Cappadocia University

School of Graduate Studies and Research

Department of English Language and Literature

# POWER AND TOXIC BODIES IN NAOMI ALDERMAN'S *THE POWER* AND SOPHIE MACKINTOSH'S *THE WATER CURE*

Şemse NAZİK

Master's Thesis

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# DEDICATION

To my beloved dad, who has taught me unconditional love for any being in this universe.

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# ÖZET

NAZİK, Şemse. *Naomi Alderman'ın* The Power *ve Sophie Mackintosh'un* The Water Cure *Adlı Eserlerindeki Güç ve Toksik Bedenler*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Nevşehir, 2022.

Distopya geleneğinde, bireylerin yaşamları ve bedenleri üzerindeki kontrol uygulamaları çeşitli tekniklerle gerçekleştirilir. Naomi Alderman'ın *The Power* (2016) ve Sophie Mackintosh'un *The Water Cure* (2018) adlı eserlerinde, fiziksel beden ile bedenin sınırları dahilinde gerçekleştirilen diğer insanlar üzerindeki nüfuz arasındaki bu tür bir ilişki, tartışılan temel konulardır. Her iki eserde de kadın karakterler bedenlerindeki değişiklikleri fark etmelerinin ardından diğer erkek karakterler üzerindeki iktidara dair bakış açılarını değiştirmeye başlarlar. *The Power* eserinde bu, yalnızca kadın bedenlerinde keşfedilen ve erkekler için ölümcül hale gelen elektrik gücüyle mümkün olmaktadır. Bu tür bir fiziksel güç, giderek dengesiz bir siyasi ve sosyal güce dönüşmektedir. Bu elektrik gücü, yeni materyalizm perspektifinden bir eyleyicilik biçimi olarak yorumlanabilecek somutlaşmış bir güç haline gelmektedir. *The Water Cure* eserinde ise ataerkil figürlerin aniden ortadan kaybolması, kadın karakterlerin onları dışarıdaki dünyanın ölümcül toksinlerinden uzak tuttuğu varsayılan su ritüelleri gibi rutin uygulamaları bırakmaya yöneltir. Söz konusu iki romanda elektrik gücünün gerçek varlığı ve toksinlerin varsayımsal varlığı, bu tür insan dışı maddelerin tüm siyasi ve sosyal sistemlerin belirlenmesine katkıda bulunduğunu göstermektedir. Bu konularla ilgili olarak, bu çalışmada güç ve cinsiyet ilişkilerinin bireylerin insan dışı madde ve maddi dünya ile olan ilişkileriyle yakından ilişkili olabileceğini göstermek için ağırlıklı olarak yeni materyalizm, güç ve cinsiyet ilişkileri ile ilgili çalışmalara yer verilmiştir. Bunların ışığında, bu tez, "toksisite" ve "güç" kelimelerinin ikili anlamlarının birbiriyle derinden bağlantılı olduğunu göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır, çünkü güç ve toksisitenin gerçek anlamı, mecazi anlamlarının anlaşılma biçiminde önemli rol oynar ve bu da toksik insanlar ve manipülatif güçlü bireylerden oluşan distopik dünyalarla sonuçlanır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler**

Yeni materyalizm, distopya, feminizm, eyleyicilik, toksisite, güç ilişkileri

# ABSTRACT

NAZİK, Şemse. *Power and Toxic Bodies in Naomi Alderman's* The Power *and Sophie Mackintosh's* The Water Cure, Master's Thesis, Nevşehir, 2022.

In the dystopian tradition, control over the lives and bodies of individuals is realized through several techniques. In Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016) and Sophie Mackintosh's *The Water Cure* (2018), such relationship between the physical body and the influence upon other people within the limitations of the body are the central issues discussed. Female characters in both texts begin to change their perspective about power over other male characters soon after they realize the changes within their body. In *The Power*, this becomes possible through the skein, the electrical power discovered within only women's bodies, which becomes deadly for men. This type of physical power is gradually transformed into an imbalanced political and social power. So, the skein becomes an embodied power, which can be interpreted as a form of agency from the perspective of new materialism. In *The Water Cure*, the unexpected absence of patriarchal figures leads the female protagonists to quit routine practices such as water rituals that are assumed to keep them away from the deadly toxins of the world outside. The real existence of electrical power and the hypothetical existence of toxins in these texts indicate that such nonhuman matters contribute to determining the whole political and social systems. Regarding these issues, studies mainly about new materialism, power and gender relations are included in this study to demonstrate that power and gender relations can be closely related to individuals' relation to nonhuman matter and the material world. In light of these, this thesis aims to indicate that the double meanings of "toxicity" and "power" are deeply interconnected to each other in that the literal meaning of power and toxicity has repercussions in the understanding of their figurative meanings, which results in dystopian worlds endowed with toxic people and manipulative powerful individuals.

**Keywords**

New materialism, dystopia, feminism, agency, toxicity, power relations

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# INTRODUCTION

The tradition of utopian and dystopian fiction brought up certain universal issues that revolved around oppressive state power and surveillance practices in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively, when they were popularly produced. While dystopian fiction almost always includes these common elements, utopian fiction attempts to create a setting free from these restrictions. Although the definitions of these genres differed slightly depending on authors, their main approach remained the same: utopia is considered as a preferable place by most people while dystopia is a context that most people would not wish to be involved in any way. In his book, Lyman Tower Sargent makes certain definitions regarding what utopia and dystopia mean. He states that utopia is "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space. In standard usage utopia is used both as defined here and as an equivalent for eutopia" (Sargent, *British* 154). Following this definition, he also includes the definition of eutopia: "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 better than the society in which that reader lived" (154). By definition, while eutopia means a "good place," utopia means "no place" (Sargent, "The Three Faces" 5). However, now in the standard usage, the meaning of the word "utopia" corresponds to both the good place and the place that does not exist. In this regard, Ruth Levitas' argument about the main aspect of utopia is also noteworthy: "The essence of utopia seems to be [. . .] the desire for a different, better way of being" (209). In utopian fiction, the protagonist usually visits a place in which residents follow a different lifestyle than that of the protagonist. The protagonist gets to understand how politics, laws, and society work in this place. In this way, the reader is introduced to the "ideal" way of life that the writer intends to demonstrate. As the notion of an ideal place changes from one author to another, the contexts of literary works about imaginary utopian societies differ accordingly. Still, the common point of all utopian fiction is to imagine a society where everyone is happy with their life, or where everyone is assumed to be happy with their life.

Certain arguments revolve around the concept of utopia. For instance, Sargent indicates that there are two main features of utopia: One is that the society described in utopian fiction does not exist. The other is that the author of that utopian fiction "must in some way evaluate that society" (Sargent, *British* 157). At this point, it would be useful to address the aspects of utopia by referring to Thomas More, who invented the word "utopia." His book *Utopia* that was published in 1516 provides the first example of a utopian fiction. By combining the prefixes "ou" and "eu," which mean "no" and "good" respectively in Greek language (Sargent, "The Three Faces" 5), More puns on the word "utopia" seemingly to demonstrate the impossibility to reach such a better world. So, even if there is a hopeful image of a future world in utopias, the underlying meaning of impossibility is always there. The genre of dystopia reaches such a conclusion from a different angle. Sargent defines the description of dystopia with the same words as he defines eutopia—"a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space"—but concludes the same sentence with "worse than the society in which the reader lived" (*British* 154). Ultimately, dystopias help the reader evaluate the world of the dystopian fiction and reach the conclusion that the real and the existing world they are living in is a better place, and that they may need to take necessary measures if they do not wish to live in such a dystopian place someday.

