'll madden them with desire. Middle-aged women need to madden somebody some times."⁹⁶ At this point the character of Rima shows the same pattern of behaviour as Inge, as she was quite open about her affairs, showing absolutely no effort at hiding her lovers. As Alasdair confided to Glass at one of their sessions, "in recent months, Inge had taken to leaving the house after Andrew had gone to bed and returning home from her lovers before he rose in the morning."⁹⁷ Alasdair's reaction was the same as Lanark's, he just wanted to be the man she will always be coming home back to, never defying his wife's misdemeanour.

This way of life soon led to their separation and Inge's and Andrew's departure to live at "home of a not-very-close friend of Alasdair's."⁹⁸ Even this

⁹⁴ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 94.

⁹⁵ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 426.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 102.

⁹⁸ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 102.

event is projected into Lanark, in the chapter titled Divorce, where Rima leaves Lanark, taking their son Alexander with her. They go to live with Sludden, a corrupted but well financially secured friend of Lanark. The only thing left is a note laying on the bed saying:

*I expect you won't be surprised to find us gone. Things haven't been good lately, have they. ... It may surprise you to hear that Sludden needs me more than you do. I don't think you need anybody. No matter how bad things get, you will always plod on without caring what other people think or feel. You're the most selfish man I know.*⁹⁹

As the goodbye note reveals, the true reason for Rima's and Lanark's separation is of more complicated nature. It seems that Lanark has managed to cure Rima's dragon-hide completely in the Institute part of the book, but he was unable to get rid of his own, even if the external symptoms of it faded away. On the contrary, he kept Reich's emotional armour on, using it to "to petrify himself and the others."¹⁰⁰ As Gavin Miller elaborates on this armouring concept further on in his work *Alasdair Gray: the fiction of communion* (2005), from his perspective it "acts primarily as an insulation from intimate personal relationships."¹⁰¹ In this sense, Lanark still carries with him the emotional aloofness he himself experienced as a child in his previous life as Duncan Thaw and this burden consequently causes the break-up of the only romantic relationship he experienced in his life. Even Rima herself along with Sludden express their opinion over Lanark's emotional petrification in the sense that he "would be a very valuable man if [he] knew how to release [his] emotions."¹⁰² Also as Rima comes back to Lanark after a few days to pack the rest of the things she left behind, she confronts him face to face saying "Women can live quite comfortably with a clumsy lover if he makes them happy in other ways. But you're too serious all the time. You make my ordinary feelings seem as fluffy and useless as bits of dust."¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 456.

¹⁰⁰ Gavin Miller, *Alasdair Gray: the fiction of communion* (Amsterdam Netherlands New York: Rodopi, 2005), 64–65.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid* 65.

¹⁰² Gray, *Lanark: a life in four books*, 457.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*.

This aforementioned emotional detachment seems to make it impossible for Lanark aka Alasdair Gray to connect with the objects of their desire on a romantic level, to actually express their love. At the end of *Lanark*, in the epilogue, the eponymous protagonist meets the author of the novel Alasdair Gray, disguised as a comic author figure named Nastler, being in fact “Alasdair Gray’s baby name for himself.”¹⁰⁴ He informs Lanark that his life story is about end tragically with him dying all alone. He even specifies the reason for it, which is rooted in the previous life of Lanark’s, as he tells him that “the Thaw narrative shows a man dying because he is bad at loving. It is enclosed by your narrative which shows civilization collapsing for the same reason.”¹⁰⁵ From Alasdair Gray’s perspective, however, being bad at loving seems to hold a completely different meaning than being able to express affection. He believes the true reason why his marriage with Inge collapsed lies in his inability to sexually satisfy her, as he confines to Glass:

She made it clear to me – from early on in our marriage – that I was a useless lover. It was no one’s fault. That’s just how it was. That’s why it ended. She was not a bad person.¹⁰⁶

Rodge Glass elaborates on this issue further on as he refers to the fact that Alasdair Gray “had felt sexually inadequate for many years, even before Inge.” He even confided to his son Andrew about this issue. Gray’s belief in his own sexual repulsiveness may be rooted in his life-long lasting dissatisfaction with external appearance due to his severe skin condition, but also in his adolescent years, during which he experienced multiple rejections and disappointments over love matters. His lifelong struggle also seems to be quite heavily projected into his literary oeuvre, as Roderick Watson points out in his work *The Literature of Scotland* (1984) the fact that “the dynamic tension between the sexual drive and our need for love is a theme that Gray keeps returning to at a personal as well as a political level.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Roderick Watson, *The literature of Scotland* (Basingstoke New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 220.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid 484.

¹⁰⁶ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 114.

¹⁰⁷ Roderick Watson, *The literature of Scotland* (Basingstoke New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 226.

Alasdair Gray also seems to have experienced the same suffocating effect of matrimony as his mother Amy Gray did. Just like his alter ego Lanark, he was supposed to take care of his family and provide for it financially as the social norms dictated. Doing so, however, came at the expense of a complete abandonment of his artistic self-fulfillment. Among other things, his work on murals of the Greenhead Church had to stop, since “it wasn’t practical for a married man to be working all hours for no money.”¹⁰⁸ In fact as he openly declares at his sessions with Glass, he has not dealt with any artistic activity since he got married. This period of time was one of the hardest for him, since without art, as he wrote into his personal notebooks in 1962, he felt “a great dryness of heart, with little confidence as an artist.”¹⁰⁹ His skin condition worsened and it is believed to be projected into Lanark as dragonhide, a disease Iain Crichton Smith, a Scottish poet and novelist, described as “the symbol of absence of love.”¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, in Alasdair Gray’s case this disease stands for so much more including Reich’s emotional armouring, his lifelong stress-triggered severe eczema and also the aforementioned absence of love spanning from his childhood years to his unsuccessful marital relationships.

¹⁰⁸ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: a secretary's biography*, 114.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid* 93.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*.

