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Toxic Family Relations in the Metamodernist *Water Cure* by Sophie Mackintosh

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Dedications

Somewhere between the seams of living and leaving, I found me...

My undying appreciativeness is dedicated to me, myself, and I. To the person I was yesterday, the person I become today, and to the future version of me; I am proud of you already. To my sweetheart, my nephew; his beauteous paroles and encouraging cute letters mean the world to me.

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Abstract

The work at disposal deals with particular contemporary societal matters from their narrowest side through the dystopian novel *The Water Cure* (2018) by Sophie Mackintosh. An analysis of the suggested book would require a metamodernist reading, for even if some twenty-first century authors still utilise postmodernist mechanisms, they do apply them according to contemporary usage. What will also be dealt with is a representation of the marginalised women through the analysis of the novel's female characters. Mainly, a special representation of feminism is extricated from the suggested novel. It is not only that of men versus women, but also that of women versus others of the same sex; a thing that adds to its acuteness. It is becoming more and more crucial to voice the voiceless women and to defend the abused ones. One of the major topics to be investigated and in this field is domestic violence and parental toxicity; a central topic in this research. Toxic family dynamics are to be discussed and analysed in *The Water Cure* (2018), and projected on contemporary societies of the twenty first century.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

Literature is quite of similitude to a paysage; both of them trigger emotions and thoughts, which makes critical reading of the former (literature) appear as meditating in nature. Like an artistic scenery, literature unconsciously drives one to build sentiments, and it undoubtedly leads him/her to draw conclusions. Therefore, literature with its fiction projects views, ideologies, information, expectations, and hypotheses on the real world. Parts of what treasures fiction is its ability to link fantasy with contemporary society along with its urge to detoxify the environment. Not rarely did fictitious works contribute to the change of real societies, and many are the writers who undeniably contributed and still do to the worldview. Additionally, irregardless of how fiction varies, it pours in the same stream; it mirrors current problems, and by doing so, it shapes solutions and grants guidance. Promoting for alternative answers that life asks and sketching social parameters is exactly what literature aims at.

Particularly, novels are means of communication through which writers' words and thoughts are conveyed. However, the actual meant communication is that one occurring between writers and readers. This latter teaches what the possibilities can be, it beautifies and adds value to the original works. Hypotheses regarding literary works decoding may be suggested by the critical reader. Above all, reading between the lines is making assumptions; these assumptions aid in building the reader's own conceptualisations. More importantly, the process of voicing the unspoken elevates the critical reader to the position of the writer him/herself; as if rewriting their own work, and making plain their own original understanding, idea or analysis.

The piece of literature that this research rotates around is Sophie Mackintosh's *The Water Cure*. This work is contemporary as it has been published in 2018, London, U.K. Essentially, the novel belongs to a feminist dystopian and post-apocalyptic genre. The

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metamodernist attribute in the novel is to be added and therefore analysed in this research paper. The work of fiction in hands uncovers the intricacies some daughters -or women in general- endure inside their homes in contemporary western society. The general idea of the book is centred on the psychological consequences of domestic violence alongside parental toxicity.

These fundamental themes are implicitly yet thoughtfully put within the story's events to show Sophie Mackintosh's standpoint on toxic parents and abused women. In amalgamating family, psychology, and feminism with its narrow spectrum, Mackintosh has come up with an astounding truthful fictitious debut work entitled *The Water Cure*. This latter paves the road to toxicity, manipulation, as well as love, liberty, and sisterhood.

The book offers nothing but the reflection of current social dilemmas. It portrays the servitude of women, their submission to the masculine sex, but also their persistence and strong will to break free from whatever subtle restrictions there could be. It seems to be a common problem that women share in today's society. These reflections seem to trigger the following enquiries:

- ✚ What issues does the water cure as a metamodernist novel draw?
- ✚ How are toxic family relationships manifested in the dystopian novel: *The Water Cure*?
- ✚ How is the dystopian metamodernist *Water Cure* linked to feminism?

The above highlighted questions may consent to these suggested hypotheses; the first question may have the metamodernist characteristics thoroughly applied on the book for a clearer vision of one's own claims. Responses would attempt to highlight particular (family) issues in the novel. The second question is one of the major points to be investigated in this research work, and it may be answered through the depiction of the characters' relationship with each other. Namely, mother-father, father-daughter, and

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mother-daughter relationships. Through this analysis, toxic aspects will be noted to the reader. The third problematic may accept as a response the feminine representation in the novel in question. These representations may be projected on contemporary societies where some marginalised women suffer a huge deal.

This dissertation will be divided into two chapters. The first section will be devoted to explore the genres to which *The Water Cure* belongs: metamodernism, dystopia, and post-apocalypse. Contemporary feminism will be highlighted as well. This first chapter ends with a theoretical part of family and/or psychology and toxic family relations. The latter prepares the ground for the next chapter.

The second section will provide Sophie Mackintosh's *The Water Cure* analysis. Genres' (dystopian, metamodernist, post-apocalyptic) aspects will be directly projected on the book; examples will be presented in the process. Feminist representations will be extricated and analysed. Above all, the second chapter ends with the exploration of toxic parenting; its signs, its manifestations, and its consequences.

Chapter One

Conceptualising the Metamodernist Dystopian Novel

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1.2. Introduction

Novels play a great role in transcending writers' subtle concerns. In doing so, fiction communicates effectively with its readers. Readers, on their turn, try to decipher whatever messages appear or hide between the lines. This is called literary criticism/literary analysis. However, this latter varies as it depends on each one's comprehension and interpretation. There is, hence, no absolute conclusions as criticism in literature tends to be biased on myriads of perspectives. Nonetheless, deciphering literary compositions is a pleasing and an entertaining process as it does not denigrate, assess, or evaluate the writer and his ideologies, rather, it brings to light unseen aspects of the work.

Following the steps of literary criticism, the present chapter will theorise the essential points in analysing the book in hands. What will be dealt with proposes a post-postmodernist reading of the contemporary *Water Cure* (2018). Particularly, metamodernist representations have been chosen and will be, thus, theorised before being practically applied on the novel in chapter 02. What succeeds offers an overview of dystopian and post-apocalyptic genres for a clearer vision on the characteristics and implications that these genres draw. After dealing with literary devices (genres and trends), the attention will be directed to the content. Conceptualisations of feminism, to which *The Water Cure* (2018) belongs, will be discussed. The last idea of this segment will tackle family relation in both psychology and literature. Thus, toxic family relations will be deduced as a negative social consequence to not only violence, but also to the ill-treatment that some children endure in contemporary societies of the twenty first century.

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1.3. Metamodernism

Before dealing with metamodernism as an established ideology (trend) in literature, mentioning a background to it is compulsory.

1.2.1 Pre-metamodernism (Preamble)

Discussing knowledge is often associated with a myriad of philosophies and schools of thought; enveloping different domains economy, politics, culture, architecture, arts, and literature. This latter has witnessed great changes since ever. In fact, literature has always been influenced by distinct philosophies; each adding, developing, improving, modifying, upgrading, and shaping new changes in literary works. These philosophical reflections, hence, contribute to the special artistic touch in literature to cope with contemporary tendencies.

The Romantic era is believed to have started around 1872 or 1776 (Chandler, 2009, p. 01). At that time, the Western World was influenced by the psychology of Transcendentalism which encourages individualism and emphasises on refuge in nature. Bearing in mind that Enlightenment was synchronised in its periodization with Romanticism, this latter was the literary movement which responded to social, political, and economic aspects of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Western World.

Furthermore, one reaction to the Romantic literature is the realistic one. This philosophy contributed to a new style of writing, different from that of the Romantic style. While romanticism plays on the imaginary side of the brain, realism affords more logical and reality-like events, stories, and ideologies. This can be explained in the sense that consciousness is not a constant pattern. Instead, it changes with time; ecosystem and social system evolutions call for the evolution of literature and writing styles. The beginning of the 19th century marked the start of this philosophy in literary works, which paved the road

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to a new genre. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1886) is one work by Mark Twain where realist and pragmatic ways of thinking are prominently present. In this novel, the writer describes life in the south of America and the slavery institution through the adventures of his fictional character Jim. This was one realist work which pictures real life, and has realist characteristics in it. However, it can be deduced that with time changing the objective belief and theories of accessible truth of realism were no longer enough in responding to the new dilemmas of the beginning of the twentieth century, for literature did change afterward.

As a response to the realist tenets, Modernism attempted to answer the question of who the west really was. Are they really what realism describes them, or have they changed? The very reason why the technique of stream of consciousness was prominently used in modernist novels. *The Dead* in *Dubliners* (1914) is one work by James Joyce in which readers get into the characters' interior thoughts through the technique of stream of consciousness and epiphany. This turning into the conscious and subconscious parts of the individuals' minds goes back to the development of psychology at that time, namely, *The interpretation of Dreams* (1913 in English) by Sigmund Freud was of intense influence on modernist literature (Heller, 1975). Add to this the emergence of psychoanalysis in literature during the modernist era (Gang, 2013).

Moreover, since “the house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million, several possible Windows not to be reckoned” (James, 2004, p. 04), literature always calls up for new changes and adopts new philosophies, accordingly. Postmodernism as a reaction to previous movements, disempowered and undermined the traditional notions about language and identity (Carter, 2006, p. 120). On the grounds that literature deals with the most intricate problems, it holds more questions than answers. It is, indeed, the case

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with postmodernism which “suggests, an unwarranted belief in truth and self” (Josipovici, 2011, p.19). According to Josipovici, there is no one and unique truth or self, instead there are plenty of unidentified truths and selves (2011). From a postmodern standpoint, truth cannot be something sure as it varies from one perspective to another. It can be, then, safe to utter that the larger possibilities are served, the closest one gets to postmodernism. This philosophy was widely used in the late 20th century and early twenty-first century, transmitting the idea that each individual has the ability to generate a specific version of truth according to each one's understanding. In other words, truth becomes vague and less clear. In a postmodern stance, “different people will come to different conclusions about the same subject” (Farhan, 2019, p. 01). The same reason why literature of postmodernism is various and treats mostly topics from different sides appealing to different analysis in the world of criticism.

In literature, postmodernism “Signifies the Triumph of individuality” (Farhan, 2019, p. 03), where the subjectivity of truth, scepticism, and absurdism are prominent themes in literary works. In fact, the periodization of postmodernism is quite critical, but it deals mainly with the issues of the twenties and the beginning of the twenty-first century in the Western World. However, the uncertainty about the start and end dates of postmodernism is a typical characteristic of the Periodization of this philosophy. About this, Jason Gladstone and Daniel Worden in their article “Introduction: Postmodernism, Then” that “it does not matter whether postmodernism is or is not on the way out” (2011, p. 292). In this vein, periodisation is not important, instead, postmodernism can be understood through its aesthetics and ideologies. One can tell a postmodernist literary work from a non-postmodernist one.

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What is then postmodernism? Many scholars responded to that question, each having their own arguments regarding the matter. Jean François Lyotard, for instance, in his work *The Postmodern Condition a Report on Knowledge* asserts that postmodernism “Is undoubtedly a part of the modern” (1984, p. 79). It is not an art-mothering period independent from modernism, but is, rather, a continuation of it. He follows on by stating that the works a writer provides through a postmodern lens are not governed by any principles or rules. Instead, they take a more subjective theme (1984, p. 79). Postmodernism, being a variety of modernism, is believed to corrupt its readers. Brian McHale, in his book *Postmodernist Fiction*, argues that “postmodernism denies external objective reality” (2004, p. 219). He follows on with his argument by asserting that the supposedly anti-realist philosophy of postmodernism doesn't absorb a little from realism (2004).