Despite the attempts to differentiate the two genres from one another, no clear-cut distinctions seem to exist between these two types, as Sargent also argues: "[O]ne person's eutopia may well be another's dystopia" (*British* 158). This is clearly observed in the selected novels in this study, *The Power* by Naomi Alderman and *The Water Cure* by Sophie Mackintosh. While female characters with a special organ called skein seek to establish a utopia after experiencing the injustices practiced by men in *The Power*, their endeavor results in a dystopia for male characters and even for certain female characters as well. *The Water Cure* analyzes a similar issue when the parents of three sisters attempt to isolate their daughters so that they will be away from toxins and men, the daughters have to live in a dystopia because the utopian attempt restricts every step they take. There are also subcategories to these genres such as critical dystopia, critical utopia, and flawed utopia, which combine elements of both dystopia and utopia. Thus, a literary work may include more than one of these definitions and titles, as

exemplified in *The Power* and *The Water Cure*. Nevertheless, the point of departure for these genres is almost the same: the writers present their discontent with their contemporary society. They either imagine a better society in utopian fiction or reflect what could be worse than the present in dystopian fiction. Regarding the former, it is obvious that there would not be any need to imagine a better society if the writer were completely satisfied with the existing one. Regarding the latter, that is, dystopia, it aims to warn the reader if certain measures are not taken, the imagined dark future can be a reality one day. Sargent argues that even a utopia upsets people because it reminds them of the fact that their existing society and world are incomplete ("The Three Faces" 25). Thus, utopia does this by depicting a desirable alternative, and in this way, it makes the reader realize the flaws in their own society (Sargent, "The Three Faces" 27). This leads to the consequence that discontent is underlined even in utopia. In utopias, for example, when the protagonist returns home after visiting the utopian place, they in fact leave the utopia behind (Greenway 201) and come to terms with the reality of the existing world. As Greenway also argues, the reader experiences a distancing effect, and the narrative structure "to that extent feeds into existing anti-utopian ideas" (201). So, the permeability of utopian and dystopian fiction in terms of including different elements makes it difficult to describe these two genres in the clearest way. However, if there is one thing that separates the two, it would be, as Frances Bartkowski states, that utopia is "anywhere but here and now," (4) and, as Deborah Wills argues, that dystopia is always here and now and the dystopian now is eternal (51). In this sense, a utopian image of a world feels slightly more distant to the reader than a dystopian imagination.

The effect of the discontent in utopian fiction started to be also felt in dystopian literature, especially in the second half of the twentieth century (Vieira 18). As Fatima Vieira also indicates, political developments like the two World Wars are effective in the development of the dystopian genre (18). In line with these developments, belief in a utopian future also begins to diminish considerably (Vieira 18). As a result of this, the genre of dystopia began to find a place in literature through examples such as Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and George Orwell's *1984* (1949). The twentieth century not only revealed the discontent in utopia and paved the way for classical dystopia but it also brought certain shifts like the feminist turn in dystopia (Cavalcanti, "The Writing" 49). The early examples of such

dystopias include *Swastika Night* (1937) by Katherine Burdekin and *Man's World* (1926) by Charlotte Haldane (Cavalcanti, "The Writing" 49). Therefore, both classical dystopias and feminist dystopias appeared around the same period. As Cavalcanti states, the number of dystopian fiction written by women increased especially after the 1960s ("The Writing" 49). Especially, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is one of the most well-known and discussed feminist dystopian examples among them. These feminist dystopias reminded the reader of the problems and oppression women faced and portrayed a bleak outlook on the future. They also illustrated issues like patriarchal oppression and the control over women's bodies and minds perpetuated through long ages. In this study, the selected novels *The Power* and *The Water Cure* are analyzed as fictions that portray a dystopian setting. While *The Water Cure* can be considered as a feminist dystopia in many ways, *The Power* reveals a more complicated setting for it to be a feminist dystopia. However, it would not be wrong to say that the novel incorporates certain dystopian elements, which are discussed in Chapter 1. Because of these elements, it can be analyzed as a dystopian fiction. In the light of these, this study analyzes these two dystopian novels by focusing on the issues of power, gender, and materiality. The capacity of matters such as electrical power in *The Power* and toxins in *The Water Cure* is so strong that these materials change the course of events irretrievably: chaos reigns after people encounter with these materialities. For this reason, relationships with matter are the determinative factors in shaping the power relations between male and female characters by creating a dystopian setting in both novels. Accordingly, the following sections in this introduction analyze this intersection of power relations in terms of gendered power, and new materialism: in both novels, these issues intersect and contribute to the creation of dystopia.

**The Feminist Turn in Dystopias and a Comparison of Classical and Feminist Dystopias**

Certain common elements apply to classical dystopias and feminist dystopias. Typically, a dystopia includes issues of loss of individuality, oppression by totalitarian control, and surveillance of the individuals in society. The control over society may be maintained through certain powers such as a political regime, technology, or a certain group. A dystopian text makes the reader question and criticize their own society by

demonstrating the oppression in the related fictional world. Often, a dystopian work includes elements of constant surveillance, total lack or restriction of freedom, and propaganda by certain entities or people. In addition, subjects in both classical and feminist dystopias are "interchangeable parts in the functioning of society" (Walsh 144). In this sense, one can read Naomi Alderman's *The Power* as a dystopian fiction in general terms because female rulers restrict male citizens' lifestyle by appointing female guardians to watch them regularly. Or, men cannot drive cars, or own their business. At the same time, they are constantly under the threat of being hurt by any woman because of the electrical power women have within their skeins. In this case men appear to be interchangeable parts in this world because women only need them for reproduction purposes, and they do not need all the men for this: "The subject is: how many men do we really need? [. . .] Of course we need them to have babies, but how many do we need for that? [. . .] Maybe one in ten" (Alderman 278). A feminist dystopia often includes those aforementioned elements as well. However, the focus is on a female character's predicament, the realization of the illusion by the power in question, and the way she tries to escape from it. It includes the "plight of the individual" (Zaman 1): in this case, the individual is a female character. *The Power* does not directly involve the plights of women but approaches the same issue from another perspective: it portrays the inequalities between men and women by featuring women as the oppressor party. Several role reversals of traditional sexed practices in the novel also indicate the criticism about what women undergo in oppressive male-dominated societies.

Turning back to feminist dystopias, the issue of control over the female body is an integral part of this genre. Resistance and rebellion against the patriarchy are also very crucial in such dystopias. While traditional dystopias include oppression and manipulation by a totalitarian state, political group, or such similar organizations, the oppression in feminist dystopias emerges mostly from a patriarchal system. This does not mean that traditional dystopias do not include patriarchal systems; however, patriarchy stands out as the first form of oppression in feminist dystopias. For this reason, *The Water Cure* corresponds to most qualities of a feminist dystopia: it includes female characters who are not at first aware of the patriarchal oppression and manipulation, but they get to realize how the prominent male figure in their life, the father, shapes their life.

Typically, dystopias portray control of society through certain channels, and surveillance is a common element of this control in dystopian fiction. Surveillance leads members of that society to suppress their individual differences and forces them to harmonize with the rest of the society. So, all citizens are reduced to becoming uniform members who are denied free thought and individuality in traditional dystopias. In feminist dystopias, such control and oppression are applied mainly to female characters. The oppressive power in these dystopias may deny female characters free speech as demonstrated in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). They may also exercise power over female characters' bodies, especially in terms of childbearing. In this way, female characters in feminist dystopias are forced to become docile, both physically and mentally.