III. Poor Things – Parenthood

Alasdair Gray's novel *Poor Things*, winning the Whitbread Novel Award in 1992, is a complex historical fiction with quite ambiguous status of narratives, since it presents two completely different perspectives. The main body of *Poor Things* is predominantly narrated from the perspective of Archibald McCandless, a Scottish Public Health Officer, who claims to be the author of the content and in fact presents a novel inside of a novel. He claims the story to be his autobiography titled *Episodes from the Early Life of a Scottish Public Health Officer* and published in Glasgow in 1909 by Robert Maclehose & Company. Alasdair Gray does not appear there as the author, only as the editor providing the introductory part to the abovementioned autobiography and its concluding critical and historical notes. The other perspective is provided by his wife Victoria McCandless, who questions the trustworthiness of the entire previous storyline by the addition of her own chapter titled "A letter from Victoria McCandless M.D. to her eldest surviving descendant in 1974 correcting what she claims are errors in *Episodes from the Early Life of a Scottish Public Health Officer*."

Archibald McCandless's narrative tells a story of him, as a medical student at Glasgow University and his wealthy friend Godwin Baxter, who apart from traditional medical practice also dedicates his time to an unethical activity of vivisection and combining animal body parts to create a perfect creature, just like Doctor Frankenstein to whom there are many allusions throughout the novel. Baxter sometimes deputizes for the official of Glasgow Humane Society, whose responsibility is to fish dead bodies out of river Clyde, which gives him a perfect opportunity to take possession of drowned bodies no-one claimed and have them transferred to his dissecting-rooms and laboratories. This is how he manages to meet a pregnant lady from upper-class family, (Victoria Blessington), who committed suicide by drowning in Clyde and is about to become his surgically fabricated human being. Baxter takes the brain of her child and implants it into the mother's head, calling the newly born human being Bella Baxter, his alleged niece. She is later on about to confront her past life via meeting her father and previous husband General Blessington. Eventually, she becomes the wife of Archibald McCandless and also a medical doctor herself.

Victoria McCandless's perspective, on the other hand, presents a completely different sequence of events. She speaks of herself as of a "runaway wife of an English Baronet and Great British General,"¹¹¹ who sought shelter in the house of a wealthy bachelor Godwin Baxter. She adopted new identity and eventually fell in love with her saviour. Of Archibald McCandless, her husband, she speaks very poorly, as of an extremely useless and envious person, who could not even write his own autobiography without multiple plagiarism of famous literary works, namely G.B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*, works of Herbert George Wells, Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe or even Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. She refers to her husband's alleged autobiography as to an "infernal parody"¹¹² of her own life-story. What more she even claims that "the book stinks of Victorianism,"¹¹³ suggesting a highly distorted view of womanhood in the book. With this being said Victoria provides the reader with her version of what happened to her and what roles Godwin Baxter and her husband Archie McCandless played in it.

There is an apparent clash between the two abovementioned storylines, each presenting a completely different sequence of events, which is why they are to be analysed separately in this thesis. Victoria McCandless's perspective will be explored in the chapter dedicated to reversed social and parental roles in *Poor Things*.

Motherhood and maternal role

Both narratives of *Poor Things* are set into late nineteenth century Glasgow, thus the Victorian period. The concept of motherhood in Victorian society was perceived as the highest possible female honour, as Susan Kent compares motherhood in her work *Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860-1914* (1990) to "the crowning achievement of a woman's life."¹¹⁴ Despite this apparent elevation of the maternity concept, the reader of *Poor Things* becomes multiple times acquainted with the fact that none of the central characters experienced a

¹¹¹ Alasdair Gray, *Poor things* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), 262.

¹¹² Ibid 273.

¹¹³ Ibid 275.

¹¹⁴ Susan Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860–1914* (Princeton: Princeton university Press), 33.

childhood filled with manifestations of appreciation for their mothers, particularly not with regards to their husbands, the kids's fathers. On the contrary, the narrator, Archibald McCandless, commences his autobiography with memories of his mother at the end of her days, showing her husband's refusal to pay for anything else but the burial of hers, leaving the stone payment to his son. As Archibald confesses "twelve years passed before [he] could afford a proper monument, and by then nobody remembered the position of her grave."¹¹⁵ This way his mother ended up in an unmarked grave. She was buried with no tombstone at all to honour and commemorate her life and utterly no chance for anyone to pay tribute to her.

As for Godwin Baxter's mother, "some said she was in a lunatic asylum, others that Sir Colin kept her as his maidservant in black dress, white cap and apron, silently passing plates round the dining table when he entertained colleagues and the wives of colleagues."¹¹⁶ As Helena Wojtczak states it was quite common in Victorian times that "a domestic servant became pregnant as a result of seduction by her employer."¹¹⁷ Moreover, throughout the text there are no records of Sir Colin's (Godwin's father) marriage to his mother, implying that she was a mere mistress of his and Godwin therefore an illegitimate child. He himself refers to his mother in the sense that Sir Colin trained a nurse "to be his anaesthetist, and worked so closely with her that they managed to produce [him], before she died."¹¹⁸ The way he speaks of his mother it may seem as if she was a mere passive carrier of his and with the act of childbirth her maternal role was done.

His upbringing was entirely in his father's hands teaching his son only what interested him, which were mathematics, anatomy and chemistry. His father never spoke of Godwin's mother, except for one time appreciation of her cleverness. The absence of the maternal figure in the children upbringing

¹¹⁵ Gray, *Poor things*, 9.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid* 15.

