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"LET GLASGOW FLOURISH BY TELLING THE TRUTH:" SEARCH FOR THE SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE IN ALASDAIR GRAY'S *LANARK*

"HAKİKATİ SÖYLEYİN Kİ GLASGOW GELİŞEBİLSİN:" ALASDAIR GRAY'İN *LANARK* ROMANINDA İSKOÇ BAĞIMSIZLIK ARAYIŞI

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ABSTRACT

Lanark: A Life in Four Books (1981) is a medium through which the versatile Scottish artist, critic, and poet Alasdair Gray can create an artistic representation of Glasgow. While the novel has been predominantly analysed as a quintessential postmodern text due to its generic multiplicity and self-referential qualities, this paper argues that these very qualities are in the service of highlighting the novel's primary concern: the urgent need for self-representation to achieve political, artistic, and economic independence. The text both calls for and heralds the emergence of a new national literature. For the artist, literary representation is the prerequisite for political representation, and consequently, for independence. The disillusionment with the 1979 Scottish devolution referendum can be seen as one of the political backdrops of *Lanark.* The novel, in that sense, is an attempt at both coming to terms with the recent political defeat and an artistic endeavour to represent the Scottish reality as the position of a stateless nation that has been deindustrialised economically and polarised politically.

Keywords: *Alasdair Gray, contemporary fiction, Lanark, postmodern fiction, Scottish literature.*

ÖZ

Lanark: Dört Kitaplık Bir Hayat (1981), çok yönlü sanatçı, eleştirmen ve şair Alasdair Gray'in Glasgow'un sanatsal temsili için yarattığı bir araçtır. Roman, türsel çeşitliliği ve kendine referans veren yapısı sebebiyle ağırlıkla postmodern bir metin olarak analiz edilmiş olsa da bu çalışma, bahsedilen özelliklerin romanın birincil kaygısını vurgulamaya hizmet ettiğini savunmaktadır: siyasi, sanatsal ve iktisadi bağımsızlık elde etmek için zorunlu bir öz temsil ihtiyacı. Metin, yeni bir ulusal edebiyatın ortaya çıkışını hem talep etmekte hem de müjdelemektedir. Sanatçı için edebi temsil, siyasi temsilin ve dolayısıyla bağımsızlığın ön koşuludur. 1979 İskoç özerklik referandumunun sonucuna duyulan memnuniyetsizlik, *Lanark*'ın siyasi arka planlarından biri olarak görülebilir. Bu anlamda roman, hem son siyasi yenilgiyi kabullenme çabası hem de iktisadi olarak sanayisizleştirilmiş ve siyasi olarak kutuplaştırılmış, devletsiz bir ulus pozisyonunda İskoç gerçekliğini temsil etme çabasıdır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Alasdair Gray, çağdaş kurgu, İskoç edebiyatı, Lanark, postmodern kurgu.*

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship of language, culture and power is the chief concern in Alasdair Gray's debut novel *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (1981) as the text symbolically struggles to create and maintain a Scottish national identity by subverting the authority of traditional realist narratives. The novel's first, but chronologically the third, book opens with an unnamed protagonist finding himself in the town of "Unthank" with no memory, identity, knowledge, or existential security. Disrupting the linear progression of the story by juxtaposing the first protagonist's story with the life of a young Glaswegian artist named Duncan Thaw, Lanark chronicles the journeys of both characters from twentieth-century Glasgow to a reincarnation of the eighteenth-century Royal Society. Written in four parts and ordered in a non-linear fashion, the chronological progression of the plot opens with a failed artist named Duncan Thaw who is growing up in post-war Glasgow. He is an asthmatic, shy, and awkward outsider whose sexual frustration and failure to bond meaningful human connections lead him to depression. Due to society's under-appreciation of his artistic talents and his conflict with the educational institutions, the sexually depraved, sadistic, and narcissistic young man first kills a young woman, then commits suicide. Waking up in a dystopian city called Unthank, the protagonist assumes the name Lanark and finds himself in the middle of a political conspiracy, where he is commissioned to defend the rights of Unthank against a sinister organisation called the Institute. Through his journey from Unthank and the Institute to Provan, Lanark finally meets his author. Learning that his journey is based on twelve other epics, and he must die as a result, Lanark yields to the destruction of Unthank.