Another reason leading to the feminist turn in dystopian fiction is the fact that the examples of utopian fiction in literature are not inclusive enough to present a world order that is as suitable for women as it is for men. Raffaella Baccolini addresses the issue of how women could not find a place in utopias written by men. She argues that such utopias "had not been radically different places for women, and through history women had and still have often been citizens of dystopia" ("Dystopia Matters" 2). Similarly, the early examples of dystopia did not include female characters in a distinct way, and almost all of these dystopias were written by male authors such as Orwell, Huxley, and Zamyatin (Zaman 1). Therefore, women and problems revolving around them such as patriarchy and sexism are disregarded in many early examples of both utopias and dystopias. The lack of concepts in both utopian and dystopian genres influences the emergence of feminist dystopia.

The focus of dystopian fiction produced by women writers of the time was more on the issues that female characters face and the issues that are ignored by male authors (Klingensmith 1). As Zaman also indicates, a writer of a feminist dystopia "engages in a doubly political act: she writes in a genre that is overtly recognized as a vehicle for social criticism and thus advances into the very political arena from which she has traditionally been excluded" (78). In other words, a female writer of a feminist dystopia criticizes both the mistakes of her era and the injustices against women. Regarding this issue, Ildney Cavalcanti addresses the feminist turn in these dystopian works and

expands Ruth Levitas' definition of utopia—the desire for a better way of being (Levitas 209)—to "women's expression of desire for a different (better) way of being" ("The Writing" 50). As a result of this "desire," issues revolving around the oppression of women begin to appear more in the dystopias written by female authors. The source of this oppression is varied, and the oppression is realized both on the body and mind (including the oppression on the use of language). For this reason, analyzing dystopian fiction entails an examination of power relations as well. Such fictions demonstrate the oppressed and the oppressor from a certain point of view. Oppression in these texts may appear as a result of patriarchal practices, surveillance, and loss of individuality and freedom which often upset the balance of power relationships.

**The Idea of Power in Dystopian Fiction**

Oppression and control over individuals are essential in addressing differing power relations among the members of a society as dystopian fiction well exemplifies. Michel Foucault proposes distinct arguments regarding how power and power relations in society work. To begin with, he sees power "not [as] something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (*The History* 94). His reflection on power and the methods of holding power are distinct from the contemporary understanding of political or social power. In Foucauldian sense, power "is an open-ended, more or less coordinated 'cluster of relations'" (Jones and Porter 117). Thus, power may exist anywhere any time, and it is not a thing in its nature to share with others or abandon at will, according to Foucault. Foucault argues that power comes from everywhere because it is everywhere and it is not an institution or a structure (*The History* 93). He does not see it as a strength that people possess. There are a few other arguments that make Foucault's understanding differ from the traditional understanding of power. One of them is the argument that power is in fact productive although power relations are traditionally regarded within superstructural positions (Foucault, *The History* 94). In that regard, Foucault does not conceptualize power as something negative. On the contrary, he approaches power as a positive concept because power makes way for people to produce something, and this makes power as a productive concept. Considering power from this aspect, one can use

their power to react to an oppressive use of power in several ways. For instance, the emergence of female writers of feminist dystopian fiction stated above can be an example of this productive quality of power. Female characters were ignored in the earlier examples of both utopian and dystopian fiction, as is stated by Baccolini and Zaman above. The absence of issues that women deal with in classical dystopian fiction gave birth to feminist dystopia. In this way, the number of both female writers and female characters increased. This led to an awareness of these plights of women to reach a broader mass of readers. Thus, this can be an example of the productive power that Foucault argues: although the problems women handled were ignored in traditional dystopias, certain female writers used their power to produce texts that filled the gap in such dystopias. Lois McNay points to this issue in a similar way: "[Foucault] states that his idea that power is everywhere in modern society does not mean that domination is universal; rather, power relations are the necessary precondition for the establishment of social relations" (67). In this way, Foucault separates the meaning of power from domination and oppression. So, what he means by power relation is the relationship between two people/groups in which a possibility of resistance always exists (Foucault, *The History* 95). To go further, Foucault considers that if there is no possibility of resistance, one cannot speak of a possibility of relations of power (*The History* 95).

Although Foucault sees power as productive, the repercussions of institutional or patriarchal power in feminist dystopias are clearly described as power's unfortunate consequences. The same also applies to the impacts of totalitarian regimes both in history and in dystopian fiction. In this sense, totalitarianism is a form of power that restricts society members' freedom of thought and action. Considered from this point, one can argue that power is an entity that can be easily manipulated in accordance with the interests of a certain group. In this sense, Max Weber's definition of power is more related to this kind of view of power, that is, "the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action" (926). From this perspective, as Barry Hindess also argues, power appears as a tool for domination (2). To compare different ideas about power, one can refer to Michael Mann's statement about power. According to Mann, power, in general, is "the ability to pursue and attain goals" (6). He also points out the concept of social power, which sounds similar to Weber's definition above. Mann addresses two different

aspects while explaining social power: One is “the power of some people over others” (6). The other is collaboration, that is, people acting in cooperation and building up their power over others or over nature (Mann 6). Hindess comments on this view of social power as both domination and collective organization (7). On that account, while the concept of power for Foucault involves a more comprehensive understanding, Mann and Hindess approach power and social power as something that is open to manipulation and domination at will. For Foucault, however, power can produce both oppression and a resisting reaction against this. Thomas Hobbes, on the other hand, defines power as “his [a man’s] present means to obtain some future apparent good, and is either original or instrumental” (ch. 11). In this way, he categorizes power into two categories: natural power and instrumental power. Natural power involves features arising from the body or mind such as prudence, strength, and nobility. Instrumental power, on the other hand, says Hobbes, is “means and instruments to acquire more; as riches, reputation, friends, and the secret working of God, which men call good luck” (ch. 11). Therefore, one can have different types of power such as political power and social power. If the wielding of this power results in oppression of part or all of a group/public, then the balances in the order of the public change, and one can use power to resist this outcome.

The discussion of power and power relationships entails the consideration of who exerts power over the other, and who is subject to this execution of power in a more passive way. To give an example of this, the former can be regarded as sovereign power and the latter as subjects/citizens in a society/country. Locke explains how the right of power can in fact be manipulated in accordance with the political figures’ own will. He exemplifies it through addressing practices of tyranny: “Tyranny is the exercise of Power beyond right, which no Body can have a Right to. And this is making use of the Power any one has in his hands; not for the good of those, who are under it, but for his own private separate Advantage” (398-99). In this sense, Locke explains that this is an abuse of power for the benefit of the one who holds power, not for the benefit of the common good. As a result of this, such a tyrannical governor’s actions are “not directed to the preservation of Properties of his People, but the satisfaction of his own Ambition, Revenge, Covetousness, or any other irregular Passion” (Locke 399). This type of situation brings to mind the question of the legitimacy of such power that a ruler

employs. According to Locke, the legitimacy in question depends on the assessment and consent of the public (407-8). Hence, it is the citizens that decide whether the government or the state is tyrannical or not. In a similar way, Locke argues that the survival of a government depends on the mere existence of the society, and not vice versa (407). Considering the abovementioned assessment by the public, the issue of consent emerges as well. Hindess indicates that in modern political thought

> the imposition of power is seen as legitimate if it is based on the real or implied consent of such persons. All other impositions are seen either as illegitimate or, at best, as bearing on persons who are regarded as less than fully autonomous and therefore as being without the capacity either to give their consent or to withhold it. (96)

Antonio Gramsci, on the other hand, approaches the issue of consent as a part of hegemony which he sees necessary for the maintaining of power: "State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules" (504). In that sense, he argues, both domination and consent are elements that constitute a state. Yet, the state produces this consent, according to Gramsci: "The State does have and request consent, but it also 'educates' this consent, by means of the political and syndical associations; these [. . .] are private organisms, left to the private initiative of the ruling class" (527). In this way, a state obtains consent from the public not through force but leadership. To this end, consent is learned in certain institutions like schools (Eula 178). As the tradition of dystopian fiction involves oppressive society as one of its main elements, the issue of the absence or the existence of explicit/implied consent in the face of oppression becomes important.