¹¹⁷ Helen Wojtczak, "Pregnancy and Childbirth," The Victorian Web, accessed March 16, 2016, <http://www.victorianweb.org/gender/wojtczak/pregnancy.html>

¹¹⁸ Gray, *Poor things*, 18.

process, however, was not an exceptional matter, not even in the complete families. Mothers used to play an important role in their children's moral teachings rather than education and childrearing as such. As Sally Mitchell states in her work *Daily Life in Victorian England* (1996):

Parents in better circumstances were supported by nursery maids, governesses, and boarding schools. The idealized loving mother probably spent only an hour or two with her children each day.¹¹⁹

As for the missing maternal affection, Sir Colin tried to compensate for it with animal substitute, as Godwin himself admits "I got all the animal warmth and affection I needed from Sir Colin's dogs."¹²⁰ Due to the aforementioned lack of female figure in his upbringing, Godwin was never exposed to the emotional maternal influence over a child. As he himself admits:

As I was educated at home, and saw no other families, and ever played with other children, I was twelve before I learned exactly what mothers do. I knew the difference between doctors and nurses, and thought mothers an inferior kind of nurse who specialized in small people. I thought I never needed one because I was big from the start.¹²¹

Being big from the start, however, serves as a reference to Godwin's premature loss of childhood, skipping an important phase of his life as he immediately progresses to adolescence and adulthood. Similar process of accelerated development may be spotted also in the upbringing of Bella Baxter, as she has no access to a maternal figure either, and is educated and raised solely by her male "creator" Godwin himself. As for Godwin's adolescent consideration of mothers being inferior to fathers, just like nurses are inferior to doctors reflects the perception of motherhood being socially restricted, in fact a form of an institution just like marriage, in which males are dominant to their female counterparts. The lack of maternal figure in his life, eventually manifested itself, as in his adult years he began to feel the urge for an emotional connection with a female, an unconditional mutual love he never experienced:

¹¹⁹ Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1996), 146.

¹²⁰ Gray, *Poor things*, 19.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

I dreamed of a fascinating stranger – a woman I had not yet met so could only imagine – a friend who would need and admire me as much as I needed and admired her. No doubt a mother supplies this want in most young creatures, though rich families often employ a servant to take the mother’s place.¹²²

Godwin openly admits his seek for a maternal figure fulfilling the role of a female friend to admire, need and love. He also refers to servants replacing the mother’s role in rich families such as his, but at the same time he confesses he “formed no special attachment to those who fostered [him].”¹²³ Thus he refers to the role of a mother being of unique nature, in fact irreplaceable.

Similar need may be spotted also in Alasdair Gray’s case as he kept on searching a rare friendly connection with a female even in his adult years, especially with his first wife Inge. As was mentioned before, Alasdair Gray felt sexually inadequate for many years of his marriage with her. The reason for such insecurity in this area is also reflected into the literary world of his, as in *Poor Things*, the reader is acquainted with the fact that “uncuddled men fear sexual love”¹²⁴ for “cuddling is like milk. It can, and should, nourish our health from birth to death.”¹²⁵ However, with no maternal figure or complete lack of her physically manifested affection for the child, this need is unsatisfied.

This state of deficiency and the constant search for maternal affection even throughout the adult years is also projected into the literary world of *Lanark*. The eponymous character, Gray’s alter ego, is reproached by his partner Rima for the constant child-like demands he keeps on imposing on her. The day she eventually decides to leave him, she confronts him saying “you want me to pet you and make you feel big and important. I’m sorry, I can’t do it.”¹²⁶ He is also later on approached by a neighbour of his, telling him that he makes a mistake in needing Rima badly and he “must try to need her properly.”¹²⁷ Along

¹²² Gray, *Poor things*, 38

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid 309.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Gray, *Lanark: Life in Four Books*, 430.

¹²⁷ Gray, *Lanark: Life in Four Books*, 428 .

with Godwin and his desire for a friend that would need and admire him, all of these references lead back to the diseased Amy Gray and the lack of maternal affection:

MOTHER, LOST MOTHER,
WHERE HAVE YOU TAKEN ALL MY HEAT
LEAVING ME ALONE
AS COLD AS WATER, AS COLD AS STONE?
I DID NOT WEEP WHEN YOU DIED,
I WAS WARM THEN.¹²⁸

These lines from Gray's poem "Statement of an unceilinged blood," written shortly after Amy's death in between the years of 1952-1957 and included in *Old Negatives* (1989), reveal the effect his mother's death had upon him, the warmth of hers gone, being left alone in this cold world. As Glass states, Gray himself admits later on in his life that his mother was more or less taken for granted in the Gray's household and it was only after her demise that the family fully acknowledged her.

As for Victoria McCandless's mother, her father, Mr. Hattersley, considered her to be head-strong woman like "the sort of donkey who needs more kicks than carrots to drive her in the right direction."¹²⁹ This animal simile enforcing his own dominance over her as well as her submissiveness to him was later on also applied to his daughter, as he wants her to marry a wealthy man in order to secure his own welfare regardless of his daughter's fate:

Think of those grand places Vicky, all for you and me, Me! The gran-dad of a baronet! You owe me that, Vicky, because I gave you life. So be a sensible donkey. Honour and riches are the carrot heap ahead of you, a madhouse is the boot kicking you toward it.¹³⁰

He openly threatens his daughter to put her in the asylum if she is not submissive, treating her as his property, his own creation born only to one purpose, to help him reach the upper-social class. In order to reach this goal, he needs her to produce an heir to General Blessington, as one of her duties for that

¹²⁸ Glass, *Alasdair Gray: A secretary's biography*, 53.

¹²⁹ Gray, *Poor Things*, 215.

¹³⁰ *Ibid* 224.

matter, so that his own position as a “grand-dad of a baronet”¹³¹ would be secured. He quite explicitly commands her to “squeeze at least one son of him.”¹³² As for his personal attitude toward his wife, he despises her since she cannot act ladylike, as he explicitly states “though a good wife for a poor man she was no use to a wealthy one,”¹³³ which he desperately wanted to become. It is precisely this kind of behaviour that eventually leads Mrs. Hattersley to alcoholism. Young Victoria experiences this and tells her father, his answer, however, is less than indifferent: “Well, if she wants to kill herself by that particular road why should I object? As long as she does it quiet-like in her own parlour.”¹³⁴

As was mentioned before Mr. Hattersley claimed to be the sole originator of Victoria’s birth, as he refers to himself as the life-giver, excluding his wife’s role in that matter completely. A woman is once again perceived from the Victorian perspective merely as a passive carrier of the baby, which is not hers, but rather “the property of her husband,”¹³⁵ who remained till the end of his life the sole legal guardian of his children. With Godwin Baxter, the idea of a male being the originator of birth is stretched even further, since the reader becomes acquainted with the fact that he is capable to produce life, a man-made woman without any assistance of the opposite sex.