Due to its narrative fragmentation, non-chronological organisation, and intertextual connections to various literary and critical texts, Lanark has been frequently identified as a postmodern epic. Alasdair Gray's hostility towards the formal categorisation of his writing as "post-modern," is not only evident from his interviews but also in a footnote in his novel, *Mavis Belfrage*: where the author states that he has been "…perplexed by the adjective *post-modern*, especially when applied to my own writing, but have now decided it is an academic substitute for *contemporary* or *fashionable*. Its prefix honestly announces it as a specimen of intellectual afterbirth" (Gray, 1996, p. 153). In this brief note, the emphasis is on the artificiality and excess of such academic keywords. The term, for Gray, does not originate from the literary works themselves. Instead, the "post-modern" is "applied" from the intellectual circles. It is but the intellectual fetal membrane, or waste, that is discharged after the birth. Despite his disdain for such critical responses, Gray has been often located as a leading Scottish postmodern writer. For Donald P. Kaczvinsky, the novel is an exercise in historiographic metafiction where "[w]hat is fact and what is fiction … is up for grabs" (2001, p. 791). More recently, Papatya Alkan Genca examines his texts in the context of postmodern realism (2018, p. 330). Other critics, such as Alan McMunnigall, observe that the tension between Gray's refusal of the postmodernist responses to his writing and the insistence of the critics in analysing his oeuvre in the context of postmodernism points to "a more fundamental debate between authors and critics … [on] the issue of ownership of literature" (2004, p. 335). It is also possible, however, to distinguish a second camp of critics who offer that Gray's text moves beyond "a postmodern pastiche and sense of depthlessness" (Allen, 2014, p. 210). While acknowledging both camps of critics and the creative writer have equally legitimate opinions about the literary text in question, I agree with previous critics that analysing only the postmodern aesthetics would remove the novel from its "cultural and political immediacies" (Platt, 2015, p. 144). Moreover, pointing out that the realist mode of writing is questioned in the novel does not account for the novel's purpose in questioning realism. To address both the politics and poetics of *Lanark: A Life in Four Books*, this paper will focus on the significance of self-conscious references in the novel within the context of Scottish national literature.

1. Artist's Need for Self-Expression

The questioning of the boundary between fact and fiction versus the artist's need for self-expression in *Lanark* should be understood in the context of postcolonial writing. In the second half of the twentieth century, a series of philosophers from Barthes and Lacan to Lyotard and Baudrillard, there has been a growing scepticism towards language's secure representative ability due to Ferdinand de

Saussure's theory of language, stating that the sound pattern and concept, or the signifier and signified, are only arbitrarily connected (De Saussure, 1916/1960, pp. 37-38). In fact, the genealogy of the distrust towards language goes far back from Plato's *Cratylus* to Friedrich Nietzsche's unpublished essay "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense" (1873). In this context, Nietzsche's writing casts doubt not only on language but also on the concept of truth since it is but a "mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms" (Nietzsche, 1896/2001, p. 878). While *Lanark* anticipates in this line of critical interrogation of language and its relation to an external social and political reality, this questioning of fact and fiction is appropriated by the postcolonial artist to destabilise the coloniser's claims to authority and truth because what is at stake is the third world artist's need for creative freedom. While claiming that Gray's *Lanark* is best understood in a postcolonial context, one should also add a few caveats. Scotland's identification as a current or former colony of the Empire is challenging due to Glasgow's "involvement in the imperial enterprise" (Sassi, 2012) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As many historians and literary critics have previously attested, Scotland, as a stateless nation within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, has not only been subjected to colonialism but has also been an active partner in the British colonial enterprise. However, it is also not easy to discuss Scotland's agency as an independent nation due to the unification of both nations through the Acts of Union in 1706 and 1707. In short, Scotland can neither be unequivocally positioned in the First World of England, nor in the Third World of other former colonies. Rather, the failure to accommodate Scotland's ethnic, cultural, social, and economic position in relation to England results in an "inbetweenness" (March, 2002, p. 326).