For a more comprehensive understanding of power relations, it is necessary to evaluate the issue of gender insofar as this thesis is also concerned. This constitutes a very important part of the discussion of power, considering the oppression that women have been facing throughout history. At this point, Rosi Braidotti critiques Foucault's views by stating: "Foucault never locates woman's body as the site of one of the most operational internal divisions in our society, and consequently also one of the most persistent forms of exclusion" (*Patterns* 87). Lois McNay also points out the absence of the "gendered character of many disciplinary techniques" in Foucault's analysis of the body (11). She also emphasizes the fact that oppression of women is essentially exercised through the consideration of biological differences "because it is upon the

biological difference between the male and female bodies that the edifice of gender inequality is built and legitimized" (McNay 17). So, the inferiority of women is legitimized and naturalized "by reference to biology" (McNay 17). In this sense, patriarchy can easily use the biological differences between female and male bodies, and can argue that the female body is fragile, taking the male standards as a basis. Yet, these biological functions are worked in social characteristics in time (McNay 17). This leads to the outcome that while femininity is associated with passivity and fragility, masculinity is associated with dominance and strength.[1] As a result of this comparison based on bodies and biological capacities, McNay contends, corporeal oppression arises with its different strategies (18). Elizabeth Grosz analyzes such intervention on the female body in terms of inscriptions of bodies. She argues that a body can be inscribed either through violence, or via "less openly aggressive but no less coercive" inscription ("Inscriptions" 63). The latter type of inscription involves a "psychic inscription of the body" (Grosz, "Inscriptions" 63). Thus, norms, cultural and personal values are all part of this type of inscription. In that sense, the life a woman spends, the accessories or outfits she wears, or her makeup can seem more or less voluntary, and they can mark her body. As a result of this, her body is marked to make it respond to the necessities of power (Grosz, "Inscriptions" 63).

Regarding this discrimination between the female and male body, Chesler says that "[w]omen who live in patriarchal settings are defined by certain traits, or by the absence of other traits" (319). Therefore, what matters for patriarchy is how a female body functions. If it is devoid of certain functions, then this absence of traits determines how a woman is regarded. Such an understanding of the female body well reflects the popular perception of women in the nineteenth century as well. For instance, crimes committed by women used to be seen as natural consequences of women's biology that is prone to regression, homicide, and suicide (McNay 34). This is why women were thought to respond less to rehabilitation than men do because crimes committed by

[1] Regarding the conceptualizations of the bodily differences between a male and female body, Luce Irigaray has suggested insightful arguments through her works such as *This Sex Which is Not One*. She points out that "[f]emale sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters" (23), and women have become a use-value and exchange value for men (31). Although her arguments are quite valuable in feminist discussion, her works are not further explored in this study because of the scope and limitations of this study which is mainly new materialism oriented together with power and gender relations. Inclusion of her psychoanalytical approach towards this issue would make this study digress from its main framework. However, her arguments can be efficient for further studies.

female criminals were considered more natural while crimes committed by men were considered to have a social background in the nineteenth century (McNay 34). Hence, taking different bodily features between men and women as a reference point has been effective in establishing hierarchical and unequal power relations between these sexes. Judith Butler, on the other hand, dismisses such essentialist views that link the male and female body to certain fixed traits, and she adds another dimension in understanding of gender. Accordingly, she argues that femininity is not necessarily linked to a female body just as masculinity is not necessarily linked to a male body (*Gender Trouble* 10). She mainly argues that there is no true or false gender, and genders do not have an origin (*Gender Trouble* 180). Rather,

> gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (*Gender Trouble* 179)

In this way, Butler notes that gender is not a pre-given identity to someone, rather, it shapes in accordance with how an individual practice their gender through time. This way of conceptualizing genders and bodies has helped in questioning the binary structures regarding male and female bodies. Although sex discrimination based on biological differences is disapproved by more people today, its practice still continues in several parts of the world, making it the basis for contemporary feminist dystopias as well. Regarding this discrimination, one needs to look closely into to what extent the material conditions both within individuals' bodies and in their surroundings are effective in arranging the positions of men and women in society. It follows that the mere material nature of the body can eventually have influence on how the social structures are shaped, in the same way as discourse can have effects on bodily practices.

### New Materialism and Power Relations

Following a review of the ideas on power and power relations introduced by prominent philosophers and theoreticians in this field, an introduction to the concept of new materialism and its relation to power relations would be convenient at this point. I here argue that material conditions and things themselves have the capacity to shape the course of events in humans' life as well. To this end, I focus on the agency and the vitality of "things" that Karen Barad and Jane Bennett propose. Starting from this point,

I also analyze how the meaning of things is shaped according to the mutual interaction between human and non-human entities, and how many possibilities the human intervention with matter give birth to in the shaping of social, sociopolitical, or religious practices. In that regard, the following questions are taken into consideration while analyzing the selected novels in this study: How can one's relationship with matter determine their position in society? Or how can this intimate relationship lead to varying gender practices?

In *Material Feminisms*, Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman collect certain essays about materiality and the relationship between inanimate matter and living creatures. At the beginning of this collection, Alaimo and Hekman address the postmodernist approach which treats the real/material as a product of language: "what we call real [. . .] has its reality only in language" (2). However, Alaimo and Hekman argue that such an escape from materiality, as it is, has had repercussions on feminist theory and practice (3). In response to this, "[a]n emerging group of feminist theorists of the body are arguing, however, that we need a way to talk about the materiality of the body as itself an active, sometimes recalcitrant, force" (Alaimo and Hekman 3-4). The reason is that "[f]ocusing exclusively on representations, ideology, and discourse excludes lived experience, corporeal practice, and biological substance from consideration" (Alaimo and Hekman 4). For this reason, writers of new materialism highlight the existence and effects of non-human entities in social and political systems. In this way, such writers emphasize that materiality and discourse/language/culture interact with each other simultaneously, and none of them is superior to each other. Culture can shape materiality and material conditions and interactions with matter can regulate social practices. Susan Hekman contributes to this argument as follows: "The material is not only a social construction; it is not only a passive object of our linguistic creation. Feminists, philosophers of science, environmental philosophers, epistemologists, and critical theorists need a new way to understand the relationship between language and reality" (92). Hence, Alaimo and Hekman acknowledge that culture and discourse have certain effects on the material condition of things; however, they suggest that matters are not only constituted by these social constructions. The aim is to remind the reader of the materiality of things, and the effects caused by the direct and/or indirect interaction with matter.

In the same book, Claire Colebrook supports this argument by observing that "[t]he idea that the world is constructed through language merely repeats a centuries-old privilege of the formal and logical over the material" (Colebrook 52). Similarly, for Moira Gatens: "Bodies and states of affairs are interleaved with the collective assemblages of enunciation/utterance" ("Feminism" 70). In this sense, the material circumstances in our world shape our ideas and discourse as much as the material world is constructed by our ideologies. A bilateral process is at work here. Hekman points out that "[t]his perspective has the advantage of bringing bodies and the material back into the discussion of social reality [. . .] it breaks down the division between the natural and the cultural" (114). The linguistic turn leads everything to be reduced to text, discourse, or language, and it disregards materiality. On the other hand, new materialist thinkers emphasize materiality which differs from traditional materialism in that traditional materialism asserts that the only essence of the universe is matter and nothing else exists except for its movements. New materialism, however, argues that matter and language/discourse affect each other mutually.