Nevertheless, between a continuity to modernism, a break from it, or return to realism, postmodernism lays a plethora of interpretations to different Scholars. However, though postmodernist fiction does not abrogate from previous theories, it stands for new perspectives and techniques, especially in literature. These techniques are the open ends, fragmentations, intertextuality, and metafiction (Yousef, 2017, p. 43). Above all, neither did twentieth century post-modernism divorce nor revolt against modernism. Instead, it re-enacted it and interacted with its principles and ideals.

1.2.2. Toward Metamodernism

The 21st century puts forward new challenges and new dilemmas to the western world, enveloping different fields. This, actually, brings us to the following point which could not have been mentioned without the Chain of (the above stated) philosophies: Realism, Romanticism, Modernism, and Postmodernism. No one stands without the other.

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In fact, the world is now collecting information; these types of information about technology, science, and artificial intelligence have become a crucial part of everyone's daily life. In other words, the ways people are living in the twenty-first century differ a huge deal from the life before. Communication is not the same, neither manners are, nor are culture or ideologies. It is, then, salient that the individual understands the influence of contemporary developments on his thoughts and way of receiving and interpreting data. After all, being aware is being safe. However, if life changes, philosophy changes, and by extension Literature develops. The socialization of digital practices and equipment has resulted in changes from postmodern TV screens to metamodern networking sites and social media; denoting that an entirely different movement is shining beyond postmodernism. Internet, for example, is the twenty-first century's most successful and brilliant invention. When it comes to traveling, a click on internet has substituted the map of previous centuries. Nevertheless, neither internet nor maps can replace the actual taste of traveling. However, they both successfully help in finding the right way; and as such are postmodernism and post post-modernism or metamodernism.

The term metamodernism has been first mentioned at Chicago University 1997 in a conference entitled "After Post-modernism". More recently, in 2014 the University of Strathclyde held a conference on metamodernism. A myriad of books and articles, thus, were published supporting what is to be followed by postmodernism. Raoul Eshelman in *Performatism or The End of Post-modernism* (2008), affirms that "we are now leaving the postmodern era with its essentially dualist Notions of textuality, virtuality, belatedness, irony, and metaphysical skepticism and entering an era in which specifically monist virtues are again coming to the fore" (p. xi). In this book, Eshelman acknowledges that the world of philosophy and academic theory shifted interest in what succeeds postmodernism.

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Linguistically, the prefix "meta" is defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary to refer to the highly organized or specialized form of something. It has also the meaning of after, between and beyond. To put it differently, metamodernism is after post-modernism and beyond it. It also lays between modernism and postmodernism. Simply reflecting that it can be found neither in modernism nor in postmodernism.

On the one hand, Josephson in his *Metamodernism the Future of Theory* (2021), claims throughout this book that metamodernism gathers both modernism and postmodernism and cannot be reduced out of them. He, then, summarizes the philosophy of metamodernism as resembling to postmodernism in rejecting objectivity and notions of scepticism but also for discarding realism. Josephson, moreover, suggests that metamodernism brings with it aspects of modernism as it articulates a system; the communication style is the same (Josephson, 2021). Through Josephson arguments, one can note that metamodernism cannot stand by itself. Just like postmodernism, modernism, or realism cannot. They all take from each other. The very reason why it was compulsory to mention them in a chain (chronologically) before tackling metamodernism as a contemporary element of this century.

On the other hand, Linda Hutcheon puts it forwardly in *The Politics of Postmodernism* second edition: "Let's just say: it's over" (2003, p. 166). Many have affirmed the end of the postmodern epoch, yet scholars and philosophers are still working on giving this contemporary philosophy an appropriate name following up with the economic, cultural, and political changes in the world. Names like automodernism, pseudomodernism, or digimodernism have been, thus, suggested. Linda Hutcheon concludes that Post-postmodernism needs a new label of its own challenges her readers to name this new trend (2003).

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More importantly, Timotheus Vermeulen, along with Robin Van Den Akker are considered the two influencing figures in developing the theory of metamodernism. Their 2010 article "Notes on Metamodernism" has been a brave step toward the theory in question, and turned out to be a reliable source for other researchers investigating metamodernism. In this article, the writers emphasise that metamodernism moves for the sake of moving (Akker, Vermeulen, 2010, p. 05). This movement is believed to be pursuing the truth it never expected to discover (Akker, Vermeulen, 2010, p. 05). The writers have therefore compared the philosophy of metamodernism to a donkey chasing a carrot it never manages to eat. In other words, metamodernism will never stop chasing the truth or abandoning it.

Driven by the platonic idea of 'metaxis', Robin Van Den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen in their book *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism* (2017), assert that the concept of in-between-ness outcomes the ideologies of postmodernism with new senses, themes, and structures in literature (Akker, Vermeulen, 2017, p. 30). As it has been identified by Akker and Vermeulen (2017), in the first part of the book, metamodernism being the contemporary (21st century) cultural logic of Western capitalist societies, is by no means a new term as its notions have been first utilised in the 1975 article as "the apocalyptic fact and eclipse of fiction in recent American prose narratives". It is noted by Robin van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen that in that article, Zavarzadeh Asserts that literature moves beyond the interpretation of the novel, just like metafiction does (Akker, Vermeulen, 2017, p. 22).

Howbeit, it is important to denote that the protagonists of metamodernism do not see it more of a philosophy or a social movement - though it can be regarded as such -, as much as they deem it "a structure of feeling that emerges from, and reacts to, the

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postmodern as much as it is a cultural logic that corresponds to today's stage of global capitalism” (Akker, Vermeulen, 2017, p. 23). Though complex, the term "structure of feeling" can be regarded as a mood or an attitude that relates to contemporary cultural challenges; “the most delicate and least tangible parts of culture”(Williams, cited in Akker, Vermeulen, and Gibbons MacDowell, 2017, p. 51). This structure of the western capitalist societies is, hence, explained in the book as present in many movements and phenomena, but reducible to any of them (Akker, Vermeulen, 2017, p.27). The idea of structures of feeling is, however, adopted from Raymond Williams who first coined and detailed the term to the world of the literary criticism in his *Marxism and Literature* (1977). Contentedly, Williams brings together feelings and thoughts as the effective elements of consciousness and relationships. He, therefore, attributes it as follows: feelings as thought and thoughts as felt (Akker, Vermeulen, 2017, p.27). The word feeling, hence, could be substitutional to "experience"(Akker, Vermeulen, 2017, p.27). It could be, then, taken for granted that metamodernism takes extensively from Marxist notions.

So what truly is metamodernism? The lexicon ‘meta’ means with, between, and beyond. Akker and Vermeulen claim that metamodernism is simultaneous and paradoxical. “Epistemologically with (post) modernism, ontologically between (post) modernism, and historically beyond [it]” (2010, p. 02). As explained in the article, metamodernism oscillates with, between, and beyond past, present, and future cultural structures. The ideals of metamodernism lay in reconstructing what has been deconstructed. Trying to give life meaning is fore mostly a metamodern goal. This reconstruction succeeds through a reconciliation between extreme elements - sometimes opposing elements. Moreover, the metamodern paradigm oscillates between modernist hope and postmodern scepticism by advocating sincerity. The actual meeting ground of extremist judgments is the space of in-between-ness. Let it be called the swing movement.

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As Ihab Hasan detailed it in his *Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (1987), while modernism seeks truth and certainty, postmodernism favours irony and doubt. This, eventually, makes metamodernism swing between the two since it believes meaning is wavy; neither objective nor subjective. The very polarisation of metamodernism makes it different from other systems. (Hasan, 1987, p. 94).

The most suitable comparison between postmodernism and metamodernism would be the very difference between recycling and upcycling. The former makes use of other products after destructing them, whereas upcycling retains -does justice to- the original object and adds value to it (Vermeulen, Akker, 2017, p. 29). It is neither significant nor absurd, it is simple. In a similar vein, it can be deduced that metamodern artists and writers do use old techniques (modern, postmodern, or romantic), yet they are still attributed under the metamodern column. Simply because they move beyond the old traditional techniques by genuinely adding new and contemporary senses, positions, feelings, and experiences altogether.

In a nutshell, it is increasingly important to understand that the basic sense of in-between-ness does not entail a balance, but keeps going back and forth into the edges (extremes) of things; aiming at filling the gap between positive and negative, true and untrue, perfect and imperfect, existing and absent, prized and ignored, even loved and hated.

1.2.3 Metamodernism in Fiction

If ways of thinking are only reflective, then metamodernism is best in representing twenty-first-century Western capitalist nations' issues. It is only the new generation reacting to the old one by attributing contemporary structures or feelings. Like real life domains, literature, fiction, and novels are no exception. Artists and writers, thenceforth,

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continue to confront twenty-first-century dilemmas; each with their own way of doing so. With the increasing complexity of these dilemmas, critics have begun to think of contemporary fiction as no longer postmodern. Nevertheless, this does not mean writers divorced postmodern patterns or rejected them. On the contrary, metamodern authors draw extensively on postmodernism.

No matter how Western culture transforms or changes with the 21st century ecosystems or politics, it stretches back to the postmodern. It can be, thus, taken for fact that postmodernism cannot be understood by ignoring modernism, and neither can post-postmodernism (metamodernism) be discerned without light shedding on postmodernism. In this case, the trend of Metamodernism appears to be unifying and harmonising between modernism and postmodernism. Unifying the two concepts might be challenging, yet it offers, indeed, a meeting ground of “Modern enthusiasm and postmodern irony” (Akker and Vermeulen, 2010, p. 05).

At times of writing contemporary fiction, “metamodernism appears to find its clearest expression in an emergent neoromantic sensibility” (Akker and Vermeulen, 2010, p. 08). It has been noted in Akker and Vermeulen's article that Romanticism is about the attempt to turn the finite into the infinite, while recognising what can never be realised (Akker and Vermeulen, 2010, p. 08). That is to mention that the very oscillation of Romanticism between the edges has been adapted by contemporary trends under the name of metamodernism. Moreover, fiction of the twenty-first century envelopes the beauty as well as the ugliness (optimism and pessimism) of romanticism. Additionally, contemporary literature still utilises postmodern themes to articulate today's issues, which again, explains the in-between-ess of metamodern trends.

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Furthermore, in her 2015 article “Take that you intellectuals!” and “kaPOW!” Adam Thirlwell and the Metamodernist Future of Style”, Allison Gibbons is careful not to neglect Vermeulen and Akker's "notes on metamodernism"(2010). She takes what the writers uttered as "aesthetical" and attributes it to the metamodern writing, to suggest an anti-global capitalist style. In this case, metamodernism envelopes global ethics, where writers contribute to raising the consciousness of the public through fiction wishing for a better disciplined future. Confessing, by this token, that human beings are the very source of all sorts of corruption (Gibbons, 2015, p. 31). Their attempt to fix this is already a good step toward reconciliation and solutions finding. Yet, one cannot deny the idealistic core of this ideology.

Supplementary, another means by which metamodern writings achieve their goal is through the assimilation of high and low cultural references. (Gibbons, 2015, p. 32). Though this technique is postmodern, it has been reutilised in the metamodern to show juxtapositions that elicit considerations towards current society. In the remainder of the article, Gibbons takes *Kapow* novella (2012) by Adam Thirlwell who explores the issue of Arab Spring in the story. This example is believed to have responded to the characteristics stated earlier (metamodern characteristics). By the end of the article, the critic concludes by asserting: “Metamodernist writing hints at a future literature” (Gibbons, 2015, p. 41). Just like Thirlwell in 2012 did not know what the Arab spring will lead to, metamodernist theorists know little about the future nor can they predict it. Yet, they contribute a huge deal to offer plausible conclusions to contemporaneous issues for a “future beyond me and beyond you” (Thirlwell, cited by Gibbons, 2015, p. 41). Like Akker and Vermeulen articulate it in their 2010 article: metamodernist endeavour “Not to fulfill [contemporary dilemmas], but to attempt to fulfill [them] in spite of [their] “unfulfillableness” (p. 09).