So far it has been demonstrated that the role of womanhood depicted in *Poor Things* to a certain extent reflects the status of women in Victorian era, nevertheless the role of a mother in the novel substantially differs from the artificial Victorian ideal of motherhood. It has also been pointed out that lack of physically manifested maternal affection seem to have detrimental effects on children, which manifest themselves not only in their infant years but also in adulthood. Such instances are also projected into Gray’s literary characters of Lanark, Godwin Baxter and also with Alasdair Gray himself.

¹³¹ Gray, *Poor things*, 224.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid* 215.

¹³⁴ *Ibid* 258.

¹³⁵ “Women and the Law in Victorian England,” University of St Andrews, accessed March 14, 2016, www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~bp10/pvm/en3040/women.shtml

Reversed social & parental roles

During the Victorian period male and female roles in the society were considerably polarized. It was generally acknowledged that the two sexes inhabited two separate spheres – public and domestic. The ideology of separate spheres not only facilitated consequent legal subordination of women manifested beside other things by their exclusion from the franchise, but it also gave rise to “the ideal of true womanhood, based on four traits: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.”¹³⁶ Therefore, women were supposed to obey their husbands and restrict their interests only to a proper management of their households and childbearing. This, however, was not the role Victoria Blessington would accept. Her mother’s life was a sufficient deterrent example for her, as she says:

Of my mother I have only this to say: she was unselfish and hard-working, and taught me how useless these virtues are when separated from courage and intelligence...Life for Mother and me was mainly a struggle to keep the family and home clean.¹³⁷

There are multiple hints throughout the text suggesting that Bella Baxter aka later on Victoria McCandless starts to dissociate from the role of the Angel of the House, “a common label for the Victorian ideal of respectable middle-class femininity. Quiet beauty, purity, devotion and selflessness were some of the essential features of the domestic wife and mother.”¹³⁸ Just like Lanark in *Lanark: Life in Four Books*, she lost her memory of her previous life and “she must struggle to integrate two parts of a damaged life in an effort to attain a cohesive identity.”¹³⁹ In her case her identity discovery lies in the embracement of becoming the New Woman and dissociating from her previous life, as she herself states that “she had to travel through water to get [her] useless past washed off.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Crista DeLuzio, *Women's rights people and perspectives* (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 62.

¹³⁷ Gray, *Poor things*, 256–257.

¹³⁸ Joseph Black, *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature* (Peterborough, Ont. Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2012), LXVII.

¹³⁹ Stephen Bernstein, *Alasdair Gray* (Lewisburg, Pa. London: Bucknell University Press Associated University Presses, 1999), 129.

¹⁴⁰ Gray, *Poor things*, 232.

As Stephen Bernstein points out in his work titled *Alasdair Gray* (1999), the names of Archibald McCandless's wife - Bella and Victoria - attain certain symbolic importance, since "as "Bella-Victoria," Baxter's concatenation of her two names, she is "Beautiful-Victory," though whose beautiful victory is certainly debatable."¹⁴¹ With respect to the time period, the story being set into the late nineteenth century, I believe this symbolic allusion refers to the rise of the New Woman and consequent reversal of both social and parental roles in the novel.

Bella Baxter quite openly expresses her opinions on marriage, when talking to her "creator" Godwin Baxter. Her intention is to maintain her independence with respect to not being submitted to any social restrictions arising from matrimony, including passivity or sexual restraint:

I am very romantic woman who needs a lot of sex but not from you because you cannot help treating me like a child, and I cannot CAN NOT treat you like one. I am marrying McCandless because I can treat him how I like.¹⁴²

In the last chapter, written by Victoria McCandless herself, the reader is acquainted with the fact that she holds the degree of Doctor of Medicine (M.D.), since there is a professional title acronym attached to her name, in fact she became the first female medical student in the city of Glasgow. Her access to education is yet another implication of the rise of the new woman, along with multiple allusions to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the fact that her mother Mary Wollstonecraft was a significant advocate of women's rights.

Apart from a considerable reversal of social roles in *Poor Things* with respect to the leading female character – Victoria gaining access to education, medical profession (as she opened the Godwin Baxter Natal Clinic) or even her efforts to become a social reformer, there is also an apparent change in the relationship between Archibald and Victoria with respect to their partnership in marriage and parenthood. As Victoria finds herself more emancipated than ever before, she starts actively travelling the world and pursuing her medical career.

¹⁴¹ Bernstein, *Alasdair Gray*, 110.

¹⁴² Gray, *Poor Things*, 53.

Even though she has three sons, born in two-yearly intervals, she almost never stays at home with them and even during her pregnancy she continues her medical work until the very last three days before childbirth. She calls herself a “practical, busy-in-the-world mother”¹⁴³ who found “very good wife in [her] husband.”¹⁴⁴ As she herself proudly states, she is not the one being in charge of the domestic sphere anymore, this role in fact has been taken over by her husband Archibald entirely:

It is a fact that I, the fearless advocate of homely cuddling and playful teaching, was kept out of the house by my clinical work for most of the week, while other responsibilities took me out of Glasgow for part of every year. My husband practised what I preached.¹⁴⁵

Victoria is proud to admit that her sons eventually left their “dreamy fantastical father”¹⁴⁶ behind when they entered Glasgow High School and the company of other boys of their age. Even though she had been missing from their lives for most of their childhood years, later on they began to feel certain urge to surpass their mother’s achievements in the public sphere.

Producers of poor things

The title of *Poor Things* itself also bears certain significance to the examined phenomena of parenthood. Stephen Bernstein states that for Victoria, “the woman who eventually becomes “Dr. Vic” the central importance of various accounts of motherhood is that—in the novel’s nineteenth century or (by implication) in our twentieth—it is frequently unwanted or ill-advised, a disaster for parent and child, a producer of poor things.”¹⁴⁷ In this specific reference the poor things serve as a designation for unwanted children.