Such an understanding of materiality—but not materialism—brings one to the theory of new materialism. New materialism is a concept that has a focus on materiality and material forces. This materiality in question includes human and non-human bodies, "other animate organisms; material things; spaces, places and the natural and built environment that these contain; and material forces including gravity and time" (Fox and Alldred 1). New materialist approaches argue that material forces play a huge role in the production of the world and history (Fox and Alldred 2). In addition, it does not separate the physical world and human thoughts or desires. On the contrary, new materialism questions "how each affects the other, and how things other than humans (for instance, a tool, a technology or a building) can be social 'agents', making things happen" (Fox and Alldred 3). Karen Barad contributes to the theory with her concepts of agency and agential realism. She separates the concept of agency from a human-centered perspective and says: "Agency is not aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity [. . .] Agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has" (Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity" 826). In this sense, it is not an attribute but "doing/being in its intra-activity" (Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity" 826). Like agency, matter is not passive, either, and "[i]t does not

require the mark of an external force like culture or history to complete itself. Matter is always already an ongoing historicity" (Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity" 821). In this way, new materialism argues that even inanimate beings like a stone or the air can have agency. Thus, if something has a direct or indirect effect on something or someone else, then they are capable of agency. Such an outlook on the matter has contributed to several seminal works like those of Barad and Jane Bennett. Barad particularly emphasizes "how matter comes to matter" and explains why we should not ignore its importance (*Meeting* 210). She calls such an understanding "agential realism," which denotes the agency of matter: matter is an active agent, and not a fixed substance ("Posthumanist Performativity" 822). Barad's understanding of matter involves no human intervention on matter, so, for instance, matter can perpetuate itself without needing any external factors. In this way, matter contributes to the chain of transformation in this physical world. Furthermore, matter does not necessarily have to be moving objects.

Within this framework, Ladelle McWhorter's analysis of dirt as having agency takes an important place in understanding agential realism. She claims that people consider dirt inactive and inert, so they do not pay enough attention to it (McWhorter 165). However, it perpetuates and aggregates itself on its own, and this makes it capable of agency (McWhorter 166). It can simply exist anywhere, and it does not need a will or intention for its aggregation (166). Taking this as a reference point, Alaimo similarly raises the issue of the cycle between human and non-human flesh and vice versa. During this cycle, Alaimo claims, certain material agencies appear. For example, dirt perpetuates itself and interacts with the soil, the tomato seed, and water, and so on. As a final step, the dirt at the beginning is transformed into an edible tomato, and a human or a non-human animal eats this tomato. What becomes interesting for McWhorter is that, suggests Alaimo, McWhorter realizes that "her scenario moves in the opposite direction, extending her own flesh to the dirt, rather than merely incorporating the fruits of the dirt into herself" (255). In this sense, a sort a feeling of kinship arises out of this relationship between the human flesh and dirt (Alaimo 254). Ultimately, according to her deduction, the human flesh turns into dirt one day, and this dirt too gets involved in the working of the soil to produce edible products such as fruits and vegetables. These examples emphasize the importance of material agency that humans ignore or consider

insignificant most of the time. Through these interactions between the body and other agencies, the human flesh is always subject to change as Gatens well points out: “The human body is radically open to its surroundings and can be composed, recomposed and decomposed by other bodies” (*Imaginary Bodies* 110). Accordingly, dirt exemplifies matter’s quality of activeness without the matter necessarily moving itself from one place to another.

W. J. T. Mitchell elaborates on a similar example of agency, which, this time, has effects in literature. Mitchell indicates that the discovery of fossils in the eighteenth century changed the perspective of the Romantic poets in the nineteenth century to a certain extent. He argues that Georges Cuvier’s introduction of a new thing like a fossil of a mammoth to the world in 1795 “transforms them [fossils] from freaks of nature or mere curiosities into traces of extinct life and evidence for a series of catastrophic revolutions in the history of the earth” (174). In addition to being real objects in this world, Mitchell notes that fossils carry certain meanings as well: “[T]hey are also images and verbal expressions” (175). Accordingly, these material entities in a way narrate their stories for humans to understand the ancient history better. However, Mitchell adds, “they are also physical manifestations, a reconstructed assembly of petrified bone fragments” (182). For this reason, the discovery of this very real fossil, which is not a typical element of the eighteenth-century Romanticism, “enabled romanticism to recognize and to refigure its relation to the mortal limits of the natural world,” as Bill Brown well argues (16). Thus, the discovery of the fossil sets an example of how things can shape and change the human world through their agency: “Language is important, but it is not everything. And poetic language is the place where the world beyond language comes home to roost, at least temporarily” (Mitchell 182). This mutual relationship between things and ideas is noted by Leo Stein as well: “Things are what we encounter, ideas are what we project” (44). Therefore, our experience with the material world directs our ideas and ideologies as in the case of the Romantics. Hence, it is the mutual engagement between things and people that determines how people are affected by the very material, in addition to their agency.

The “vitality” of materials that Bennett proposes is similar in essence to the agential power that Barad suggests. She clarifies her position regarding vitalism not in

the traditional sense that connotes a life force but in the sense that emphasizes the relationship of materiality with "affect" (Bennett xiii). In this way, the power of materials on our understanding and experience of our world is pointed out by Bennett as well. Bennett stresses that vitality is intrinsic to materiality (xiii). In Bennett's words, "[i]f matter itself is lively, then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimized but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated" (13). In this way, she emphasizes the "thing-power" which is the "curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (Bennett 6). Considered from this perspective, it would be easier to acknowledge the influence of objects and things upon political systems: "It is not controversial to say that trash, gadgets, electricity, and fire are relevant to politics, or to say that though such things do not qualify as political stakeholders, they form the milieu of human action or serve as means or impediments to it" (Bennett 39). So, the shared materiality can bring about drastic consequences in many areas including politics as is exemplified in the first chapter of this study. The first chapter exemplifies the transformation of governments and political leaders after their encounter with skeins—the organ in the female body that produces electrical current in *The Power*. However, although the electrical power manifests its agency—in Barad's terms—at the very beginning of its occurrence, it is intervened and manipulated by women after its destructive effect is noticed. Eventually, the power coming out of the skein becomes a tool for domination and threat. Still, one can read the electrical power within the skein as having agency of its own at least in the very beginning. The skein takes on another meaning of agency in terms of being an instrument. According to *Merriam-Webster*, agency is described as "a person or thing through which power is exerted or an end is achieved" ("Agency," def. 3). Upon the discovery of this thing, female characters realize its effects which can break an object or harm a man in an irretrievable way. For this reason, both the agency in itself and the conscious manipulation of the skein are analyzed in this study.

In parallel with the concept of vital materialism and agency, Vicki Kirby puts forward the question of whether the term culture "was really nature all along" (214). From this perspective, one needs to take into account how nature, our experience with the universe, and our biology can have an influence on our ethical values, culture, types of government, and such other concepts. Considering the impact of nature—in the

broadest sense—in shaping cultures, special attention to how nature works in ways that can influence concepts like values is necessary. Stacy Alaimo approaches "human processes and events as inseparable from specific biophysical relations and interconnections" (Alaimo and Hekman 14). In this sense, it would be misleading to separate the concepts of culture and nature as two opposites. Karen Barad contends: "Nature is neither a passive surface awaiting the mark of culture nor the end product of cultural performances. The belief that nature is mute and immutable and that all prospects for significance and change reside in culture merely reinscribes the nature-culture dualism" (*Meeting* 183). In other words, nature and culture are so interconnected that it would be difficult to separate one from the other. They interact with each other, and culture is not the ultimate and perfect end product of anything. The word "naturecultures" coined by Donna Haraway signifies such an understanding about the interconnection between what we call nature and culture. She rejects the separation between these two concepts, and she also rejects the argument that animals change only biologically and humans change culturally (362). This also means that "human being is a site of natureculture" (Latimer and Miele 11). Latimer and Miele exemplify this inseparability between nature and culture as follows:

> Just as there is no aspect of human being that is not a part of and in connection with the material world, so there is no corner of the earth that is unaffected by the human (Adam, 1997)—from the icecaps to the rain forests, the effects flowing from human technologies travel over time and across space, going global, for example in the form of acid rain. (17)

In this way, natureculture indicates the difficulty to consider nature completely independent from humans, and vice versa. Although humans may be seen as an extension of culture in this culture-nature dichotomy, they cannot be reduced to be merely the embodiment of culture. Humans, like nature, both affect and are affected by culture. This is why humans are sites of natureculture, as stated by Latimer and Miele.