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1.3. Dystopian Fiction

If Utopia means good, and Dystopia means bad, then the world is already dystopian. Taking this statement for real, there is, eventually, no need to identify Dystopia as a futuristic society, or as Lyman Tower Sargent defines it a “Non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived” (1994, p. 09).

In *Utopia/Dystopia Conditions of Historical Possibility*, however; it has been stated that dystopia is only a “Utopia that has gone wrong” (Gordin, Tilley, & Prakash, 2010, p. 10). In other words, keeping in mind that Utopia is the imagination of a positive, pious, righteous, and honourable world, Dystopia, then, starts when the writer imagines a fictional world where these adjectives have no room. Rather, a corrupted world. As if the world was supposed to be created only good. More exactly, Dystopia as a literary genre became famous in the twentieth century with postmodernism. Writers found a new and thereby different trend to transcend their messages. Moreover, this type of fiction is used to draw attention to oppressing societies, (Totalitarian) governments, religions, or systems. Though the genre’s central interest is futuristic, it relates more to present (contemporary) issues; sometimes plausible consequences, other times exaggerating results to serious intricacies of society.

1.3.1 Dystopian Writing

Many writers have considered Dystopia the best way to sensitise their readers towards a plethora of matters. Namely, oppressed women, patriarchal systems, or outlawing governments, family, identity are all Dystopia’s core subjects. For instance, *Brave New World* (1932) by Aldous Huxley is among the first dystopian novels of the

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twentieth century wherein the author predicts the acute dangers technology would lead societies to (Aiman, 2012). Additionally, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) suggests the absence of a civilised society where man is so evil (Aiman, 2012).

Furthermore, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and its continuity *The Testaments* (2019) is a Feminist Dystopia by Margaret Atwood who reveals the dangerous consequences of sexist attitudes which dehumanise women. On a side note, even though the current era of twenty first century does no longer belong to postmodernism –instead, it requires a metamodernist understanding-, dystopia is still as expressive as it was before, simply because the genre still responds to contemporary complications. Not least, psychology, religion, feminism, society, and politics. *The Hunger Games series* (2008-2010) by Suzanne Collins, for example, is one famous dystopian creation concerning (physical and mental) survival, which as well, corresponds to today's problems.

1.3.2 Dystopia V.S Utopia

Dystopia and Utopia can never be mentioned one without the other, and seem to have very deep and philosophical meanings. Like a dark tunnel, dystopia is an atmosphere of complete challenge, enthusiasm, but fear and danger. On the other hand, Utopia is the ray of light at the end of the tunnel. In this sense, howbeit, Utopian society remains in the imagination of writers and their audience, solely. Simply because in real life there are far more ways for going and doing wrong than there are for it to go and do right. Utopia, hence, relates to the Greek origin of the word “no place” (utopia has, indeed, no place in real life). Nevertheless, the two concepts meet in revealing social concerns and cultural formations, drawing on present data of which imaginary ends are generated. While utopian characters live in complete harmony and embrace

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morals, dystopians endure dissonance and chaos under an oppressing -generally-patriarchal system. In addition, utopia offers freedom, whereas dystopia provides only restrictions.

However, it is important that one understands that utopia and dystopia, as literary genres, both revolt against contemporary issues and already corrupted societies. This means that they are reactions; one (utopia) advocates the goodness of life aiming to influence readers, authorities, or systems, for positive changes (generally suggested ones). The other (dystopia), eventually, depicts a disordered futuristic society which sheds lights on today's problems. Contentedly, since literature is about asking questions more than answering them, dystopia along with utopia are only means through which writers lighten readers' consciousness about today's hindrances. Supplementary, it is noted that dystopian fiction, generally, envelopes the atmosphere of struggle and melancholy, nonetheless, utopian one proliferates peace and hope. In a nutshell, both genres deal with futuristic incidents, therefore, they both urge the audience to reform the contemporary circumstances of which they make part.

1.3.3 Feminist Dystopia

Issues involving women are generally portrayed in literature through Feminist Dystopia. In this (sub) genre, problems of patriarchy, gender, violence, dysfunctional family, or whatever limits women's liberty, are discussed exaggeratedly to highlight the need for change in contemporary society. To put it differently, feminist dystopias are extensions to the problematic the world witnesses at the time being for the aim of making people afraid and to make them react, to provoke aversion so that a counter-position is adopted (Minvielle & Wathelet, cited in Pinto. et al, 2021, p. 03).

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As a revolutionary act, writers –generally female writers- join their voices together to speak the unspoken, defend and shout out the situation of oppressed women. Though, feminist writings serve the western woman extensively, they share, somehow; aspects of universality of women. Feminist writers have, hence, found their refuge from patriarchal systems in fiction. In like manner, Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the first western feminist writers states “I do not wish them [women] to have power over men; but over themselves” (2004, ch. 04).

As the quote entails, the righteous victory for a woman is to overcome herself. Equivalently, there should not be a war of women against men. Howbeit, the literary genre of feminist dystopia serves as the bridge between feminist theory and practice wherein female characters strive to be recognised and valued beyond patriarchy and gender. Readers can easily extricate the negative aspects writers allude to in their texts. The psychology of characters tells a lot about their toxic families, environments, and societies.

1.3.3.1. Feminist Dystopian Writing

Feminist fiction relies extensively on dystopia for better depiction of women status. In this case, women writers’ foremost goal is to change the current society, to grant subordinate women a decent position by highlighting their pain and struggle. Moreover, feminist dystopia reached its fame in the mid of the twentieth century as a second wave feminist activity, which served the movement -of feminism- by presenting gender inequality, social norms domination, or even dysfunctional families, as important themes. Mainly, when feminist dystopia is brought to discussions, *The Handmaid’s Tale* by Atwood is on top of suggestions.

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Nevertheless, there is a plethora of other dystopian novels defending women's status, particularly, Sophie Mackintosh's *The Water Cure* (2018) is one novel inspired by *The Handmaid's Tale* which exhibits family violence against the three protagonists of the novel. Besides, *Red Clocks* by Leni Zumas, Released in 2019, imagines a society making abortion illegal (Alderman, 2018). The book questions freedom, identity, and motherhood. Furthermore, *Before She Sleeps* (2018) by the Pakistani author Bina Shah represents the terror exercised upon women who must marry multiple husbands with the objective of bringing many children (Kramatschek, 2019). However, above all, dystopia continues to serve the movement of feminism to this day; annexing other contemporary issues like that of the LGBT matter.

1.3.3.2. Men in Feminist Dystopia

Feminist dystopias play a huge role in the awareness of its audience. Until the twenty first century, dystopia is still trendy for the simple reason that it is effective. Nevertheless, men's participation in it remains low. There is, therefore, no point in disputing the fact that feminist dystopia is written by women writers, and very few male writers. The same reason why male characters take a minor contribution in the novel. Fore mostly, the ultimate goal of Feminist movements is confined to challenging men's privilege and overturning patriarchal institutions in society (Holmgren & Hern, 2009, p. 408).

In addition, with the increasing complexity of dystopian themes, and women's growing sense of liberty, this genre is eliminating the role of men. They are, sometimes, demonised, or minimised, and other times, completely absent. Their absence, nonetheless, plays a salient role, as it denotes the writers' rejection of any patriarchal or gender based dominance. On a side note, many critics argue that writers

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must let their male characters defend themselves, eventually, tell their version of the story. Reluctantly, writers exclude men on purpose. Mainly, reflecting the idea that one had enough, and that now is the time when only women speak. This exaggeration is expressive as it demonstrates the core of problems females confront in their environments. All in all, men are permanently depicted antagonists in feminist dystopian novels. Society, as well, is dangerously portrayed which leads to the following conception of post-apocalypse.

1.4. Post-Apocalyptic Fiction

In studying the future, Post-apocalyptic representations in literature serve a huge deal. By definition, post-apocalyptic fiction pictures the end of the world we live in resulting to a new and different world; entailing different orders, social structures, and ecosystems. Generally, the post-apocalyptic novel shows the life of humans who survived global disasters. In Hanna Jameson's *The Last* (2019), only twenty people survive, after the world collapses. The protagonist, decides to find his family in the aftermath of the apocalypse society. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the apocalypse itself does not matter as much as the idea behind it does. The actions characters perform under themes of disaster and survival seem to be fighting the toxicity spread after the event of destruction.

Since in fiction the apocalypse of the world cannot be equated with "the real" end of the world, characters must survive or adapt to the –usually- terrifying social structures. Add to this, that the atmosphere of post-apocalyptic novels is full of violence. Science and technology, on the other hand, are not really present. Survival, however, is the post-apocalyptic novel's major theme. Taking the former characteristics as arguments, post-apocalyptic notions look like current affairs matters.

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Today, society is corrupted in all senses, technology and science are becoming more and more dangerous on the human life, politics and economy, as well, are now advocates of pure corruption. Hence, it becomes safe to note that the world is already witnessing post-apocalypse without having a real apocalypse. More importantly, this drives to the simple deduction that “The movement from the present into the future is never as neat [...] there is no entirely new world, and that history can never be transcended or escaped” (Pitetti, 2017, p. 447). Post-apocalyptic fiction, thus, invites the reader to confront the full complexity of existence.

1.5. Women in Contemporary Era

Talking about women is talking about Feminism. In one way or another, the movement of Feminism envelopes all the issues faced by women and in all domains. There is, indeed, no point in disputing the fact that Feminism has caused no end of debate among its protagonists and antagonists. Since the very emergence of this movement, it has been a central interest to many of researchers, but also the laymen. Feminism, therefore differentiates between sex, referring to the biological constitutions of female or male, and the gender, which refers to the cultural stereotype as feminine or masculine (Carter, 2006, p. 93). However, the differences between men and women are believed not to be primarily biological but socially constructed due to traditional male dominance (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p. 03). Hence, every woman revolting against the ‘Patriarchal’ rules of the feminine and masculine attributes is regarded by the same institution as a ‘Bad girl’. It is at this particular moment that Feminism takes place to reclaim the ‘balance’ between both sexes.

In fact, feminist activists should embrace the difference between men and women but never the superiority of one over the other, neither society nor men can undermine

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women's strength. Most importantly, it is not a war to win, nor is it a she or he matter. It is a rehabilitation. As a background, First Wave Feminism has contributed in granting women the right to suffrage. By the end of the 1800s and early 1900s, women in America, as in Britain revolted against authorities to achieve their political equality; that of vote. The second wave, however, was not political but social. Women in The United States gained their right for equal pay with men in 1963, whereas British women in 1970. They were also permitted to abortion under the second wave of the movement. Third Wave Feminism (1990s) turns around workplace sexual harassment. As a result, gender trouble has increased and Trans-feminism has been paid attention to (Rampton, 2015). Now that this liberation movement has contributed extensively to a huge change in the lives of women everywhere – as it proclaims its universality-, feminists have to go beyond and rethink of the notions of this movement.

The twenty first century is giving new challenges and potentials, and thus problems which should be rethought of. Post-feminism, or Fourth Wave Feminism reassesses current day dilemmas; specifically those of the Western World. Essentially, nonetheless, today's Feminism is all about women empowerment and leadership. The road to voicing the voiceless is still long, but considerable changes have been done since feminism was first launched. One cannot deny that woman's status has shifted from being voiceless and subordinate to autonomous, empowered, and a leader. "There is no limit to what we, as women, can accomplish" (Michelle Obama, 2017).

Today women have more or less attained the liberty they once yearned for. While not exactly false, this view is only half true. Equality is believed not to be discerned in real life. Patriarchal norms are still discriminating against women. Sexual aggression under the so-called "rape culture" is proliferated in western society. Nowhere is this

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best exemplified than in Sophie Mackintosh's *The Water Cure* (2018) where one of the protagonists (Grace) is raped by her –supposedly- father, however, this act is normalised by the character. After all, “Like previous eras of feminist thought, the fourth wave isn't a homogeneous movement” (Abrahams, 2017, para. 15). Nowadays, not only scholars, critics, writers, or apologists of Feminism take part of this movement. Youtubers, bloggers, and influencers contribute extensively to the feminist activities. To put it differently, women problems are more likely heard and appreciated, and interacted with, through social media more than they are through conferences, articles, books, or fiction. This, thenceforth, might touch the coherence of the movement, but also enriches its diversity with a wide range of voices and perspectives.