It is true that even Bella Baxter herself quite openly expresses her desire to indulge to sexual intercourses, even of homosexual nature, without the slightest intention to produce children as she says “I want fun, not babies. I only

¹⁴³ Gray, *Poor Things*, 252.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid 303.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid 252.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Bernstein, *Alasdair Gray*, 130.

do more with women, if I like the look of them, but a lot of women are shy.”¹⁴⁸ Even later on in her life, when she becomes a mother of three boys, she does not seem to be thrilled by motherhood either. She keeps on pursuing her medical career and leaves the maternal role on her husband Archibald, who stays at home and plays with children.

Similar pattern of behaviour may be spotted in Mary Shelley’s literary creator of one of the most famous monsters in English literature, whom there are many allusions to throughout the text of *Poor Things*, including the allegation provided by Archibald McCandless, depicting Godwin Baxter as having no childhood and being born already big, as he himself mentions, implying the idea that “Sir Colin had manufactured God by the Frankenstein method.”¹⁴⁹ Other instances are also represented by the reality of Bella being a scientifically fabricated human being (as her husband’s narrative implies) or her original name of Victoria, holding certain resemblance to “*Victor Frankenstein* whose story hers recalls.”¹⁵⁰

As Stephen Bernstein states “education and parental responsibility are the fore of Gray’s concerns”¹⁵¹ in the novel of *Poor Things*. Taking this perspective into concern, Victor Frankenstein, as a life-giver, just like Victoria McCandless, as a mother, turns out to be completely indifferent toward his creation regarding primary education and taking responsibility over the upbringing in childhood. This pattern of behaviour places both of them into the position of producers of poor things with respect to parental negligence in the infant years of their children.

Side effects of such parental negligence seem to be present even in the adult years of the children, which are demonstrated also in Victoria McCandless’s later medical career:

¹⁴⁸ Gray, *Poor things*, 49.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid 274.

¹⁵⁰ Bernstein, *Alasdair Gray*, 110.

¹⁵¹ Ibid 118.

Her work focuses on pre- and postnatal care, while abortion and contraception loom as illegal but necessary aspects of her practice. Her analysis of the causes of the First World War finally rests on the idea that bad parenting has left the fighting men “with a heartfelt belief that their lives were valueless.”¹⁵²

She also admits in her additional chapter in *Poor Things* that her own two sons “succumbed to “an epidemic of suicidal obedience””¹⁵³ caused by bad mothering and fathering. They were perfect aspirants to become the best soldiers since the best soldier “was he who regarded his own body as the least sensitive machine.”¹⁵⁴ I believe this insensitivity of body and low self-esteem toward one’s own life are nothing but direct consequences of the lack of maternal affection in their childhood. Victoria was negligent of her emotional duties as a mother and left the upbringing of her children entirely up to her husband. Nevertheless, as was demonstrated before with the childrearing of Godwin Baxter performed solely by his father in his mother absence, it turned out to be completely insufficient in providing certain emotional qualities and even left him confused about the concept of motherhood as such.

What is quite interesting is the fact that Victoria also provides an assertion of her own involvement in the upbringing process of her children at the end of the novel, quite openly admitting that her “boys were all preparing to be peaceful professional Scottish public servants.”¹⁵⁵ This statement is not only contradictory to what is depicted in the novel, but it also confirms the idea of childrearing without any attention to the child’s personality and singularity, producing rather a purposeful machine than a human being, just like her father, Mr. Hattersley did.

One more reference to the designation of poor things in the eponymous novel is referring to the character of Victoria Blessington. She calls herself that way when talking about her previous life role as General Aubrey Blessington’s wife, way before her eventual suicidal attempt and consequent acceptance of a

¹⁵² Bernstein, *Alasdair Gray*, 130.

¹⁵³ Gray, *Poor things*, 306.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Gray, *Poor things*, 307.

new identity as Bella Baxter. She meets with her previous husband in the house of Godwin Baxter along with her father Mr. Hattersley and the General's doctor, Mr. Prickett. All of them were in search of her since the day she fled from her home with the intention, as her husband puts it, to "escape from [her] wifely duties."¹⁵⁶ As it turns out Victoria was about to undergo a clitoridectomy procedure in order to be surgically cured from erotomania, which appeared during her pregnancy. As Dr. Prickett explains her case:

All amorous dalliance should cease as soon as pregnancy was detected. Alas, Lady Blessington was so deranged even in her eight month she wished to lie with Sir Aubrey all night long. She sobbed and wailed when not allowed to do so.¹⁵⁷

Upon hearing this rather implausible evidence of her alleged erotomania disease, Bella starts crying and speaks of herself in the third person, as if about someone completely different, as she states that "the poor thing needed cuddling."¹⁵⁸ In this particular context, it is clear that another potential producer of poor things in Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* turns out to be the marital relationship itself, depriving female counterparts from any potential joy rising from physical manifestations of their affections toward their husbands. As Dr. Prickett himself points out:

No normal healthy woman – no good or sane woman wants or expects to enjoy sexual contact, except as a duty. Even pagan philosophers knew that men are energetic planters and good women are peaceful fields.¹⁵⁹

General Blessington fully supports this Victorian perspective of matrimony and women's duties ensuing from it regarding sexual intercourse solely for the purpose of conception. He despises the option of sharing bed with his wife simply for the sake of her company as he shouts furiously at his wife "Cuddlin! The word is disgustin and unmanly. It soils your lips, Victoria."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Gray, *Poor things*, 213.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid* 217.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid* 218.

¹⁶⁰ Gray, *Poor things*, 218.

Nevertheless, his former wife Lady Victoria is of a different opinion, which she expresses later on in her years, already as a doctor of medicine, in her book *A Loving Economy—A Mother's Recipe for the End of All National and Class Warfare*. Her study “centres on human contact, whether “cuddling” between parent and child or “wedding” between adults,”¹⁶¹ in fact Dr. Vic puts in it an equal sign between these two phenomena, stating that “wedding is the cream of cuddling, the main delight of our middle years (if we are lucky) but it is not different from cuddling.”¹⁶² This way she assigns certain importance to this, in her former husband's eyes, rather abominable activity, which if neglected, may result in disastrous consequences such as psycho-sexual problems or emotional inhibition, as manifested in *Lanark*.