It is precisely this in-between state that identifies and shapes the postcolonial aesthetics of *Lanark* as a literary creation. By employing both realist and allegorical modes of narration, the novel aims to destabilise the coloniser's claims to authority and truth. Through this destabilisation, Gray's novel creates its own version of truth by claiming that the imaginative representation of the Scottish reality is paramount to the nation's flourishing. *Lanark* is a medium through which the versatile Scottish artist, critic, and poet Alasdair Gray can create an artistic representation of the city of Glasgow. For the artist, literary representation is the prerequisite for political representation, and consequently, for independence. The Scottish Government was established in 1999, following the 1997 referendum on devolution. The disillusionment with the 1979 Scottish devolution referendum can be seen as one of the political backdrops of *Lanark*. The defeat of the referendum, two years before the novel's publication, maintained the social and political status quo, which Gray had opposed throughout his literary, artistic, and political life. The novel, in that sense, is an attempt at both coming to terms with the recent political defeat and an artistic endeavour to represent the Scottish reality as the position of a stateless nation that has been deindustrialised economically and polarised politically.

The frontispiece to Book 1 of *Lanark*, illustrated by Alasdair Gray,[1] captures the importance of depicting Scotland at the centre of larger social and political issues. The Art Nouveau-style black and white illustration depicts the city of Glasgow amidst an apocalyptic scene. A bolt of lightning emanating from the mouth of Hobbes's Leviathan, standing on the horizon, is about to strike the city while the Biblical Leviathan is on a collision course with a ship sailing away from Glasgow. The city, its inhabitants, and its dockland sites are about to be swallowed by the deluge that both Leviathans create. The inscription on the two pillars on the margins of the page reads: "Let Glasgow flourish by telling the truth" in capital letters. The inscription comes from the motto on the coat of arms of the City of Glasgow. The full version of the motto is from the sermons of the city's patron saint, Kentigern: "Lord, let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of the word." By omitting the religious context, Gray adapts the

[1] In the global publishing industry, all aspects of the text as a physical book, from the design of its dust jacket and distinct typographical choices to the author profile and blurb, would be considered external to the text's meaning because these paratextual materials are designed and decided by the publishing companies as a part of their commercial strategy. Not only in *Lanark*, but in all his works, Alasdair Gray designs these extratextual materials. McMunnigall cites an incident when the author fell out with one of his publishers, Penguin Books, which commissioned another illustrator to design the paperback edition of *The Fall of Kelvin Walker* (1985) (McMunnigall, 2004, p. 336). In that sense, the insistence on the part of the creative writer to have liberty over their creation even in a globalised publishing market has been one of the key aspects of Gray's oeuvre.

motto in a civic and secular context. The inscription in the imperative form reminds the reader about the importance of civic duty. Flourishing is the opposite of languishing, and this message seems to emphasise a sense of fulfilment and purpose. The truth, however, is not readily apparent in the visual text. This truth can be read in relation to two influences of the frontispiece. Gray combines the engraved title page of Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (1620) and the frontispiece of *Leviathan* (1651). By appropriating the illustrations of the two Renaissance empiricists, Gray takes the sign "in the first system" and transforms them into "a mere signifier in the second [order]" (Barthes, 1957/1972, p. 113). In other words, he problematises the signs of the first order, the seventeenth-century claims of reason, intellect, and progress, by juxtaposing them with the images of the apocalypse. Through this chain of signification, the truth claim of the English coloniser is removed. Instead, the truth is associated with Glasgow. It becomes possible for the Glaswegians to flourish, and as the inscription suggests, it is by telling the truth. This truth is the solitary artist's efforts to put Glasgow on the cultural, artistic, and political map by contextualising it within the grand scale of things.

In the context of the novel's publication in 1981, the deluge that is about to swallow the Glaswegians (and their docklands) is the rapid post-war deindustrialisation of the nation. Despite the promises of neoliberal market economy and the welfare state, the United Kingdom has suffered the highest amount of "job losses … in the twentieth century … and … [took] a decisive shift from manufacturing to a service economy" (Samuel, 1992, p. 29) under Margaret Thatcher's leadership from 1979 to 1990. The city's rapid deindustrialisation and suffering at the hands of the British government are allegorised in the image of Leviathan, Thomas Hobbes's state as the monster. It is the artist's mission to uncover the truth by telling (by imaginatively representing) the city because the representation reveals not only the 300 years of colonisation of Scotland (since the illustration refers to seventeenth-century empiricists) by the English but also the current dangers that are facing the city. What is advocated in the novel is the artist's obligation to represent Glasgow for literary and cultural recognition, not only outside Scotland but also by the very inhabitants of the city. One of the passages in the Thaw storyline is particularly illuminating in this context. In his young adulthood, Thaw and his friend McAlpin travel to Glasgow and gaze at its cityscape, musing on how the urban experience is constructed like a text:

> "Glasgow is a magnificent city," said McAlpin. "Why do we hardly ever notice that?"
> "Because nobody imagines living here," said Thaw.
> …
> "… think of Florence, Paris, London, New York. Nobody visiting them for the first time is a stranger because he's already visited them in paintings, novels, history books and films. But if a city hasn't been used by an artist not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively. What is Glasgow to most of us? … when our imagination needs exercise we use these to visit London, Paris, Rome under the Caesars, the American West at the turn of the century, anywhere but here and now. Imaginatively Glasgow exists as a music-hall song and a few bad novels. That's all we've given to the world outside. It's all we've given to ourselves." (Gray, 1985, p. 243)

In the passage quoted at length, Thaw not only refers to "the tourist gaze" (Urry, 2002, pp. 1-3), which is constructed through images, travel writings, and advertisements, but also laments the lack of representation of an entire, living experience of the city by its inhabitants. While all the other Western cities have been circulated in the global market, for Thaw, what Glasgow can offer is limited. In *Istanbul* (2005), Orhan Pamuk laments over a similar lack of self-representation in the Turkish context. Pamuk writes: "The living, breathing city—its streets, its atmosphere, its smells, the rich variety of its everyday life—is something that only literature can convey, and for centuries the only literature our city inspired was penned by Westerners" (Pamuk, 2003/2005, p. 240). While both writers produce their texts from the periphery, there is a crucial difference between Pamuk and Gray's narrators' perceptions of their respective cities and cultures. The cultural and ideological stance the narrator adopts in Pamuk's work allows him to view his own city from the perspective of the West. Pamuk's narrator claims that reading

the Westerners' accounts of Istanbul frees him from "narrow nationalism and pressures to conform" (Pamuk, 2003/2005, p. 241) because their eyes offer him a detached gaze, free from Turkish nationalism. In contrast, the two Glaswegians in the Thaw narrative lack any point of self-reference. Their gaze veers off towards different times and places, anywhere but the non-Scottish setting; they "hardly ever notice" the magnificence of Glasgow. For them, the city's lack stands in stark opposition to the sublime Western cities from ancient to modern times. However, in both Pamuk and Gray, the truth claim is always represented by the West, representing itself and the Other, and reproducing these claims in various media, thereby proliferating and securing its validity. Then, not only for the Scottish artist but also for the third-world writer, there is an immediate mission for imaginatively representing the city that the artist inhabits, because, as Thaw's final remark, "It's all we've given to ourselves," indicates, what the city dwellers lose by not representing the city is their self-perception.

This self-representation and creative freedom, however, are intermingled with the politics of race and class even in Thaw's early life, as well as his professional endeavours. In the opening scene of Book 1 of the Thaw narrative, Duncan Thaw draws a scene from a fairy tale:

> "He drew a giant with a captured princess … and since he couldn't draw the princess lovely enough he showed the giant holding a sack. The princess was in the sack. His father looked over his shoulder and said, "What's that you're drawing?"
> Thaw said uneasily, "A miller running to the mill with a bag of corn." (Gray, 1985, p. 121)

This brief exchange captures an aspiring artist's difficulties in growing up in a low-income household. While the reader knows the content of the child's drawing through the third-person narrator, he must lie to Mr. Thaw. Imagining that his working-class father would not understand or appreciate his artistic talent for an imaginary scene, Thaw feels the need to lie about his work, disguising it as a scene of an agrarian worker's labour. Due to its political and economic dimensions, however, the passage also points out the construction of meaning in the social context. Even a child's drawing is not a single, unmediated representation of the image he created in his mind. Since his previous attempts at drawing the princess "lovely enough" failed at capturing his expectation, he draws a sack. Moreover, when the image is put into the paper, the meaning of the work also changes with the external and political context. Even after being commissioned to paint the murals of a church in provincial Glasgow, the young artist, Duncan Thaw, remains disheartened because his art is underappreciated. In his anguish, Thaw calls out to God:

> "[H]ere I am, illustrating your discredited first chapter through an obsolete art form on a threatened building in a poor province of a collapsing empire. Only the miracle of my genius stops me feeling depressed about this, and even so my brushes are clogged by theology, that bastard of the sciences." (Gray, 1985, p. 321)

While the threatened building is the small church where Thaw works, the poor province refers to the city of Glasgow, which lacks significance even in a collapsing empire, namely Great Britain. The passage can also be read as a meta-comment on the novel's purpose within the broader English literary canon. This implicit hierarchy invokes the ancient prejudices codified as early as Plato's *Republic* (ca. 375 B.C.E.), where the poet is famously banished from the ideal state for engaging in deceptive imitation rather than pursuing the absolute truth of the philosophical Forms in "Book X" (Plato, 2001, p. 79). If, in the Thaw narrative, the author is using the obsolete form of realism in a poor province of post-war Britain, enduring the burden of having to justify literature's truth-telling capacity, then what is the significance of even producing this work of art? The main question, from the creative writer's perspective, is the significance of literary creation in the context of a wider socio-political context.