Bruno Latour discusses this mutual interaction via the theory he calls actor-network theory (ANT). This concept proposes that there are actants/actors that shape social relations and society, and these actants involve non-human entities as much as they involve humans as well (Latour, "On Actor-Network" 369). Also, anything can be an actant if "it is granted to be the source of an action" (Latour, "On Actor-Network" 373). Latour also explains that an actor is "something that acts, or to which activity is granted by others" ("On Actor-Network" 373). In that sense, as Dolwick further

clarifies, it is "something that modifies a state of affairs by making a perceptible difference" (39). This theory aims at understanding the relational activities among the heterogenous elements that make up the social that Latour calls associations. Latour indicates that ANT "aims at accounting for the very essence of societies and natures. It does not wish to add social networks to social theory, but to rebuild social theory out of networks" ("On Actor-Network" 369). Also, there is no inside or outside of this network, and anything can be a part of this network (Latour, "On Actor-Network" 372). These networks contribute to the shaping of the social. This situation of coexistence with all entities emphasizes the inevitable influence they create on each other. Since there is such an intimate and sometimes even unconscious relationship with materialities, humans may encounter results in the world that they cannot easily explain at first glance.

Following a recognition of the matter's agency in itself, it is also crucial to analyze in which ways the mutual action-reaction relationship or intra-action between human bodies and inanimate matters can shape certain social, political, or even artistic practices. In other words, it is useful to examine how agency—this time not in Barad's term but agency as a thing through which someone exerts power—can lead to certain changes in certain practices and ways of living. For this reason, function is an important aspect to examine these shaping of practices. Michael Brian Schiffer introduces the concept of "function" to indicate the type of power and domination that agency—not in Barad's sense—implies. Schiffer divides function into three types: technofunction, sociofunction, and ideofunction. The technofunction happens to be the utilitarian function of something. The sociofunction, on the other hand, is related to social facts. Finally, the ideofunction symbolizes values, ideas, and beliefs. Schiffer addresses the example of a chair to clarify these three types of function. The chair's technofunction is to enable people to sit on it. Its sociofunction can indicate its owner's economic status if it is an expensive chair, for example. If it is a pope's throne, then its ideofunction is to symbolize the authority of the pope (Schiffer 10). In addition, Schiffer contends that one thing can own these three functions all at once as well. Beth Preston adds another aspect to these three types of functions, namely proper function, and system function. It follows that while the "proper" technofunction of a chair is to seat people, the chair can demonstrate a "system" technofunction when people use it to reach a high place by

standing on it (Preston 30). So, while proper function is about what you are supposed to do with a thing, system function is what you "can" do with it (Preston 42).

Considering the fact that proper functions are acknowledged by a group who maintains the tradition of using things corresponding with their proper function, system functions are dependent on individual purposes, and because of this, system functions may generate unique ways in using material culture (42). In this way, system function can bring about new possibilities of working with an object, which can in time change certain social practices. In this regard, Preston notes that while proper function is normative, system function is non-normative (43). Therefore, it is mostly the system function that determines and ignites a social change and even resistance. The reason for this is that such use of system function is not commonly predictable or standard. Preston also remarks that the function of material artefacts is "in itself part of society and culture," and this is why it is always subject to change (5). Also, as Schiffer further observes, these artefacts mediate the social roles and cultural distinctions (12). In this sense, the agency of matters may shape the types of functions as well: their agency leads people to use these materials in a certain way, and each of these different ways constitutes a part of function. Therefore, "[o]n the user's side [. . .] system function accommodates the analysis of the actions of individuals" (Preston 42). An example of this is brought by Les Paul and his invention of the solid body electric guitar (Bacon and Day 58). In this example, the proper function of electricity is transmuted into a system function of contributing to art. Les Paul's original aim was to make the sound of his guitar higher when he was a child at the age of twelve. He worked with certain materials such as a record player pickup and a telephone mouthpiece, and he set them up to amplify the sound (Bacon and Day 58). After this success, he started working on building a solid body electric guitar. Eventually, he created this type of guitar, and he diverted electrical current from its original purpose of providing electrical power for lamps, machines, and so on. Eventually, the system-functional use of electricity changes the course of the whole music industry paving the way for rock music (Preston 45). This mutual interaction between an individual and a non-human matter like electricity has led the way for the invention of a new musical instrument. Such an invention now benefits both the musicians to enrich their music, and the vendors of such guitars to earn money from this market. As can be concluded from the examples of the chair and electrically

amplified guitar, the proper functions of materials can change due to the interests of or innovations by individuals. For Paul Graves-Brown, the reason is that "functions are also defined by systems, which include other artefacts, actions, social contexts" (5). In this sense, mutuality is inevitable. Therefore, the relationship between material conditions and human actions works like a cycle: matters and material conditions shape human actions (Graves-Brown 1) while at the same time the human approach to materiality also shapes material conditions as in the example of the electrically amplified guitar. In this way, they affect one another in intricate ways, not in a hierarchical order.

The theories and arguments revolving around the vitality, agency, and function of matter above are quite related to posthumanism as well. In fact, they can be considered as branches of posthuman studies. In addition to acknowledging many aspects of humanism, posthumanism opens a space for nonhuman entities by focusing on the relations with these entities. As Braidotti explains, "[d]iscourses and representations of the non-human, the inhuman, the anti-human, the inhumane and the posthuman proliferate and overlap in our globalized, technologically mediated societies" (*The Posthuman* 2). It argues against the humanist idea that positions the Vitruvian Man in the center. Leonardo Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man stands for a white, male, healthy, and young individual who excludes everything else he is not endowed with (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 24). However, as Braidotti argues, this is where binary oppositions and hierarchy emerge: by embracing and upholding only specific features of a specific human, classical humanism leaves out all other individuals and beings—including women—who do not fit this description (*The Posthuman* 15). In this way, self and other appear as two different forms. However, instead of leaving out neither humanism nor anti-humanism, posthumanism embraces new alternatives (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 37) where no hierarchy or binaries prevail. This, again, demonstrates the perpetual coexistence and interaction between all types of entities in the world, as already argued by Haraway and Bennett.

To sum up, new materialism takes an important place in understanding how the everlasting relationship and agencies of human and non-human entities result in possibilities of different ways of life. This interaction between human and non-human

entities does not always end up in positive results, however. Such interactions carry the possibility of leading to a dystopian world, which is exemplified in the selected novels in this thesis. Accordingly, in Naomi Alderman's *The Power*, the agency of skein in terms of its existence as an instrument results in molding the characters' understanding about the relationship between power and skein. If one can wield the skein successfully, they can get political influence or make even more money. This ultimately changes one's way of living in a positive or negative way. This is where the distinction between a utopia and dystopia appears. Since the skein is a thing that only female characters can control, they can create their utopia while turning the world into a dystopic place for men in which men have to protect themselves against the arbitrary practices of female rulers, or become subject to constant surveillance, for instance. The manipulated relationship with matter has repercussions in carrying out political, social, or patriarchal power in both *The Power* and *The Water Cure.* For this reason, I discuss that the corporeal existence of materials directs the power relations between individuals, and the engagement with materials can result in unfortunate consequences such as violence and chaos in society if this engagement is manipulated by characters such as Tatiana and Allie in *The Power* and King in *The Water Cure*. There are certain turning points in both novels where the stability of power relations is broken. I argue that those turning points occur after the characters encounter and engage with material bodies in certain ways: in *The Power*, the turning point occurs through a specific way of wielding electrical power, and in *The Water Cure*, it occurs after the physical encounter with other people and their bodies. I further claim that the use of the double meanings of the words "power" and "toxicity" is noteworthy in the sense that both the literal and figurative meanings of "power" and "toxicity" become inseparable from each other at the end of *The Power* and *The Water Cure*, respectively.