¹⁶¹ Bernstein, *Alasdair Gray*, 130.

¹⁶² Gray, *Poor things*, 309.

IV. Poor Things – Matrimony

The two examined phenomena of marriage and parenthood, as depicted in Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things*, seem to be considerably intertwined with each other. Therefore even their individual examinations are interrelated and a considerably large amount of marriage analysis has been already provided in the section dedicated to the phenomenon of parenthood in *Poor Things*. This chapter aims to provide additional insight into the nature of matrimony as it is understood in the novel.

Matrimony as a business contract

Matrimony, as approached in *Poor Things*, seems to be a solid contract with strictly defined terms and conditions on both sides, the husband's and his wife's, which "lasts *until death do you apart*."¹⁶³ In the case of Victoria Blessington aka Bella Baxter this condition is fulfilled by her suicide attempt and consequent performed brain transplantation:

The brain is considered the only organ which cannot be substituted (neither in a mechanical way nor through a transplant) in the human body; it coordinates the whole organism. Therefore human life coincides with cerebral life. Following this line of reasoning, Victoria and Bella are two different persons.¹⁶⁴

Godwin Baxter also holds on to this fact, as he admits his involvement in Bella's rebirth and claims that the marriage is over since death did them apart. Nevertheless, General Blessington does not slacken in his demands of his wife's immediate return in order to avoid even greater scandal, which would arise from her bigamous cohabitation with Godwin or even McCandless. He has no intention to acknowledge Bella as a completely different person, neither is he willing to approve the divorce.

Victoria's father, Mr. Hattersley, shares General Blessington's attitude and even reinforces the inevitability of his daughter's immediate return to her husband by offensive similes, saying that "a wife who abandons her husband is a

¹⁶³ Gray, *Poor things*, 219.

¹⁶⁴ Daniela Carpi, *Bioethics and biolaw through literature* (Berlin Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 292.

truant in the eyes of man and God.”¹⁶⁵ Apparently his perception of marriage is also strictly of legal nature, in compliance with which Victoria has to observe her part of the agreement and see to her wife’s duties.

The act of matrimony in Victorian times, which *Poor Things* are set into, results in blending of both newlyweds into a single unit, as “the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during her marriage, or at least is incorporated or consolidated into that of her husband, under whose wing, protection and cover, she performs everything.”¹⁶⁶ This way a woman becomes more or less a slave of her husband with almost no option of legal escape from the marriage, since as it is stated in *Poor Things*, “a husband’s adultery is no ground for divorce unless it is unnatural—committed anally, incestuously, homosexually or with a beast.”¹⁶⁷

The reader of *Poor Things*, becomes acquainted with the fact that General Blessington, did commit an adultery, specifically with his former sixteen-year old parlour-maid Dolly Perkins. However, this is not a solid ground for a divorce to be granted to Victoria, since in that time, the Victorian era:

A woman could be divorces on the simple grounds of her adultery (her adultery threatened his ability to pass his property to his male heirs), whereas a woman had to prove adultery aggravated by desertion (for two years), or by cruelty, rape, sodomy, incest or bigamy.¹⁶⁸

When confronted about his adulterous behaviour, General Blessington along with Dr. Prickett unwaveringly keep on justifying the ungodly behaviour referring to homeland service and the necessity to draw strength from somewhere:

Strong men who lead and defend the BuBuBritish people must cultivate their strength by satisfying the animal part of their natures by rererevelling with sluts, while maintaining the pupurity of the

¹⁶⁵ Gray, *Poor things*, 231.

¹⁶⁶ “Women and the Law in Victorian England,” University of St Andrews, accessed March 14, 2016, www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~bp10/pvm/en3040/women.shtml

¹⁶⁷ Gray, *Poor things*, 234.

¹⁶⁸ “Women and the Law in Victorian England,” University of St Andrews, accessed March 14, 2016, www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~bp10/pvm/en3040/women.shtml

mumum marriage bed and sanctity of the home where their sons and daughters are engendered¹⁶⁹

Such as the nature of purity in marriage that it imposes double standard with respect to adultery. The character of Mr. Astley, a man Bella meets during her travels through Europe, captures quite well the status of women in marriage at that time during his unsuccessful proposal to Bella, saying:

If an intelligent woman of this class does not find an unconventionally sensitive husband her life can be as painful as that of women who spend years dying of slow suffocation while drudging in the Lancashire weaving-sheds. And that is why you should marry me, Bella. You will be my slave in law, but not in fact.¹⁷⁰

Marriage, or as Mr. Hattersley aptly labels it “marital war,”¹⁷¹ seem to represent a rather negative experience, a necessity required by social conventions. The abovementioned years of suffocation presented in *Poor Things* as a simile to marriage is a phenomenon also encountered in Gray’s *Lanark*, as Mrs. Thaw struggles to keep breathing in her emotionless marriage with Mr. Thaw. This view over matrimony as a detrimental product of social conventions seems to be a recurrent element in Alasdair Gray’s literary work. It is also essential to mention that, as was demonstrated in this thesis, the basis of such attitude toward marriage is to be found in the author’s life, since his own first marriage turned out to be suffocating him immensely with respect to his artistic self-realization and also gradual self-confidence reduction.

¹⁶⁹ Gray, *Poor things*, 229.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid 155.

¹⁷¹ Ibid 231.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to explore the phenomena of matrimony and parenthood in Alasdair Gray's novels *Lanark: Life in Four Books* and *Poor Things*. In order to do so, the first section was dedicated to autobiographical features found in particularly throughout Alasdair Gray's magnum opus *Lanark*, since the author's life proved to be projected to certain degree into this novel, in fact directly linked to the one of the protagonist, his alter ego Duncan Thaw/Lanark. Due to the complex and elaborate nature of *Lanark*, the examination of abovementioned phenomena had to be performed separately, as Book One and Book Two were concerned with the childhood of Duncan Thaw and from Book Three on the main focus was transferred to Lanark as an adult man, having family of his own and being influenced by his previous life up to his twenties. Hence an individual chapter of this thesis was dedicated to the concept of parenthood as depicted in *Lanark* and a separate one dealt with the concept of matrimony in the same novel.