In the first two books written in the *Künstlerroman* form, which record the life of the young Glaswegian artist, Duncan Thaw, the novel allegorises the young artist's search for unmediated self-expression. This self-expression is presented as paramount to the creation of a Scottish national literary canon, as the lack of "the truth" leads the city into the apocalypse, in other words, the danger of being

swallowed up by the Leviathan-like (British) state. The idea of the necessity of national literature also resonates in Gray's later works. A Russian traveller in *Poor Things* (1992) explains that:

> "Russia is as young a country as the U.S.A. because a nation is only as old as its literature … [Pushkin's works] made us proud of our language and aware of our tragic past—our peculiar present—our enigmatic future. He made Russia a state of mind—made it real." (Gray, 1992, pp. 115-116)

In the passage, the national literature serves as the primary means of realising the nation as a completely independent agent, because, as the traveller suggests, it connects the past and future in the reader's present. To produce its own truth, *Lanark*'s Books 1 and 2 draw attention to the socio-political backdrop in which the novel emerges.

If the first two books of the Thaw narrative are a continuous allegory of the nation's search for cultural and artistic independence by capturing the reality of Scottish truth, then Books 3 and 4 (the Unthank narrative) are the climax of this search for political independence. The independence, however, comes at the cost of Scotland's acknowledgement of its role in British imperial enterprise. In that sense, the novel does not yearn for a pre-colonial Scotland whose history is not tainted by imperialism. The use of allegory, in that sense, is crucial for the novel to reveal the truth (or, as the motto of Book 1 suggests, "by telling the truth" about the Scottish socio-political condition) and concealing it under the guise of the Unthank narrative. As a literary device, the allegory works on the assumption that the images in the text explicitly correspond to examples and precepts in the extra-textual reality (Frye, 2000, p. 90). If we take John Bunyan's 1682 novel, *The Holy War* that was mentioned in the Unthank narrative, for instance, there is the expectation of a mutual understanding between the one who coded the message (the author) and the receiver of the message (the reader), and the war over the town "Mansoul" stands for the war between good and evil over human's eternal soul. In that sense, an allegory is a specialised form of language that assumes a fictionalised reality that corresponds to the reality outside the text. That particular aspect of reality can be understood through understanding the images in the text. This understanding of the extra-textual phenomena owes its legitimacy to the agreement between the interlocutors; in other words, the allegory demands a community of readership for it to be understood.

This demand for a particular readership is crucial in the postcolonial context. Fredric Jameson observes in "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" that: "Third-world texts … necessarily project a political dimension in the form of a national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" (Jameson, 1986, p. 69). While it should be noted that Jameson's evaluation of the third world literature essentialises all the writing of the former colonies as an extended allegory between the relationship between the Empire and the subaltern, *Lanark* explicitly demands such common ground between its readership and the socio-political context in which it is emerging. So much so that the "story of the private individual," or the story of Lanark in the Unthank narrative, stands for Scotland's search for political recognition. One of the most unambiguous passages that points to such an allegory is on the English-Scottish imperial partnership:

> "The council is a political structure to lift men nearer Heaven. The institute is a conspiracy of thinkers to bring the light of Heaven down to mankind. They've sometimes been distinct organizations and have even quarrelled, though never for long. The last great reconciliation happened during the Age of Reason, and two world wars have only united us more firmly." (Gray, 1985, p. 367)

In the passage, Lanark and Rima are addressed by the Lord Monboddo of the Council. The Institute or the scientific clique in the narrative is the threat that is about to destroy Lanark's town, Unthank. The Council, on the other hand, is the collective body of nations under the government of Lord Monboddo. At the allegorical level, the Council represents the British Empire, while the Institute serves as its scientific and cultural extension. The Council's leader, Monboddo, refers to a real-life eighteenth-

century Scottish scientist, James Burnett, who is considered one of the precursors of Charles Darwin and a leading figure in the Scottish Enlightenment. "The embattled situation" that Jameson talks about is Lanark's realisation that the Scottish intellectual and scientific elite has been part and parcel of the Institute that threatens to swallow Unthank, the allegorical Glasgow. There is no other reference to the colonisation of the third world other than a brief dialogue about the leader of Zimbabwe in the novel, stating that: "I know we sold and flogged his ancestors, which proves we're vicious; but it doesn't prove he's much good" (Gray, 1985, p. 504). However, the Unthank narrative offers a veiled critique of how leading Scottish figures have also been partners in Britain's colonial enterprise.