Accordingly, the first chapter of this study focuses on *The Power*, especially through its main characters like Margot and Tatiana. I explore the process of how the knowledge of electrical power spreads among the female characters, and how they start to coordinate and overturn the old world order in terms of mostly political and religious systems. The realization of electrical power within only women's bodies brings about an irreversible era for the female characters that turn the tables for their own benefit. I address the issues revolving around the manipulation of the electrical power, how the

power is feared and desired by different people, and how it turns into something that determines gender roles. I also elaborate on the examples of how far the characters would go when it comes to getting benefit out of this power and what it would make the characters do. The repercussions of the admiration of this power can be seen in areas like politics, religion, and social status through various examples in the novel. So, the more the use of this power spreads, the more the existence of women becomes a threat for men because the minority of women—at first—who have electrical power turn into an oppressive majority in *The Power*. In this sense, electrical power as physical matter leads the power dynamics in political and social arena to change. As a result of this, female characters take the lead in these fields, which portrays the electrical power's effect on determining gendered power and gender roles. Eventually, because female characters wield their physical and political power at the expense of male characters, the new world order becomes as problematic and unjust as the old one, which brings about a dystopia. Thus, both the physical and ideological meaning of "power" is included in the novel, and this indicates that matter such as electricity has the capacity to shape power relations and gender roles, and it can make a world turn into a dystopia as it does in *The Power*.

The second chapter of this study explores Sophie Mackintosh's *The Water Cure.* Here, I analyze the characters of the three sisters and the environment around them, which is portrayed as literally toxic by their family. I focus on the way the sisters' understanding of their environment is shaped. The fear of getting infected brings about some practices done through water such as ice-bucket therapy, or other practices like scream therapy and love therapy, all of which are challenging for the sisters. In *The Water Cure*, the turning point for the sisters occurs through their encounter with three men on the shore, and then a gradual change begins in their understanding of nature and men around them. I also emphasize the use of the word "toxic" with its double meanings. Here, I look into the "toxicity" of patriarchy in both senses in the novel: while the sisters were taught that the outside world is toxic and dangerous and they need to protect themselves through different rituals, the meaning of toxic changes from toxic nature to toxic patriarchy for the sisters. At first, water as the most purifying thing in *The Water Cure* is assumed as a tool to prevent the human body from toxicity in the literal sense. The sisters are made to believe that the rituals are their shields against

diseases. However, they realize that the so-called toxicity is a lie made up by King, and this changes the course of events in such a way that results in ending the men's lives at the end. The regular rituals with water as well as using objects like muslins and gloves convince the sisters about the existence of toxins, so, these practices and the fear of getting intoxicated turn the sisters' life into a dystopia. For this reason, I argue that the engagement with nonhuman matter such as water, muslin, or toxins under patriarchal oppression leads to a feminist dystopia, eventually.

Considering the effects of electrical power and toxins addressed in these novels, I aim to analyze the novels with a new materialist understanding by discussing the issues of power dynamics between male and female characters. I argue that inanimate matters like water and electricity can be used as means of oppression and resistance if the system wields them well. Therefore, the mutual relationship between humans and non-human entities will be the main critical perspective throughout this study. To this end, I address certain theories and concepts such as new materialism and actor-network theory and gendered power relations. While addressing these concepts, I discuss how new materialist understanding can intersect with discussions of political and socioeconomic power, violence, and dystopia because, as Bennett forcefully argues, "[w]orms, or electricity, or various gadgets, or fats, or metals, or stem cells are actants, or what Darwin calls 'small agencies,' that, when in the right confederation with other physical and physiological bodies, can make big things happen" (94).

# CHAPTER 1

# CHANGING "POWER" DYNAMICS IN NAOMI ALDERMAN'S *THE POWER*

This chapter explores Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016) in terms of the agency of matter, and electricity is the main material whose agency leads to various changes in society in the novel. This electrical power brings about visible outcomes that turn the setting into a dystopia: female characters not only acquire a physical power but they also obtain political, social, and religious influence, and this enables them to manipulate and guide people, especially men, easily. Women's power gets out of control in time, and they deliberately harm men, use violence, and practice restrictive regulations. Considering this broad change of social structure, this chapter analyzes *The Power* mainly by applying a new materialist critique. On that account, this chapter argues that the agency of the skein as an agency in itself, and as an instrument used to exert power leads to a dystopian world, eventually. It also argues that Alderman critiques sexism and patriarchy by holding a mirror to them through depicting all the violence caused by the female characters. The author of this novel, Naomi Alderman, is the writer of three more novels, a few works of short fiction, and the co-creator and writer of three mobile application games. Selected for Granta's once-a-decade list as one of the Best British Novelists in 2013, Alderman published her first novel called *Disobedience* in 2006 and received three awards including the Orange Award for New Writers in the UK. Alderman's successive novels are *The Lessons* (2010) and *The Liars' Gospel* (2012), respectively. Finally, her latest sci-fi novel, *The Power* (2016), won the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction in 2017. *The Power* starts with an exchange of correspondences between Neil Adam Armon and a woman called Naomi. Neil is the writer of the novel called *The Power* that he indicates as a historical novel on the cover. Naomi is the editor and a sort of mentor for Neil to advise him on certain points before the book is published. Alderman's book starts and ends with these correspondences that make up a few pages of the novel. The main part of the novel is divided into eight sections in chronological order. The first section serves mostly as an introduction to the book. In this section, the main characters of the book are depicted. It mainly covers the protagonists' first encounter with the electrical power, skein, either under their skin or

on some other women's bodies. The rest of the book details the events where the encounter with this electrical power evolves into and results in unexpected and unwanted consequences for the social order. Women's discovery of this organ/muscle called skein under their collarbones affects their relationship with other people, and it also tips the balance in the political and socioeconomic areas.

*The Power* sets a good example with its potential to offer new materialist insights into dystopic fiction. It portrays a world which is shaped almost completely in accordance with the interconnection between human and non-human entities—that is, humans and skeins/electrical power. According to new materialism, material factors and objects in the world are worthy of consideration because they shape societies and "circumscrib[e] human prospects" (Coole and Frost 3). This understanding does not keep out embodied humans, either: it approaches matter in its all possible forms no matter if it is a human or animal body or any other object (Coole and Frost 8). Therefore, new materialism asserts that even inorganic matter or immovable or very small matter invisible to human eye has agency, although agency is typically associated with human intention and will. In that sense, new materialists highlight the "productivity and resilience of matter" (Coole and Frost 8). While doing this, they do not deny the social and cultural factors in the shaping or organization of social systems or the physical world surrounding humans. In *The Power*, one can observe that the material power of the skein causes the society and the political systems to undergo a transformation. Also, all the events that occur in the novel are connected with whether one wields their skein or how one wields it. It is a muscle beneath the collarbone of the female body that enables an electrical current to circuit through the arms and meet at each hand. The power is so strong that it can kill anyone even with a slight touch of a hand. Young women are the first ones to discover this muscle, and they begin to awaken it in older women later. It is then realized that newborn girls have this organ-like muscle as well. At this step, the agency of the muscle of skein (in terms of self-transformation) is manifest, because it occurs within a body by itself, so no human intervention exists in the occurrence of this organ-like muscle. The novel does not provide any clear information about the causes of this occurrence of skeins either; however, there are a few speculations. One of them is the matter called the Guardian Angel that is released in drinking waters to protect people from gas attacks during the Second World War. It is

speculated to have strengthened human nerves against these gas attacks, to have spread through oceans and reached many countries, and somehow developed within women's bodies through time. Another speculation is that the skein has already been in the human genome and the Guardian Angel only reinforced it, or it is reawakened somehow by itself, or it is a mutation (Alderman 20, 125).