The second section of this thesis introduced the concept of black pedagogy as a potential source of the protagonist's emotional inhibition and insecurity when establishing intimate contact with other human beings. The objective of both parents to reform a child for its own good, to be able to become independent and well-adjusted for life fails and causes immense damage, which turns out to be of permanent nature with consequences affecting also the child's adult life. Both Duncan Thaw and Alasdair Gray seem to suffer from their parent's negligence toward their avocation – art, as well as from certain amount of stress directly linked to the authoritarian child-rearing methods they were exposed to in their households. As it is pointed out in chapter number two, both Alasdair Gray's asthma and severe eczema seem to be of psychosomatic nature just like Duncan Thaw's asthmatic seizures and Lanark's skin disease referred to as dragonhide. The bad parenting methods associated with black pedagogy proved to have detrimental effects on the protagonist's and author's health condition as well as on their mental state of being.

Certain emotional detachment from the mother's side has also been a matter of examination in the same chapter, which also turned out to be another

potential source of the protagonist's skin condition – dragonhide. Affectionless parenthood leaves Duncan Thaw aka Lanark accustomed to suppression of his own feelings, eventually resulting in physical manifestation of Wilhelm Reich's body armour. This skin condition is nothing but a reflection of incapability to connect on emotional level with other human beings or even express one's own feelings. This parental alienation seemed to come namely from the mother of Duncan Thaw not her male counterpart Mr. Thaw, which is a fact that was examined separately in the next section of this thesis, since it turned out to be directly linked to the concept of matrimony.

As the last part of chapter two dedicated to parenthood in *Lanark* shows, the protagonist as well as the author Alasdair Gray carried their childhood upbringing experience with them throughout their lives and decided to apply them on their own children as well. Lanark prefers to constantly explain things to his son Sandy rather than to indulge himself in playing with him and it is only upon losing him, when his mother moves away taking Sandy with her, then Lanark's true affection for his son emerges. Moreover, due to his emotional detachment constantly affecting his everyday life along with the loss of contact with his son, Lanark begins to show signs of excessive drinking problems, an issue, which haunts not only the literary alter ego but also Alasdair Gray himself.

Chapter three of this thesis was dedicated to the concept of matrimony as depicted in Gray's *Lanark: a Life in Four Books*, in particular to the relationship between Mrs. Thaw and Mr. Thaw aka Amy Fleming (Gray) and Alexander Gray, Lanark and Rima aka Alasdair Gray and his first wife Inge. As for Mrs. Thaw, she is depicted in the novel as a character of a rather passive and constantly emotionally reserved nature. Before her marriage, however, she used to be known as a completely different person full of life and vivid personality. As the protagonist Duncan Thaw slowly comes to realize, it was the marriage to his father that destroyed the spirit of Mrs. Thaw aka Amy Fleming. Upon being married she could no longer pursue her working career, did not get a chance to continue her studies or even to dedicate her time to her hobbies. This inner tension between who they wanted to be and who they were expected to be by the

society seems to act as a potential source of the aloofness of both characters toward their families. The dissatisfaction with their own lives started to spread and effect the atmosphere in the entire household, even their attitude to the family members.

Lanark as an adult and his partner Rima are nothing but another example of dysfunctional marriage and the detrimental effects it has on couples. As was mentioned before in this thesis, Alasdair Gray himself has a history of unsuccessful relationships and this literary couple seems to represent a rendition of his own relationship to his first wife Inge. They are brought together abruptly and then what follows is a sequence of frustration and eventual rejection from the female counterpart. Reasons for such a turnout of events are several, Rima's (Inge's) adulterous nature, Lanark's (Gray's) inability to emotionally appeal to her due to his childhood struggles, the same suffocating effect that his mother has experienced (since in the marriage he cannot pursue his artistic aspirations due to the need of regular income) or as Alasdair Gray believes, it is his own aka Lanark's inability to be a good lover. Due to their lifelong struggle with external appearance both of them seem to suffer from the feeling of being sexually inadequate even in their adult years.

Alasdair Gray's novel *Poor Things*, provides the reader with a rather female insight into the examined phenomena of matrimony and parenthood. It is through the eyes of Bella Baxter (aka Victoria McCandless) and her husband Archibald McCandless that Alasdair Gray aims to scrutinize these concepts, providing both male and female perspectives. Although rather a large portion of the novel is actually dedicated to the narrative of Mr. McCandless himself, it is the end of the novel that completes the image and reveals the female perception.

The third section of this thesis, focused on parenthood in Gray's *Poor Things*, aimed to explore the maternal role and motherhood as such, which both seem to reflect the status of women in Victorian era. The reader becomes acquainted with the fact that Godwin Baxter grew up without a maternal figure in his life and as a result of it he was not only unable to understand the concept of mother and her role in the child's life, not until his adult years, he also suffered from a premature loss of childhood, living in a emotionally detached

male governed household, skipping thus an important phase of his life. As a result of such an abrupt progress to adulthood, Godwin Baxter kept on searching for a mother-like figure for the rest of his life, as he as an adult still desired a rather emotional connection with a female than actual sexually appealing relationship. The lack of physically manifested affection between a mother and her children has proved once again to have detrimental effects on the children, as was demonstrated before also with Duncan/Lanark aka Alasdair Gray.

This chapter also concentrates on the reversal of social and parental roles in the end of the novel when Victoria McCandless takes turn as the narrator. She manages to break free from the chains of matrimony (unlike Mrs. Thaw) and pursue her avocations and career while her rather submissive husband Archibald McCandless stays with the children at home and fulfills the duties of a parent. As Victoria eventually reaches her goal and becomes a female doctor, as Dr. Vic she herself publishes a work focused on the concept of motherhood, in which she refers to unwanted children as poor things. Later on she also uses this designation in order to refer to bad mothering and fathering as well as the irresponsibility of parents as potential sources of poor things, i.e. human beings regarding their own bodies to be the least sensitive machines, in other words utterly emotionally empty and therefore not worth of love or care. Dr Vic also refers to the necessity of care and physical manifestation of affection to children as the equivalent of cuddling between husband and wife. Without such an intimate and emotional connection matrimony in her perspective becomes dysfunctional and suffocating for not only women (especially in the Victorian era) but both parties.