1.6. Feminist Literary Criticism

In one's own understanding, feminist literary criticism highlights the female representations in literary works. These representations are projections of what women in real life perform, endure, and practise. Investigating feminist literary criticism can be both synchronic and diachronic, as it studies women's activities over time, and it can also settle for considerations of the time being regardless of the historical changes and developments (Eagleton, 2010, p. xiii). “Feminist literary criticism focused on the role given to women in literary texts by male or female writers” (Mouro, 2014, p. 53-4), that is to utter that critics' foremost interest is directed to the feminine ‘characters’, and the writer as one of the characters if may be noted.

Moreover, feminist literary criticism, having scarcely left any period of literature (Eagleton, 1991, p. iv), is agreed to have followed three waves. Like first wave feminism, the first wave of feminist literary criticism is claimed by Kristeva to have highlighted political equalities (Cited in Mouro, 2014, pp. 52-53). Furthermore,

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the second wave of feminist literary criticism is believed to have argued the differences between men and women; psychological masculine versus feminine attributes were of main interest (Goodnow cited by Mouro, 2014, p. 53). However, the third wave is plainly described to have dealt with identity differences and issues under patriarchal orders (Goodnow cited by Mouro, 2014, p. 53). In essence, women as writers have developed throughout the above stated phases; they went from having no place in literature to getting decent and competitive positions in the world of literature and literary criticism as well (Mouro, 2020, p. 199).

Like fourth wave feminism (twenty first century feminism) focuses on sexual harassment, body shaming, and rape culture¹ (which *The Water Cure* remedies) (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, nd. np). ‘Fourth wave literary criticism’² can be suggested to have followed the same stream of fourth wave feminism to defend twenty first century females’ concerns, and to renounce whatever contemporary issues these marginalised women are enduring. . After all, feminist literary criticism as a feminist activity concentrate on what differentiates women from men as to the atrocities endured by women because of the ‘rules constituted by men’, ‘the patriarchal rule’. (Mostefaoui, 2022, p. 85).

1.7. Family in/and Psychology

Family’s bond is everyone’s pillar to go on with his/her life. “We are each a product of the role we are given in the family-complex” (Tyson, 2006, p. 13); family is the first place where you and your personality take from and grow. For instance, if you have

¹ Rape culture: refers to sexual harassments and violence in an environment where these acts are normalised. The work to be dealt with: *The Water Cure* (2018) envelopes this contemporary idea.

² Fourth wave literary criticism: references about such a concept are limited if not inexistent yet. This concept is, hence, suggested for further futuristic research. Clara Fischer’s “Gender and the Politics of Shame: A Twenty-First-Century Feminist Shame Theory” (2018), and *Theories and methodologies in postgraduate feminist research: researching differently* (2011) can be of usefulness for the suggested research on ‘fourth wave feminist literary criticism’.

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been raised to encouragements, you will be confident. If all what you have had as a child is restrictions, you will be an indecisive person. If you have been the favourite and most lovable child, you expect and will be, ultimately, loved by everyone. However, if you haven't had the appropriate love from your parents, or were their least favourite child, neither will you be able to give, nor fill and get the love you desire. This theory serves as a starting point for understanding the differences among individuals. In this case, family dynamics (interactions between family members) provide resources of one's own emotions, thoughts, and behaviours. (Tyson, 2006, p. 58)

Most of psychological analysis work in function of family dynamics. They can significantly impact the individual's mental health negatively or positively and in various ways. The righteous atmosphere in families builds righteous personalities. Open communication, emotional support, shared and balanced responsibility, all contribute to the wellbeing of children.

What if these elements were not available in most of families? The response to this question relies on the simple realisation that the world, now, has more traumatised adult children than healthy ones. Not all of them are products of child abuse, rape, or violence, but also abandonment, accusation, narcissism, and toxicity in all senses. And what can be bitterest than enduring "pain" in the place you've grown in and thought you truly belong to? Familial disorders are widespread in nowadays' societies to the point that one feels everyone is coming from dysfunctional families. More firmly, family dynamics can lift you up as they can drag you down. This idea drives to a very interesting type of family relationships, that of toxicity.

1.8. Toxic Family Relations

Family has always been a central topic in psychology. Its role in constructing individuals' personalities is undeniable. This is why parents-child relations are important. As far as healthy family relations are concerned, strong personalities are generally made. Before all, individuals draw heavily on environmental circumstances, and family is their first experience. Precisely, grownups are only adult children. They follow up with their lives the same way they have been raised to. Nevertheless, since the subject of familial relations is that essential, it influences other fields; namely literature and cinema. As far as cinema is concerned, a plethora of films, series, and cartoons took family as their fundamental theme. For instance, *Modern Family* (2009) is a comedy TV show portraying the hilarious look of today's modern family, insisting on togetherness despite of daily trivial conflicts. As in literature, family relations are always present.

Marmee in *Little Women* (1868) by Louisa May Alcott, portrays the support bounding together her four daughters. She is their comfort through hard times. The Brother and Sister Cuthbert in *Ann of Green Gables*, play the role of parents for the orphan Ann. They are loving, caring, and encouraging. As shown, literature encompasses a wide range of healthy family orders. Howbeit, nothing is thoroughly positive since toxicity has snuck into families' lives (Dewdrop, 2014).

By definition, toxicity is an extremely harsh, malicious, or harmful quality (Merriam-Webster). It feels like suffocation that you are obliged to ensnare, endure, surpass, and survive. Difficult! But harder it is when it comes from the closest people to your heart: your parents. On a side note, the idea of toxicity is thought not to entail violence, and abuse only, it can consist of manipulation, neglect, or over-authority. In

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this sense, toxic parents can generally be narcissistic and think of filling their egos only.

They, eventually think themselves know what is best for their children and do not let them have their own choices, which is not right. Under toxic rules, what is universally acknowledged as bad is believed to be normalised. Worse than that can be the unawareness of being surrounded by toxic thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, and even if one is aware of it, s/he cannot escape them. If ever the individual manages to run away, s/he will not fully recover from the toxins instilled in him/her. Again, if ever recovered, toxins tend to appear at another time. Like any toxin, it is contagious.

Henceforth, the metaphorical sensation of paralysis is deemed to reflect what toxicity truly is. This sensation exacerbates in our brains and souls like bacteria does in our bodies. You may contaminate other people in the process. Mentioning the term process is appealing to utter that toxicity is indeed a process generated from grandparents, parents, children, to grand-children, unfortunately. The so-called childhood trauma, mommy or daddy issues are inevitable outcomes of familial toxic orders. As adults, earlier family conflicts are reproduced in personal relations, especially romantic relationships. They end up being hurt the same way they have been hurt by their parents. For instance, if someone has a neglectful parent, he ends up seeking a careless partner. Choosing a mate who shares his parent's negative qualities guarantees that his unmet psychological needs will remain unmet for eternity (Tyson, 2006, p. 58). Above all, rare and lucky are the ones who manage to heal the child within them, because it is the only way to trans-pass toxicity.

On a related perspective, however, literature always attempts to picture reality, to portray it, and ask questions regarding plausible truths. It opens the doors for skilled

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women who highlight, influence, change and undeniably contribute to the view of the world. Precisely, women's writing has marked its impact throughout the course of history. Sophie Mackintosh's *The Water Cure* (2018) is one contemporary fitting metamodernist novel dealing with parental issues under a feminist dystopian lens. Additionally, this novel helps looking at feminism on a different light. Elements of toxic family relations alongside other related aspects are to be analysed in the second chapter.

1.9. Conclusion

In conclusion, the first chapter prepared the ground for a thematic analysis, which will be discerned in the second chapter. A theoretical framework was presented in this segment. Metamodernism with its aspects and characteristics was discussed. The possibility of reading contemporary fiction from metamodernist lenses has been suggested. After all, postmodern era is regarded to have 'ended' by many of (already mentioned) critics, namely Linda Hutcheon. In reading this section, the audience becomes knowledgeable about the important pillars on which metamodernism as a being born trend, relies on.

The chapter tackled, as well, the status of women in contemporary era and it dealt also with conceptualisations of feminism. One's eagerness to understand the fundamental motives that drive women writers to write about other women, have urged a compulsory overview of contemporary feminism.

What came after was an acquaintance with the term 'toxic family relations' which the novel centres on. The most important hypothesis of this research work was clearly stated and studied from other specialists' viewpoints, but essentially from the researcher's perspective as well. As mentioned earlier, parental issues have become

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more and more complex; whenever this topic is mentioned, people draw images of violence, physical abuse, and oppression. Nonetheless, toxicity at home has been proven and will be proven throughout the course of analysis to envelope coldness, carelessness, over protection, authority and other notions practised by ‘some’ parents.

Above all, this first chapter was only a preparation to the practical analysis of toxicity among parents in Sophie Mackintosh’s *The Water Cure* (2018).

Chapter Two

Investigating Toxic Family

Relations in the Metamodernist

Dystopian Water Cure

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2.1. Introduction

The current chapter propounds the analysis of Sophie Mackintosh's debut novel *The Water Cure* (2018) from feminism's narrowest sphere: family issues. Initially, a brief author's biography is provided. Additionally, a critical summary of the novel is put forward in an attempt to better direct the reader to what comes next. Subsequently, the genres of this fiction are straightforwardly noted and substantiated. The existence of metamodernist characteristics within Feminist Dystopian and Post-apocalyptic fiction, is proven in the process. Though the novel belongs to old genres, it is apprised that these genres are put into new usage to fit into twenty first century's parameters.

The present chapter also offers a feminist representation of the novel's characters; both male and female activities are investigated. The aim is to prove bias in the view of the author to the feminine side, yet a thoughtful, calculated and an intended view. Another to-be-discussed point is the toxic family attribute, of which the whole research consists. By the end of this chapter, readers will be aware of the reasons to which main female characters are who they are, act what they act, and are hurting the way they are deemed. Readers may also have a clear vision of characters as well as the transmitted messages the writer wants to transfer. Thereupon, symbolism of characters' names as well as a psychoanalysis of their actions are scrutinised for better understanding of toxicity's effects on the story's making.

2.2. Sophie Mackintosh: a Post-Postmodern Author

Sophie Mackintosh is a thirty four years old full time writer. She is a Welsh poet and novelist whose debut book *The Water Cure* was longlisted for the Man Booker prize 2018 and won a Betty Trask Award 2019 (penguin). "She has also won the White Review Short Story Prize and the Virago/Stylist Short Story Competition, and has been published

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in Granta, The White Review and TANK magazine among others” (Penguin). *Blue Ticket* (2020) is another novel of hers, discussing a dystopian society where women do not have the right of having children. Mackintosh is currently working on her third novel *Cursed Bread* which will be released in spring 2023.

2.3. Synopsis

What must it be like to be daughters of a man who safeguards you from the world, to discover later on that he is the danger itself? Sophie Mackintosh’s *The Water Cure* (2018) seems to exhibit a plausible answer to the question.

The world has become full of toxins. The air and climate are infected by the toxicity and violence caused by men. The mainland would not last to turn into a toxic chemical stew. This apocalypse drives King, Mother and their children Grace, Lia, and Sky to flee the mainland into an isolated island, escaping toxicity and danger. Their life in the new island is what defines the novel as post-apocalyptic.

The three daughters have been raised to solely listen and obey their parents without querying. They are deprived from education, and even reading. The girls were also instructed to offer feelings only to their parents and each other, because “Part of what made the old world so terrible, so prone to destruction, was a total lack of preparation for the personal energies often called *feelings*” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 12). Additionally, the daughters are required to perform exercises of different sorts to keep their bodies strong. Ice bucket, water drowning, love therapy, meditation, are some of their daily practises.