The fictional author, who appears briefly in the chapter titled "Epilogue," is acutely aware that his artistic vision has been co-opted in the current global economic system:

> "You see, I found Tillyard's study of the epic in Dennistoun public library, and he said an epic was only written when a new society was giving men a greater chance of liberty. I decided that what the *Aeneid* had been to the Roman Empire my epic would be to the Scottish Cooperative Wholesale Republic, one of the many hundreds of small peaceful socialist republics which would emerge (I thought) when all the big empires and corporations crumbled." (Gray, 1985, pp. 492-493)

The encounter between the author and the character is a pattern Gray repeatedly uses in his later fiction from *1982, Janine* (1984), to *Poor Things* (1992). In the passage, the fictional author perceives the novel/epic within the context of a third-world nation's struggle for freedom from the commercial and imperial powers. Reading a contemporary English scholar at the time, E. M. W. Tillyard's study in a library in Glasgow, the fictional author aspired to dedicate his epic to an emancipated, independent Scottish nation. First published two years after the 1979 Scottish devolution referendum, however, the novel reflects the author's disillusionment with the realisation of "small peaceful socialist republics." As the defeat of the referendum sustained the social and political status quo under British rule, Scotland, as Gray's fictional author imagined, could not achieve an independent state that would deserve its *Aeneid*. These metafictional references to the writing of *Lanark* as a national epic question the artist's position in the global market economy, yet the novel concludes on a hopeful note. At an earlier passage where the fictional author expresses that he is also not independent artistically: "Your survival as a character and mine as an author depend on us seducing a living soul into our printed world … I am prostituting my most sacred memories into the commonest possible words and sentences" (Gray, 1985, p. 485). Even the artist, whose creative power can "make the nation real," is also co-opted in the commercialisation of arts. Despite his intention to write a national epic for his socialist republics, due to the constraints of the market economy, he is forced to sell his ideas. Although the author cannot promise Lanark a happy ending, he nevertheless depicts him as an emancipated man. The novel's last sentence presents Lanark as "a slightly worried, ordinary old man but [he was] glad to see the light in the sky" (Gray, 1985, p. 560). Comparing this ending with Lanark's first sentence in Book 3 of *Lanark*: "I am looking for daylight" (Gray, 1985, p. 4), we can argue that with the restoration of the lost sunlight, or the signifier of hope, Lanark's search for freedom is completed.

CONCLUSION

Alasdair Gray's 1981 novel, *Lanark: A Life in Four Books*, both calls for and heralds the emergence of new national literature. In this context, the relationship between representation and power is central to *Lanark* because the novel is an attempt to overcome Scotland's recent 1979 political defeat in its efforts for independence. While the novel has been predominantly analysed as a quintessential postmodern text due to its generic multiplicity and self-referential qualities, I argue that these very qualities are in the service of highlighting the novel's primary concern: the urgent need for self-representation to achieve political, artistic, and economic independence. The truth is that the Scottish artist's pursuit of self-expression, albeit limited, is a reality. Even though the meaning and the concept of truth are constructed, and there is no unmediated access to an unchanging truth, there is a need for self-expression. Because, as suggested in the Thaw narrative, in the absence of fictional and artistic

representation, what is at stake is the Scottish self-perception. The author's interjections, as well as the artworks and self-referential gestures, offer the recovery of self-perception through creative self-assertion. As the complementary Unthank narrative suggests, full-scale political independence comes with the cost of acknowledging Scotland's efforts to come to terms with its involvement in imperialism. However, even when the nation is complicit in its subjugation or when the artists, thinkers, and writers are co-opted to serve the capitalistic machine that feeds on the nation, *Lanark* presents a hopeful note at the conclusion, hinting at the nation's independence by reclaiming its access to truth.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL / PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Ethics committee approval is not required for this study. There are no participants in this study.

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