Since the last section of this thesis dedicated to the concept of matrimony as depicted in Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* is significantly interweaved with the exploration of parenthood performed in the previous chapters, the extent of the last chapter is of a rather shorter nature. Nevertheless, I believe that matrimony as such has been fully explored in relation to parenthood and so only the last perception of matrimony as a business contract remained to be analyzed. Matrimony as a solid contract between a husband and wife seem to be perceived in *Poor Things* set into the Victorian era as a necessity required by social

conventions, which eventually has a rather detrimental effect on females involved. They are losing their identities and blending with their husbands into a single unit, which in the eyes of the law is governed by the man. Along with the husband's adultery being no ground for divorce and therefore setting a double standard with respect to adultery leaving death as the only things doing the husband and wife apart, matrimony is generally depicted in Alasdair Gray's novels as an unhealthy institution demanded by the society but not bringing anything good into the lives of those involved. The view over matrimony as an unnecessary convention, which potentially has detrimental effects on both parties involved, seems to be a recurrent element in Alasdair Gray's literary works, possibly based on his own personal negative experience with this phenomenon.

Resumé

Předmětem této diplomové práce je na základě shromážděných informací vyhodnotit způsob pojetí konceptu manželství a rodičovství ve vybraných dílech skotského spisovatele Alasdaira Graye. Jedná se o romány *Lanark: život ve čtyřech knihách* (1969) a *Chudáčci* (1982). První ze zmíněných knih byla vybrána na základě jejích autobiografických prvků, které odráží dětství samotného autora spolu s jeho pozdějšími zkušenostmi rodiče a manžela. Druhá výše uvedená kniha poté vystupuje jako autorův pokus pohlédnout na dané jevy z ženské perspektivy.

Část práce je zaměřena na koncept černé pedagogiky, jakožto možný zdroj emocionální odtažitosti protagonisty a zároveň literárního alter ega Alasdaira Graye – Lanarka, ze stejnojmenného románu *Lanark: život ve čtyřech knihách*. Oba jeho rodiče si kladou za cíl skrze autoritářskou výchovu předělat své dítě k obrazu svému, a to pro jeho vlastní dobro. Tento způsob výchovy dítěte však má neblahé účinky jak na adolescentní literární postavu Duncana Thaw tak i na jeho dospělé druhé já Lanarka. Mezi negativní dopady můžeme zařadit psychosomatické astmatické záchvaty, markantní zhoršení chronického ekzému při jakékoliv psychické zátěži a také vznik jisté formy emocionálního brnění, jež izoluje protagonistu od jeho okolí a znemožňuje mu sblížit se na citové úrovni s ostatními postavami (i členy vlastní rodiny) stejně tak jako projevit své vlastní emoce. Jako další faktor spouštějící danou emoční bariéru je v této práci analyzováno rodičovské odcizení a to zejména ze strany matky, které hraje významnou roli také ve výchově samotného autora Alasdaira Graye.

Výše zmíněné rodičovské odcizení je úzce spjato s konceptem rodičovství, které je také předmětem práce. Vztah mezi autorovými rodiči - Amy Fleming a Alexandrem Grayem se zrcadlí v literárním vztahu rodičů Duncana Thaw. V obou případech dochází ke vnímání manželství jakožto negativní zkušenosti, nutnosti, která je vyžadována společností a má neblahé účinky na oba zúčastněné, které se poté projevují odtažitostí a chladností také vůči jejich dětem. Jedná se o vzorec, který se opakovaně vyskytuje v tvorbě Alasdaira Graye spolu s konceptem neromantické lásky, uspěchaného sblížení a také sexuální nepřitažlivosti. Tématu absence matky při výchově dítěte, které odráží

také autorovo dětství poznamenané brzkou smrtí matky a jejím předešlým odcizením, spolu s konceptem manželství jakožto svazující dohody, se věnuje poté dílo *Chudácci*, jež vykresluje zmíněné faktory na pozadí Viktoriánské doby a hodnot. Dochází zde k výměně tradičních rodičovských rolí, stejně tak jako k analýze jak otcovské tak mateřské role v životě dítěte.

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Anotace

Příjmení a jméno: Honsová Tereza

Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Název práce: Manželství a rodičovství v románech Alasdaira Graye Lanark: Život ve čtyřech knihách a Chudácci

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Ema Jelínková, PhD.

Počet stran: 63

Klíčová slova: Alasdair Gray, Skotská literatura, manželství, rodičovství

Abstrakt: Diplomová práce se zabývá pojetím manželství a rodičovství v dílech Alasdaira Graye, konkrétně romány *Lanark: život ve čtyřech knihách* a *Chudácci*. Značná pozornost je věnována autobiografickým prvkům nacházejícím se v obou románech, které zrcadlí danou problematiku do jisté míry také přímo z oblasti dětství a života samotného autora. V této práci je kladen důraz především na vzájemné propojení manželství a špatného rodičovství a jejich následný neblahý vliv na formování jedince vyrůstajícího v daném prostředí, které ovlivňuje také později jeho dospělý život.

Annotation

Author: Honsová Tereza

Department: Department of English and American Studies

Title of the thesis: Matrimony and Parenthood in Alasdair Gray's Novels
Lanark: A Life in Four Books and Poor Things

Supervisor: Mgr. Ema Jelínková, PhD.

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Key words: Alasdair Gray, Scottish literature, matrimony, parenthood

Abstract: This diploma thesis is concerned with the concept of matrimony and parenting in Alasdair Gray's novels Lanark: life in four books and Poor Things. Significant attention is dedicated to autobiographical features present in both novels, which reflect abovementioned phenomena also directly in the area of author's own childhood and adult life. This thesis puts a strong emphasis in particular on the link between matrimony and bad parenting along with its consequent life-long lasting negative effects on shaping of an individual brought up in such environment.