Manageable emotions are all what the daughters must sustain. For example, if they feel sad or they carry pain in their chests, they are used to cough them into muslin, trap them as bubbles under water and let them dissolve out of their bodies. Factually, the

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beginning of the novel is all about the rituals sisters use to purify and keep themselves safe or rather, what their parents oblige them to follow. These actions justify the book to have a Feminist Dystopian genre. In this connection, King and Mother welcome abused women from the mainland granting them the water cure, to have immunity facing the outside toxic world. The women served as living examples for the daughters to think not of surpassing the borders.

The book, consequentially, covers the life of the daughters since their childhood until Grace, the eldest, is 30. One may commence to question this level of endurance on the island. Simply, King –the father- goes on monthly trips to the mainland bringing food and supplies. One day, he goes and never comes back to be believed dead. Mother on her side, drugs the daughters into sleep and dizziness for a week. When they emerge from the lost week, they are reminded by their mother “To love only [their] sisters” (Mackintosh, 2018, p.08). With time, King’s absence becomes “Stretching soft” (Mackintosh, 2018, p.37).

Meanwhile, Mother announces Grace to be pregnant. Something about which the other sisters have no idea, and the mother justifying “Grace asked the sea for one” (Mackintosh, 2018, p.35), was enough an answer for their limited brains. As soon as the baby boy is born, it is thrown to the sea, for it could not make it to this world. It is only when Grace takes turn for the narration by the end of the book that the reader gets to know straightforwardly Grace’s baby was from King who is not her biological father. That he is the father of Lia and Sky only. Grace, whose love for King was immeasurable: “What it was like to be in love with you” (Mackintosh, 2018, p.227), Grace kept wondering, but realising simultaneously how desperate she has become because of his grave toxicity and

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abuse. By this token, nonlinearity³ and the swing between past, present, and the future of the novel's events determine this latter as a metamodernist piece of writing.

Not long since King left, three men wash ashore: James, Lew and his son Gwil. Their temporal stay is welcomed by Mother. Soon Lia becomes bereft, falls in love with Lew, and starts seeing him secretly. One day, the daughters wake up to their mother going missed. As a result, chaos veiled them. Grace and Sky distancing from the men as much as they could, in fear of getting infected by any toxins held by them. Lia, on the other hand, falling blindly for Lew, and getting unknowingly pregnant resultantly. Lew unrequitedly sharing her affections, is heavy on her heart. Without thinking, she kills his son Gwil. Revenge, or love thirst; neither ways justify the heinous act.

Seven days after Mother's disappearance, James confesses to Grace that King has sent the men to murder Mother who was no longer useful and bring the daughters to him. An important realisation comes to Grace from James's utterances: "The world is not what you have been told", that they "Have been told a number of things that are untrue" (Mackintosh, 2018, p.218). She has also been told that their claimed island is only a limited coast –a small beach if may be said-. At that moment, James is killed by Grace, to be followed by Lew who was taken care of by Lia and was killed eventually. Despite Lia's love toward Lew, there is a much greater power than that. It is sisterhood and survival.

The story ends with the sisters performing the water cure for each other. This latter requires drowning oneself in hot water and salt, to be cleansed of trauma. Grace, Lia, and Sky retreat to the forest later on; realising their home, their parents and what they deemed

³ Nonlinearity: a narrating style which is a compilation of flashbacks and flash-forwards, swinging between past, present and the future.

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to be all they lived for have not kept them safe and hurt them more than the outside world could have ever done. To the unknown they would march; hoping they can create a new place with the rage and love they hold, but this time with absolute bravery, and no fear. In divorcing whatever their parents have made of them, the sisters would find their sanctuary. Away from home and away from toxicity.

2.4. Metamodernist Aspects in Dystopian Post-Apocalyptic *Water Cure*

The analysis of the novel can be attained through myriad procedures and can be achieved by many aspects. Specifically, in this work *The Water Cure* (2018) is interpreted on the basis of its genres, as well as the theme of toxic family and feminism in the process. This title, however, explores the genres' implications on the novel.

2.4.1. Metamodernist Aspects

If fiction beckons for reality, metamodernism, then, serves as the righteous tool towards examining, interpreting, and renouncing twenty first century's dilemmas. *The Water Cure* (2018), for instance, is one example of metamodernist fiction, for its periodisation qualifies it as such. As has been noted in chapter 01, the current world does not belong to postmodernism anymore. Instead, it is the era of post-postmodernism which has taken multiple names, of which metamodernism is suggested. Nevertheless, the work in hands has been published in 2018 which, again, permits a metamodernist reading of it. Though its genres (Dystopian and Post-Apocalyptic) are not typically new or metamodernist, but its tone, atmosphere, diction, characters, thoughts development, and consciousness do accord to metamodernism.

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2.4.1.1. Neo-romanticist Notions

One of the notions of metamodernism can be depicted through neo-romanticism⁴. This latter is seen in *The Water Cure* through the writer's representation of her characters' feelings, and especially the round ones. To illustrate, the main character Lia is given large portions from the book; only expressing her feelings and thoughts in the process. In fact, the book contains three parts or chapters: Father in 56 pages where the round character takes 10 turns of narration, Men in 156 pages of which Lia narrates all of it, and Sisters of 35 pages where she has no say.

By this token, Lia's inner feelings are the most described throughout the novel. For instance, when Lia performs the drowning game with her sister Grace, she describes her feelings as "Limping, wretched things" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 12). In another part of the novel, the middle daughter (Lia) misses the piano playing of Lew (the stranger she is in love with), and says: "[It] creates a hard ball of sorrow in my chest... I am sad enough already about it" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 72). She, also, characterises herself as being "Painfully optimistic" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 87). She confesses that "There is no guilt in [her] heart tonight, for once" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 103), sometimes, and "Suddenly want[s] to cry" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 104), other times. At one point, Lia is happy and declares "It is good to be in love, to have the whole world on your side" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 147), but at another point she is desperately realising she "Cannot hurt him despite the great pain [He caused her]" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 208). It is as such that the main character has evolved through the novel's events of which the reader builds different interpretations regarding Lia's personality (See title 2.4).

⁴ Neo-romanticism: a technique in literature through which the writer focuses extensively on the characters' internal feelings from pain, sadness, melancholy, fear, or happiness, and love as well. It has not been used in this research as a doctrine or a philosophy, but only the ideology of it.

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Grace, on the other hand, has her turn in feelings' description as being a 'sub-main'⁵ character who is round, but her interference in the events of the novel is not prominent, as she takes up the narration till the third chapter (Sisters). Nevertheless, the progress of her feelings and thoughts are straightforwardly shown through neo-romanticism. To exemplify, Grace pictures the moment with her sisters in feeling delighted, and says: "I am happy for a minute, here, with my sisters" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 28). At many times, Grace thinks of the pain King made her endure and realises: "Absorbing the guilt and sorrow is something the world expects of women" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 217). By the end of the book when both the reader and Grace go into epiphany (a state of realisation) regarding many of the missing events, Grace desperately wonders what it was like to be in love with her stepfather: "Fucking awful" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 227), she adds.

Finally, the eldest sister celebrates getting over King and his toxicity by saying that she has "Never been more glad about anything" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 244). It is as such Mackintosh represents her characters' feelings through the technique of neo-romanticism. It can be, thus, safe to note that *The Water Cure* oscillates between old techniques and new uses of them, like metamodernism oscillates between modernist and postmodernist views.

2.4.1.2. The Metamodernist Diction; a Contemporary Diction

A key point to analyse is the diction. The choice of words in *The Water Cure* (2018) plays a salient role, as it demonstrates particularities of the twenty first century. Mainly, words like T-shirt, leggings, lipstick, headphones, nail polish, feature the very contemporaneity of the novel and events.

⁵ Sub-main: not being the centre of interest, but not being the last on the list. It is meant that Grace may not be regarded as the protagonist and main character of the story, but has a powerful role in its events. After all, she is a round character.

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In aim of analysis, however, twenty first century literature is more about deciphering than analysing, for readers need to discern which information can be true, accurate, and reliable, and which is untrue, implausible, and weak. The difference between them remains intricate. For instance, Mackintosh tells her readers about the toxicity of the mainland, but let it unknown if this toxicity is literal or only metaphorical. The very reason why some would believe it to have really taken place in the mainland and been concrete, while others would argue that the toxicity Mackintosh hints at is only metaphorical. Between this and that lays a plethora of plausible interpretations. Correspondingly, some readers may realise by the end of the novel that the island –the family escaped to- is only a “Limited coast...There is so much more of it” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 220). Only these words explain the theory of the island being a small beach, which others may interpret differently.

Furthermore, throughout the narration of the events, the writer hints that Lia could be pregnant from Llew, for she was not taking precautions and does not even know that one can get pregnant this way. Howbeit, it remains unknown to the reader whether she was truly pregnant or not. It is up to him/her to interpret it as s/he wants. It is, factually, the oscillation in words and thus in meaning which characterises the twenty first century’s metamodernist fiction. In many parts of *The Water Cure*, one forgets s/he is reading dystopian fiction because the events become so realist-like by the end of the novel. The very oscillation of the novel is, indeed, what categorises it to be metamodernist.

2.4.1.3. Swing between Past, Present, and Future

One argument defending the novel’s belonging to metamodernist trend can be the impact of past, present, and future on the characters. In other words, since the book is narrated through nonlinearity, it can be divided into three parts: Past, present, and future.

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Firstly, if escaping the mainland after the apocalypse to live safely on the island can be considered the past of the story, then King's escape, the men's appearance (James, Llew, and Gwil), and Mother's disappearance is to be the present of the story, which makes the daughters murder the men and run away under the scope of future.

One evidence of that is when James tells Grace the truth about the island and the possibility of a new start with King away from the island: "It would have been a new start" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 221). The narration oscillates directly to the past during "Midsummer of the year [Grace] run[s] away" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 222), then goes back to when Mother was gone. The shift in time (from future to past then present), hence, persuades readers of having metamodernist notions that the prefix Meta itself has: with (past), between (present and future), and beyond (past and present).

Nevertheless, this was from the structural part for the content has another type of manifestation. Contentedly, when Grace is hit by her memories with King, she says: "Love was a great educator over the last years and especially those last months, with you. It taught me first of all that women could be enemies too. Past, present and future" (Mackintosh, 2018, p.219).The emphasis on past, present, and future here implies the meaning of Mother always being Grace's first enemy which will never change. In addition, the writer keeps reminding the readers throughout the whole story how the sisters have been raised (their past and present). "Mother and King taught" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 128), "It was the way we had been raised" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 221), "The way you taught me" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 226), are examples of how the daughters' past is instilled in their minds. Everything regarding what and how to do things is memorable for them, however, the girls did not settle for the education their parents offered and run away from the toxicity they have endured for so long. One evidence of that is "Our own world somewhere

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past it, should we walk far enough. We move into it with no fear” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 248). Though hurt, traumatised, and sick, the sisters would move forward into freedom. It is as such that they decide to change their future regardless to the damage being caused; projecting a metamodernist principle.

2.4.1.4. Naivety of the Main Character(s)

Naivety of the main character is also one of the characteristics of metamodernist literature. Therefore, this idea is depicted through the protagonist Lia. She is the narrator of most of the story’s events, and her personality is clearly described. The disorder and fluctuations she holds are outcomes of her parents’ education. The round character has little knowledge of how life goes. She is old enough (maybe 27 or 28 because the daughters’ ages are not mentioned but rather hinted at), but does not know what getting pregnant actually is, for she did not have education and is deprived of reading by her parents. On page 136, there is a sequence where the sisters and the men are watching the dusky moon. The men ask them why the moon was like that, and the sisters answer that it was “A blood moon” (Mackintosh, 2018). “It’s just dust” (Mackintosh, 2018), one of the men explained. Through this passage, the reader can take it for fact that the girls were purposely kept ignorant by their parents. In another passage (p.164), however, Lia inspects the bruises on her body and assumes them to come from Llew touching her which makes no sense. Yet, she believes it. In a nutshell, these are some incidents where the reader notices the naivety of the main character.

Above all, what has been demonstrated are the notions of metamodernist trend in *The Water Cure* (2018), from neo-romanticism, specific diction, oscillation between past, present and future, to the naivety of the main character as well. In essence, the value of contemporary fiction continues to highlight social and cultural issues responding to the

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twenty first century's parameters. Nevertheless, though the novel is characterised to belong to a feminist dystopian genre which belongs mostly to postmodernism, it extends to have new uses and implications. They are to be analysed in the following title.

2.4.2. Dystopian Aspects

Dystopia, being an exaggeratedly imperfect society, is utilised in fiction to enhance readers for thinking differently about current social, cultural, or political matters. *The Water Cure* (2018) is not an exception, as it questions the status of abused women – daughters more specifically- and toxic family relations. Good versus evil, violence, oppression, corruption, resistance and rebellion are considered purely dystopian characteristics.

The place where the novel's events take place is the unknown island and the mainland which is only talked about. Time, however, is not mentioned; only allusions to the shift in past, present, and future are clearly highlighted. Compared to other dystopian novels, the settings are not dangerous, instead they proliferate an atmosphere of relaxation, and safety; especially after the family escape from the toxic mainland (the beginning of the novel). It is not so long that the reader comprehends the true face of the parents' toxicity and abuse. This notion justifies the book to be read from a dystopian stance, since oppression and abuse are one of the prominent themes/characteristics of the genre.

Particularly, examples of abuse in *The Water Cure* (2018) are epitomised in the mother drugging her daughters into sleep, during one week. It is also shown in the stepfather raping his daughter in law. The daughters being filled with lies and superstitions since their childhood, is one aspect of the parents toxicity. Another aspect can be the daughters' deprivation from education and learning. Add to this, violence, mental abuse

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and personality disorder that the daughters and specifically Lia ended having. (For other notions on toxic family relations, see title 2.6).

On the other hand, however, notions of resistance and rebellion are evidently shown in Lia's actions. For example, she permits herself being close to the strange men even though being warned not to. "It's not so terrible, to be close to him" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 72), she examines. In resisting her mother's instructions, Lia is not regretful. "There is no guilt in my heart tonight, for once" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 103). In another part of the novel, Lia's personality has developed especially after her mother was gone. Now that there is no more pressure on her, she deems: "[She] can make [her] own judgments" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 135). It is the first time readers see evolution in Lia's thoughts, for she has been completely naïve and subordinate during the first hundred pages of the book.

Moreover, provided that the family in *The Water Cure* escaped an apocalypse of toxicity back in the mainland (supposedly dystopian society); to create their own Utopia, this latter turns out to be their "Failed utopia" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 222). This is important as the writer makes the sisters' home (the place where one feels safe) the dystopian danger itself. The daughters have been raised under toxic dystopian rules exercised on them by their parents.

Finally, if one compares *The Water Cure*'s ending with previous dystopian fiction, s/he finds out the new implication of twenty first century dystopias. For instance, George Orwell's *1984* (1949) ends with the protagonist and his lover captured by the police, besides another character being tortured to death. *The Metamorphosis* (1915) by Frantz Kafka has also a sad ending where the protagonist Gregor hides in his bedroom until a wretched death spares him. Inclusively, *The Machine Stops* (1909) by E. M. Forster

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imagines a future where people become so accustomed to technology; i.e. machine. The writer makes this latter stop to crumble the underground civilisation by the end of the novel. It can be taken for fact that merely all dystopian fictions have bad endings. However, twenty first century dystopia shapes another type of ending and *The Water Cure* (2018) is one vivid example. Its ending sends a dim of light, hope, and perseverance showing a small yet thoughtful modification of an old genre.

Particularly, a thing that metamodernism does in literature by implying already used genres, and puts them to new and thereby different usage. In the first instance, it could mean that the writer has not understood the concept of dystopia; being bad and dangerous by definition. However, if one scrutinises it, s/he may find it genuinely thought of, that demonising the world, society, or government may not often lead to bad endings for the character enduring oppressive institutions. Be it authorities, patriarchal societies, families, friends, etc. a happy ending in dystopia only means the writer has done well in linking the events of his story to the characters' consciousness. All in all, between protagonists of the happy ending in dystopian fiction and antagonists of it, lays a plethora of variations.

2.4.3. Post-Apocalyptic Aspects

As has been demonstrated in the previous analysis, *The Water Cure* (2018) is Post-Apocalyptic. The reader is told that the mainland has been infected by toxicity, mainly caused by men, to turn into a thoroughly dangerous place. Though there is no explosion, or death, end of technology or the world, this event can be regarded as the apocalypse of the story. The family composed of King, Mother and their daughters Grace, Lia, and Sky find refuge in an isolated island where the toxic climate cannot reach them. The daughters are told by their father that beyond the borders there were men whose "Bodies [have] grown

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strong despite the toxic air...Men like that tracked around the toxins carelessly...Men like that would break your arm without thinking” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 41).

Sometimes, as they performed short sharp inhales and long exhales, one of them always fainted. They are, thenceforth, reminded of “How quickly [They]’d die out there” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 29). Additionally, the daughters were not supposed to go near the women who come for the water cure by King and Mother, for they hold toxic breath, skin, and hair (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 21). They could be contaminated, they have been told.

On an extended basis, the sisters are told by the men at the end of the book that their island was only a small coast. Hence, all of what they have been told by their father and mother turns to be a painful lie. “The world is very terrible, but you have been told a number of things that are untrue” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 218), James makes it as clear as it could be. Grace, then, realises “The violence came for all women, border or no border” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 224). This particular sequence from the novel is important as the whole theory of post-apocalypse falls apart.

Toxicity of the mainland is discovered to be a lie, and the only toxicity the poor daughters endured was their parents’. Therefore, it can be deduced that the toxicity the writer was hinting at from the very beginning of the story was metaphorical and not literal. Mackintosh links the apocalypse, which is toxicity of the mainland’s air, with that of the parents letting the daughters endure an aftermaths of the apocalypse. After all, the girls have endured a metaphorical apocalypse if one considers their life with King and Mother as one. “I am surviving” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 226), “But our lives are our lives” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 243), Grace shouts out.

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To this end, notions of survival are prominently exhibited throughout the course of the story. It was survival that kept the girls alive and led them to surpassing the border in aim of finding sanctuary elsewhere away from their poisonous home. “We move into it with no fear” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 248), the three of them finally taking a real step forward.

Nevertheless, the novels’ events and organisation of thoughts are so realist-like to the point that one forgets s/he is reading post-apocalyptic fiction. It sends the feeling of reading current daily experiences (Basically an idea embraced by realism) fiction. In fact, it is appalling because the world has reached its climax in corruption with all senses.

2.5. Feminist Representations in *The Water Cure*

Literature opens the doors to skilful women who influence, highlight, change, and undeniably contribute to the view of the world. Mainly, female writers have made great impact in the world throughout the course of history. They have managed and still manage to give a strong voice to the words of marginalised women, so they can be clearly heard. Women writers have not ceased moving forward and taking huge strides into the front. Each, attributes her own touch in transcending the message. There is, indeed, no point in disputing the fact that these writers can shape a new society with their pens if they devotedly want to.

Sophie Mackintosh is not an exception. Her debut novel *The Water Cure* serves a great deal in denouncing toxic patriarchies, familial rape, abuse against women, and gender issues as well. Under a dystopian stance, the male characters have no say. Instead, readers hear and see them from the perspective of the sisters Grace, Lia, and Sky only. Because of this, some critics may not appreciate the work claiming it should have paid more attention

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to the men' voices for it to be thorough. However, the writer could have made them talk and take the initiative of narration; she did not and it was done on purpose. Simply, the author transmits the message that men have caused enough harm to the point that they no longer have to right to say anything. In real world, men have the attribute of harming women, which gives sense to the metaphorical (abstract) toxicity of Sophie Mackintosh. "I am sick of the men, of how they reduce us" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 237), are Grace's thoughts which can be the writer's ones as well.

When the three sisters share the narration by the end of the book, they describe how Llew was killed and let on the shore. They say: "He is our message to anyone else who might come to these shores. The message is *This is no place*. The message is *Fuck you*" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 246). In a nutshell, this is the writer's message; that in the place where women are perseverant, strong, autonomous, and fearless, 'toxic' men are not welcome.

2.5.1. Feminine Characters' Analysis

Characters' analysis is necessary for a better interpretation of feminist representations in a story. Thus, the female characters in *The Water Cure* (2018) are: Lia, Grace, Mother, Sky, and the women who come for therapy. The characters are mentioned by sequence of importance.

- Lia is to be considered the protagonist of this novel as most of the story's events are narrated from her perspective. She is a little naïve but selfish at the same time. She is subordinate but her mind is rebellious. This round character is a victim of familial toxicity and is the most ill-treated daughter. She is described by her older sister as being "Eager and tender-hearted [With a] knot of grief" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 235).

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Lia was the one to drink most of the toxicity cup, this is why there is a sort of disorder in her personality, thoughts, and actions.

Being a daughter of a man who deprived her from education and reading and instilled superstitions and lies in her mind, and a mother who drugs her with pills of Tramadol (and other dangerous medicines) is quite a thing for a woman to bear. There are plenty of examples showing Lia's complex personality, and only the essential ones to this analysis have been extricated. When Lia falls under Llew's charms, all of her childhood trauma reappears. To put it differently, she endures the same toxicity she once suffered from with her father and mother. Being only a product of one's own family is dreadful.

Lia has grown with a love thirst and she only strives to be lovable, for she does not know what love truly is. "I hope he will stay with me", "It's just that I want to be touched by anyone" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 174, 175). It is the lack of affection that drives her into acting inexplicably. In another part of the novel, she pleads Llew to take care of her and thinks she is "Ready to humiliate [herself], if that is what it takes" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 184). She wonders "Why loving like everyone else is so unnatural to [Her]" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 184). "This is what a lack of love does to a person" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 188), she realises. Llew's rejection makes her lose her mind, and she goes desperately lamenting herself of not having loved Gwil (Llew's son) to make Llew love her in return. In analysing the way she loves, one has to admit the girl is a needy person who has suffered a huge deal from toxicity and got infected by the end.

After all, she only knew the love of her mother and father by obligation, besides, she is not educated. In other words, she has little experience in matters of life –if not

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zero experience. An inevitable process, it is to be hurt the same way she has been from her parents. In her case, she got used to violence, and finds it normal⁶. Nevertheless, even though three quarters of the novel categorise Lia as powerless, she astounds readers to turn her traumas into an undefeated strength by the end of the novel.

Above all, she is described by her sisters “The only one who was not afraid. Or more accurately, she was a person made brave, made desperate, by necessity” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 234). Finally, Lia accepts her emotional vulnerability and traumas; it is then that she finally understands she deserves far more than the ordinary.

- Grace is the older sister. She is the ‘stepsister’ of Lia and Sky. Grace can be considered a round character for the truth is narrated through her perspective, and can also be a ‘sub-main’ character. The eldest sister is subject of rape from her stepfather who normalised things for her; telling her that falling in love with him is absolutely fine, when he was only sexually using her. Rape culture is clearly manifested in Grace’s relationship with her ‘stepfather’; their affair is normalised by the two of them. A thing that Grace seems to know nothing about, and King not caring about a little.

The poor grace can be described as ignorant, subordinate, cold, very tough, and voiceless as she does not renounce King. Instead, Grace falls in love with him blindly, has sexual intercourse with him and gets pregnant as a result. “What it was like to be in love with you” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 227), she keeps wondering, as she mournfully understands it all.

Throughout the novel, Grace is hopeless because she sacrificed a lot under the name of love, but ended up being tricked on. She still yearns for her days with King,

⁶ Other psychological issues are to be examined in title 2.6.

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but realises by the end that “The heart must be a traitor” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 234), that love when gifted to an unloved person would only cause harm to him/her (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 28). Above all, what Grace endured is so heavy on her heart because she has been failed by her father, lover, and mother as well, for her mother knew everything and kept silence.

- Mother, is a flat character who represents only an ideology in the story. She is to be considered the antagonist. She does not have the characteristics of a mother as her toxicity has blinded her. She only follows the instructions of King, and eventually has no say when it comes to him. On another side, she is so toxic with her daughters who deem her to hate them secretly. “Sometimes she was my enemy and sometimes she was just my mother, an enemy in a different way” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 230).

However, when the mother is made dead in the story, readers sympathise with her and realise the core danger was King. Though she was only a tool King was using, she was vicious and toxic with her daughters, for she could have saved them, or at least tell them the truth. Something of which she was not capable. Mother is already fighting in her own battles of which no one knows about; her character may be believed to having endured so much already. The reason why she takes pills to calm herself down. It was her own escape from the nightmarish life she ended up enduring. From Mother’s perspective, knowing her husband is cheating on her with her own daughter is quite heavy on her heart.

- Sky is the youngest and the most loved person by all the characters. There are ten years of gap between her and Lia. Her young age did not permit her to understand what was really going on, besides Mother and King were so soft with her. She does not appear a lot in the novel, the reason why readers know little about her. Howbeit, it

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is narrated that Sky was the one to hit Llew into unconsciousness and save her sisters. “She is no longer the baby” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 233). She is only depicted through the theme of sisterhood.

- The women are only hinted at, as they do not take part in the story’s events. The women who came from the mainland suffering abuse and violence were supposedly treated by King and Mother. The girls, however, were not supposed to approach them nor talk to them. They only get to know them from the words they wrote on ‘The welcome book’. Sophie Mackintosh arranged entries from the welcome book which harmonise with the events. Each of the entries telling a different story of women’s suffering, and if the writer reminds her readers that there are out there much more women who suffer a huge deal. There is always a link between the women and the daughters. “Their incomprehensible pain, which is mine too” (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 203).

From the analysis above, it can be summarised that Sophie Mackintosh’s female characters were regarded as mere ornaments: one subject of familial rape, the other subject of violence and toxic love, and the mother a tool for King’s needs. However, the author has painstakingly drawn the ending of her story where the sisters finally get to free themselves from the violence, toxicity, and manipulation of their parents.

2.5.2. Masculine Characters’ Analysis

The male characters in the story are King, Llew, Gwil, and the thrown baby boy.

- King, as his name entails, deems himself to be the sovereign on his wife and daughters. The antagonist does not have any interference in the story, for he does not take the initiative of narration, but he is presented by the perspective of Lia and Grace.

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He is a liar, manipulator, narcissistic, and oppressor. He represents the sort of fathers who lie and fill their children's minds with lies and superstitions, but claim it for protection at the same time.

Projecting King's character on real life, there are many whom literature must denounce. Driven by sexual desires, King makes use of his stepdaughter. He treats her like a mere object or a property that has to submit. What is worse than that is Mother's knowledge of everything. King's outrageous evilness drives him to kill Mother, for he does not need her anymore. It can be suggested that King had his share of toxicity in the past; something that had turned him into a heartless human. Heaviness could have been put on his shoulders. Nonetheless, nothing of the sort gives him the right to do what he did to his family.

- Llew is only a reflection of King. A doubled toxicity, he shares. He is slippery-eyed and opportunistic, for he uses Lia as an object of his sexual desires, and fools her into loving him. Llew is only a reflection of the men of the 21st century.
- Gwil is a little boy. He is a flat character who has nothing particular except for being exposed to danger by his father.

2.6. Toxic Family Relations in *The Water Cure*

Living in today's world feels like racing; each one is running away from something to another. Add to it that being a child of toxic parents feels different, as you will have to fight both your home and your society, your past and your present if to say as such. Sophie Mackintosh's *The Water Cure* provides an alternative truth to what toxic family relations are capable of doing if they continue the same way. In what comes, however, these toxic dynamics are examined through the characters' relationship types in the novel.

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2.6.1. Mother-Father Relationship

Before studying the toxicity, investigating its roots is compulsory in attaining an adequate analysis. The reason why starting with Mother and King is significant is that the two are antagonists in the story, as they are seen and heard through Lia and Grace's viewpoints. On the surface, Mother and King appear to be over protective parents who want nothing but the best for their daughters. Escaping the mainland for sanctuary on an isolated island and living a healthy life is all what they search for.

However, what they presumed their life to be is far from being a healthful one. Despite the fact that the couple escaped toxicity, they would create another one by their own. From one hand, Mother is given no name, rather she is known throughout the whole story by Mother. This can have two interpretations.

Firstly, the mother has no specific name because she is a 'nobody' to King; following orders and maintaining silence is all what she can do. The very vulnerability, subordination, submission and *Laisser faire* of Mother guarantees King a certain sense of superiority but also a sense of arrogance, over control and manipulation. On the other hand, the second argument of naming 'Mother' as such is analysed in the following title 2.6.2.

To continue, Mother obeys King's rules without questioning. Factually, this is something the reader understands through the absence of discussions between the couple. Through the narration, it is felt that Mother has no voice when it comes to King and his instructions. She is barely present which denotes that this book brings to light a topic that was subject to scrutiny for long: patriarchy.

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As far as *The Water Cure* is concerned, denouncing marginalised women is its conspicuous message. Besides, Mother's death in the story is very symbolic, as it shows that paying for her husband's mistakes is on her shoulders only, as if King has done nothing. It shows as well her uselessness; no need for a sixty year old woman anyway. Another plausible possibility for the reason of her death is urging the reader to sympathise with her because she was only a tool used by King. Her daughters, also, believe "She does relax over time" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 25). If love asked to sacrifice something, Mother would sacrifice her life. Projecting this idea on real life, Mother's personage reflects a desperate wife who does everything to impress her husband who, in return, does no little effort toward her. After all, the problem has been the same for long; women have no say in a male-dominated society.

King, to a certain extent, shows a very harsh attitude towards everyone. He is a narcissistic person who loves no one but himself, to the point that he killed his wife to fulfil his personal desires. The husband is a sadistic individual who finds pleasure in torturing others –even the close ones-. "I heard Mother's rise, then fall" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 222), is one of the scenes where King uses violence against his wife. Symbolically, naming this character King signifies his superiority over his family and his wife specifically.

King's relation with his wife is a master–servant type of relationships where Mother is subjugated. His attitude represents toxic masculinity from which he claimed earlier in the story he ran away from. Conversely, he turns out to be the most toxic person his wife and daughters have ever known. Simply, King can be described as a liar, manipulator, killer, and a psychopath, whom the reader cannot fully understand what is really going in mind. This makes him dangerous, for it is not expected what another move

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can be done by him. Readers come to realise that if *The Water Cure* ever had a second part, King's character would help immensely into the events developments. This is important as the writer may be suggesting that not only King is omniscient, but also plays with everyone and drives them to wherever he wants like puppets; drawing boundaries of authority.

2.6.2. Mother-Daughter Relationship

If a toxic relationship is where one's mental, psychological and also physical status is prone to destruction, Mother can be a vivid example of what a toxic mother-daughter relationship is like. The daughters, in the novel, are not subject of direct abuse and violence, instead, they are too naïve to realise the truth of their parents.

Nevertheless, through the developments of the events they finally discover their mother has never loved them, and that she has been a masked enemy who is nestling behind the name of love and motherhood. Factually, there is a considerable distance between Mother and her daughters. She addresses them only through an authoritative tone and constantly gives them orders. They are, hence, required to follow her instructions no matter what it takes. "You have to love me [...] You make the dinner tonight [...] If you won't do it, your sister has to [...] Stay here...Don't move" (Mackintosh, 2018, pp. 8-23-49-55), are some examples where Mother communicates with her daughters using instructions only. If scrutinised, these paroles indicate the distance between Mother and her daughters; one feels they are in a camp where rules must be followed, and not a home based on communication and understanding.

Moreover, the daughters are always getting negative feedback from their mother, which confirms the theory of toxicity. Lia, for instance, is always blamed and criticised for having a poor self-control and being impulsive. Nonetheless, Mother's name may reflect

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many things; one of them the control she has over her daughters. They cannot simply call her mom but mother in a more formal way. On a side note, when Grace gave birth, Mother tried to save the baby, but she is believed by Lia to have given up early (in saving him). These hints that Mackintosh sent through the story's events are compulsory as they show Mother as heartless, careless, and evil if may be uttered.

More importantly, the mother was drugging her daughters to sleep using *Tramadol*, *Olanzapine*, and *Diazepam*. These medicines are for anti-anxiety treatment, but the extensive use of them causes plenty of problems. Tramadol, for example, is used for intense ache after surgeries; it is in fact like morphine but stronger. If a normal person takes it, s/he would be badly affected and fall asleep for days; exactly like the daughters who fell asleep for a week (Kaye, 2015).

Olanzapine, on the other hand, is an antipsychotic prescribed for those having panic attacks or even hallucinations. In short, it is mostly used to treat Schizophrenia (Leucht. Et al, 1999). Whether Mother was taking it or not, it is not clearly demonstrated. What is, however, certain is that the girls were under Tramadol effect that caused them dizziness for a whole week. Finally, Diazepam indicates treatment for post-alcoholic patients. Again, it is unknown to the reader who was using it.

It is, indeed, the extended use of these medicines –or one of them- that caused a mental disorder in Grace and Lia's (specifically) mental and psychological health. Tramadol side effects alongside the endured toxicity of King and Mother tell a lot about the sisters' personalities as well as actions. Furthermore, mother's death symbolises the death of weakness in the eyes of the three daughters, as the reader notices that the changing

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point in the sisters' personalities as well as their actions was right after their mother's disappearance.

It could be marked that not having a family is 'not' not having a family. Simply because one can have parents who claim to be protecting and safeguarding them, but figure out, with time that they are the source of one's pain, flaws, and disorder.

2.6.3. Father-Daughter Relationship

Where does one run to when family rejects him/her? "The safe place had been contaminated from the start" (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 245), as such the girls reconciled with themselves. This sentence explains it all. King's manipulation has spread fear, no confidence, and serious psychological traumas to his daughters. Particularly, King is harsh with Lia who, in return, does follow all of his instructions. She is the one to endure all of the exercises and rituals they perform; such a hardworking person she is. It was so easy for King to fool his daughters with the lies he created, and Grace was not an exception.

However, King's relationship with Grace is quite different. Their illicit affair lays other serious parameters. Even with Grace's conviction of loving her stepfather, in no way can this act separate from rape, abuse and mental torture. Her love for him was impure and beyond measure, but, fortunately, she could escape it realising she lived the grandest lie in her life. Neither her love nor her pregnancy meant anything for him, for Grace is regarded as a tool for personal desires only.

One may ask who is to blame in this case: Grace, King, or Mother. If one considers Lia to be ignorant, uneducated, and easily manipulated, she is certainly not the one to blame. She just represents an ordinary woman who was put in an extraordinary situation of which she knows very little. Thus, Mother is the first to put the blame on because she was

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aware of everything and remained silent. The second one to blame is King for his profiting from an innocent person under the name of parenting of which he knows nothing. Furthermore, there is no point in disputing the fact that King and Mother can be a product of ancient trauma. The couple have been traumatised in their own way and especially King who can also be categorised a psychopath. All that heaviness on his shoulders has been put on his family with no mercy.

In fact, parents mean different things in different families, and Grace, Lia, and Sky's parents are a source of danger. King and Mother offered their children a house but not haven/shelter, insurance but no safety, a family but never love. In addition, detachment from parents creates a gap which can never be filled no matter how desperately you try. Lia, for instance, searched for love elsewhere and ended up being broken to million pieces; it was only a reflection of her father type of love. Indeed, one may question where to go when s/he is hurt in the same place s/he grew in? Nowhere, actually. Yet, the sisters managed to escape all of it as a big stride into liberty.

2.6.4. Post-apocalyptic Family; the 'Real' Family

Though exaggeratedly depicted, *The Water Cure*'s family reflects many of today's dysfunctional families; nothing but realist pictures are offered by Sophie Mackintosh. Thus, the dynamics that this family serves are deficient as they promote domestic violence as a normalised act. Hence, their cultural realm bears immoral activities in the process. Not only does the book denounce toxic masculinity, but toxic family dynamics as well since the problem is not limited to male patriarchy only.

To put it differently, it is important to realise that the worldview of toxic families is critical. Some parents regard themselves knowing what is better to their children and

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would never assume their toxicity. Others, howbeit, are so sensitive to this particular matter. The reason why defending this topic can never be outdated is that such dysfunctional families continue to proliferate their dangerous toxicity amongst their children until nowadays. Undoubtedly, it is an international topic which concerns twenty first century world. Particularly, Sophie Mackintosh as a female writer is discussing dysfunctional family settings in the aim of sensitising the audience. After all, fiction contributes extensively in shaping society.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter was devoted to the analysis of both feminist and social spectrums in *The Water Cure* (2018). What has been considered, offers a better understanding of the book along with a suggested theory that everyone is an adult child; a person who reflects his/her parents' demeanour with him/her. Part of what one has been raised to will always follow one wherever they go.

To put it differently, part of one's family dynamics will contribute to what their intimate relationships will look like in the future; like what happened to Lia in the story. To this end, the novel shows beyond doubt the suffering of women under patriarchy of contemporary society. Dichotomies of love and hate are treated through the novel; even if the daughters did not receive decent love from their parents, they share only love toward each other. This typical issue of toxicity has been boldly and beautifully portrayed in *The Water Cure*. Not to forget, the avenue of survival leading to women's persistence that has been conspicuously shed light on.

General conclusion

General Conclusion

Gathering the above points together, it may be accepted for a fact that literature serves as a means through which individuals learn, comprehend, interpret, and eventually establish different sorts of ‘open-to-interpretation’ conclusions. Literature gives one the opportunity to see the unseen and to hear the unspoken words. As such, one develops perceptions; that is to note that reading is deciphering, and the latter is about drawing conclusions.

However, these conclusions cannot always be objective, since they oscillate according to each writer and reader (critic). In this case, perspectives are of great importance as they are the source of biased views, sometimes. There is, nonetheless, an amounting evidence that literature (prose, poetry, and/or drama) can be regarded as a travelling machine since it switches between and encompasses past, present, and future atmospheres. In travelling over times –and places-, one assesses his/her life in comparison to that of the fictitious world.

The findings of this research suggest a metamodernist reading of *The Water Cure* (2018). The novel envelopes, indeed, metamodernist characteristics in it. Before all, metamodernist texts produce a high performance of reality to the point that readers do not engage with them as fiction, but as real world instantiations. Particularly, the use of neo-romanticism, the specific diction, periodisation, oscillation in time, and naivety of the main characters are the notions extricated from the novel. They have been thoroughly analysed and proven to exist in chapter two, title 2.4.

Like metamodernism relies extensively on oscillation, Sophie Mackintosh did oscillate between past, present, and the future by sequence of time in her story. At times

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she described old elements like fishing weights in a cotton dress sewn into the hem, sleeves, and neckline, however, in other times she stated some modern clothing style like torn leggings, etc. By testing the metamodernist characteristics in the novel, the hypothesis of this latter's belonging to the metamodern branch has been validated.

On the basis of what has been discussed, Sophie Mackintosh's debut novel *The Water Cure* (2018) makes women's pain heard and seen. It highlights the abuse, violence, oppression, and manipulation some women are prone to suffer from in contemporary era, which qualifies the novel to be a feminist work. This is epitomised in the daughters' (Grace, Lia, and Sky) suffering under male domination. It is also represented through the female characters' persistence and determination which did not occur until the end of the story as a plot twist sequence; where the girls managed to escape the island moulding a painfully happy ending. Sophie Mackintosh discusses notions of feminism in their narrowest sides.

To illustrate, not only was toxicity in the novel as a theme to be exercised by men, but also by Mother. This is to transmit the idea that the core problem is not consistently a man versus woman problem, but it can certainly be, sometimes, a woman versus woman problem; and what is worse is that this woman could be one's own mother. The female component, however, is depicted differently from Mackintosh's viewpoint, as she attributes very contrarious elements in each of the daughters' personalities. They do switch from being extremely naïve to being astute, and from being subordinate to being autonomous. Overall, the above points summarise that *The Water Cure* (2018), being a metamodernist piece of writing, is, indeed, linked to feminism in holding feminine representations in it.

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A thoughtful analysis would conclude that toxic family relationships are plainly manifested in the dystopian novel *The Water Cure* (2018). Sophie Mackintosh remedies the theme of toxicity through the novel's events; not only that of the masculine sex, but also the one attributed to the family; the first environment where one grows up.

Through the characters of the parents (King and Mother), readers sense the manipulation, over authority, oppression, and bad intentions. King, on the one hand, portrays the personality of a sociopath and a psychopath. He is a sociopath for he created a separatist environment and culture against the mainland's. In being a perfect manipulator, who makes his wife and daughters behave according to his will, aspects of a psychopath are attributed to him. From the other hand, Mother is a not only a controlling person but ruthless as well. In dealing with her daughters, she is pictured as a merciless mother who does not care a little about her daughters' 'mental' wellbeing.

As a result, the novel advocates the case of marginalised women -and daughters specifically- who suffer toxicity at home; in doing so, the writer has joined the feminist stream in its narrowest facet. Precisely, what the figures of Grace, Lia, and Sky represent is the status of controlled, subordinate, heavyhearted, docile, and metaphorically enslaved women all around the world; the marginalised sort of women; the women who should be defended.

There is a bond of queries that Sophie Mackintosh asks through *The Water Cure* (2018). The first one would question the apocalypse that happened in the story; possibilities oscillate between literal and metaphorical toxicities. A plausible answer can be that what was really going in the mainland was not a literal toxicity; neither was the air infected, nor were women truly touched by tangible toxins. What Sophie Mackintosh wanted to transmit is that twenty first century world is characterised by masculine toxicity

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which spread all over societies and became a dangerous phenomenon from which many women suffer. The second question that the author draws is about dysfunctional families.

Notably, the novel highlights this very common issue of violence and toxicity at homes. Another query the book lays to its audience is that of love. Considering that Mother and King did not want to harm their daughters and after all they wanted to protect them, the thing that the daughters sometimes confessed; notions of love do exist in the novel. Howbeit, that oscillation between love and hate, peace and violence, protection and manipulation do confirm the hypothesis of the parents being more of masked enemies to their daughters. These are only some of the enquiries implicitly deposited by the writer, as many more were enveloped.

As to the title's implications, 'the water cure' is noted by Mackintosh to have followed the archaic Victorian and historical water cures (Fadel, 2019). In ancient times, the water cure was used as a therapeutic method to relieve physical pain. The same idea was projected on the novel where the water cure was used to remove internal (mental/psychological) pain.

Simultaneously, water is the source of life but it can also be dangerous, which investigates the double edged meaning of water in the novel. It can be the cure and it can be the source of the disease. The sea and beyond it was regarded as harmful, toxic, and dangerous (Mackintosh, 2018, p. 13), nevertheless, water took part of the family's daily rituals. Add to this that King was the one to perform the water cure to women in the novel; it may signify he deems himself the cure to the toxicity and that he is exceptionally non-toxic, whereas he is the poison itself.

The analysed data that this research paper centres on, demonstrate that Sophie Mackintosh's *The Water Cure* is genuinely assembled and painstakingly recorded. The

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organisation of the events is, indeed, what treasures this piece of writing. On the one hand feminine characters were uniquely presented to fit the tyrannised feature. Masculine characters, on the other hand, were also correctly put to go with the author's perspective. Themes, also, are carefully, distinctly, and critically put together. Between love and hate, fear and bravery, ambiguity and transparency, and toxic and healthy *The Water Cure* (2018) oscillates back and forth.

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Summary:

The work at disposal deals with particular contemporary societal matters from their narrowest side through the dystopian novel *The Water Cure* (2018) by Sophie Mackintosh. An analysis of the suggested book would require a metamodernist reading, for even if some twenty-first century authors still utilise postmodernist mechanisms, they do apply them according to contemporary usage. What will also be dealt with is a representation of the marginalised women through the analysis of the novel's female characters. Mainly, a special representation of feminism is extricated from the suggested novel. It is not only that of men versus women, but also that of women versus others of the same sex; a thing that adds to its acuteness. It is becoming more and more crucial to voice the voiceless women and to defend the abused ones. One of the major topics to be investigated and in this field is domestic violence and parental toxicity; a central topic in this research. Toxic family dynamics are to be discussed and analysed in *The Water Cure* (2018), and projected on contemporary societies of the twenty first century.

Résumé:

Le travail à disposition traite de sujets sociétaux contemporains particuliers sous leur aspect le plus étroit à travers le roman dystopique *The Water Cure* (2018) de Sophie Mackintosh. Une analyse du livre proposé nécessiterait une lecture métamoderniste, car même si certains auteurs du XXI^e siècle utilisent encore des mécanismes postmodernistes, ils les appliquent selon l'usage contemporain. Ce qui sera également traité, c'est une représentation des femmes marginalisées à travers l'analyse des personnages féminins du roman. Principalement, une représentation particulière du féminisme est dégagée du roman proposé. Ce n'est pas seulement celui des hommes contre les femmes, mais aussi celui des femmes contre les autres du même sexe ; une chose qui ajoute à son acuité. Il devient de plus en plus crucial de faire entendre les femmes sans voix et de défendre celles qui sont maltraitées. L'un des principaux sujets à étudier et dans ce domaine est la violence domestique et la toxicité parentale; un sujet central dans cette recherche. Les dynamiques familiales toxiques sont à discuter et à analyser dans *The Water Cure* (2018), et projetées sur les sociétés contemporaines du XXI^e siècle.

تلخيص

يتعامل البحث مع مسائل مجتمعية معاصرة معينة من أضييق جوانبها من خلال الرواية البائسة *The Water Cure* (2018) من تأليف Sophie Mackintosh. يتطلب تحليل الكتاب المقترح قراءة ما وراء الحداثة ، حتى لو كان بعض مؤلفي القرن الحادي والعشرين لا يزالون يستخدمون آليات ما بعد الحداثة ، فإنهم يطبقونها وفقاً للاستخدام المعاصر. كما سيتم التعامل مع تمثيل المرأة المهمشة من خلال تحليل الشخصيات النسائية في الرواية. بشكل أساسي ، تم إخراج تمثيل خاص للنسوية من الرواية المقترحة. لا يتعلق الأمر فقط بالرجال مقابل النساء ، ولكن أيضاً بين النساء والآخرين من نفس الجنس ؛ شيء يزيد من حدته. لقد أصبح من المهم أكثر فأكثر التعبير عن النساء اللواتي لا صوت لهن والدفاع عن من يتعرضن للإيذاء. أحد الموضوعات الرئيسية التي يجب التحقيق فيها وفي هذا المجال هو العنف المنزلي والسمية الأبوية ؛ موضوع مركزي في هذا البحث. ستنم مناقشة ديناميكيات الأسرة السامة وتحليلها في *The Water Cure* (2018) ، وإسقاطها على المجتمعات المعاصرة في القرن الحادي والعشرين.