Since the origin of the skein is not known and it is possible to have formed by itself within the human body, Karen Barad's suggestions about matter can be a guide in analyzing the operation of the skein in the novel. Barad suggests an "intra-active" becoming of matter which she calls agential realism. Accordingly, "matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity" (Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity" 822). In that sense, she regards matter as dynamic, as opposed to the Newtonian physics which sees matter as a fixed and inherent property of objects. Therefore, matter does not necessarily need an outside factor to transform itself or to produce an outcome. To this end, she proposes a posthumanist performativity which supports that both discursive practices and material phenomena are "mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity" (Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity" 822). For this reason, they cannot be reduced to one another. In the light of Barad's suggestions, one may argue that the intra-activity of the bodies in *The Power* produces a skein, which signals the dynamic quality of both the human body and a skein.

That women in the novel feel the electrical charge moving within their arms when they get angry is another example of the dynamism of this nonhuman matter. For instance, Roxy realizes something different in her body when she tries to fight with the men who break into her house: "Roxy feels it start to build in her then, though she doesn't know what it is. It's just a feeling at her fingers' ends, a prickle in her thumbs" (Alderman 7). Then, she sees it coming outside: "A spark jumps between the metal of the screw and her hand. Static electricity" (Alderman 8). So, no one understands how the power in the body occurs in the first place, and especially for this reason, the skein sets an example of the intra-activity of nonhuman matter. The agency of the human body is capable of producing a muscle which can release an electrical charge. After the discovery of the skein, however, the social order begins to change because, for one

reason, women obtain the opportunity to take revenge on certain men in their life. At this phase of this engagement with the skein, one can observe that humans are now aware of the capacity of this muscle, and furthermore, they learn how to control it. In time, revenge changes shape, and the situation turns out to be the superiority of the "power"ful women over the "power"less men in both senses: the acquisition of the physical electrical power enables women to have influence over people in many areas including politics and religion. Thus, the electrical power transforms into political power and power within the religious communities after this mutual engagement between the human will and the physical muscle.

The occurrence of skein gives birth to issues like problematization of gender roles as much as it engages with the process of gaining and executing oppressive power of a certain group over others. Alderman presents issues about gender roles through certain characters such as Neil who is a male writer attempting to write a novel about a world where women tyrannize men and hold power. Neil's book in this sense can be regarded as a tool to reveal the unjust practices of women who have recently enforced their political and socioeconomic influence over men as a result of the electrical power they contain within their bodies. In this way, one may argue that Neil is a spokesperson for the men who are treated brutally by women in many areas of their life. Accordingly, he demonstrates this issue to the world through his book. This forms an example of Foucault's argument about productive power. Foucault states that "relations of power are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role; wherever they come into play" (*The History* 94). In this sense, because power is everywhere and it has the capacity to produce, power and power relations are productive. Here, Neil uses his power to write a novel to criticize what the men have been through under the oppression of a matriarchal system. Thus, Neil's role is an example of productive power, which can be read as parallel to a feminist attempt from a different point of departure compared to the real course of history in today's world. In one of the correspondences with Naomi, Neil comments on this issue:

> This thing isn't 'natural' to us, you know? Some of the worst excesses against men were never—in my opinion anyway—perpetrated against women in the time before the Cataclysm. Three or four thousand years ago, it was considered normal to cull nine in ten boy babies. Fuck, there are still places today where boy babies are routinely aborted, or

> have their dicks 'curbed'. This can't have happened to women in the time before the Cataclysm. (Alderman 337)

Neil articulates the injustice by indicating that men could not have done such torture to women before Cataclysm—which appears to be a huge catastrophe that halters the violence and chaos created by women. He is also critical about the way that readers are disinterested when it comes to explaining a part of history and archeological findings:

> Four books in I realize that no general reader can be bothered to wade through endless mounds of evidence, no one cares about the technicalities of dating finds and strata comparison. I've seen audiences' eyes go blank as I try to explain my research. So what I've done here is a sort of hybrid piece, something that I hope will appeal more to ordinary people [. . .] I've included some illustrations of archaeological finds that I hope are suggestive, but readers can —and I'm sure many will!— skip over them. (Alderman ix)

Neil is aware of this apathy about the injustice against men in history, and he takes on the mission to relate this fact through novelizing it. He wishes that it will now attract readers more in this way, and make them read the facts even under the name of a fictional work like a novel. The situation of Neil as an ignored male writer is indicative of the fact that sexism against men still prevails in the post-Cataclysm world. So, even if women somehow lose their skein after the Cataclysm, sexist and oppressive practices continue as Neil also states above.

Regarding this relationship between men and women, one can look at Kate Millett's argument as she rightly problematizes the issue of the distribution of temperamental traits based on two sexes in contemporary terminology. Accordingly, in this terminology, "aggression is male" and "passivity is female" (Millett 32). She adds that "[i]f aggressiveness is the trait of the master class; docility must be the corresponding trait of a subject group" (32). Such binary structure exists in *The Power* as well, as can also be observed in the relationship between Naomi and Neil. What Millett argues next is quite parallel to how the social system is constructed in *The Power*: "[I]n patriarchy, the function of norm is unthinkingly delegated to the male—were it not, one might as plausibly speak of 'feminine' behavior as active, and 'masculine' behavior as hyperactive and hyperaggressive" (32). In *The Power*, conventional patriarchy is turned upside down, and the function of norm is now delegated to women. The way Neil talks to Naomi in these correspondences is indicative of the imbalance of power dynamics between the two genders. Prior to the

publication process, Neil asks Naomi's opinion and guidance about his book timidly. In each correspondence, he uses words such as "sorry" (Alderman ix), "I'll shut up now" (ix), "I'm afraid" (339), and "I feel [. . .] uncertain" (335). On the contrary, the way that Naomi writes to Neil is more impulsive and sometimes condescending. In one of these correspondences, she states: "I see you've included some scenes with male soldiers, male police officers and 'boy crime gangs,' just as you said you would, you saucy boy! I don't have to tell *you* how much I enjoy that sort of thing [. . .] I'm practically on the edge of my seat" (Alderman x). Naomi's words indicate how she perceives the existence of men in society. It also indicates how men are now regarded in the society: passive and not worthy to be respected. Therefore, Millett's assumption of active femininity becomes a reality in *The Power*; however, it is as discriminative and violent as patriarchy. Also, there are still specific roles assigned to men and women just as one can observe in patriarchy: "Alderman's characters play specific roles based on their gender. This is primarily shown in the way men and women relate to one another; a person's role in the world of the novel is essentialized based on their gender" (Froslie 2). Obviously, this is one of the outcomes that the skein's occurrence paves the way for. Accordingly, the idea of men being soldiers or being part of a gang sounds absurd to Naomi because the electrical power that women have owned for a long time literally stopped men from taking part in certain positions in society, because female rulers—who have the power—did not want men to be involved in serious jobs in the society. For this reason, men were kept away from most of the jobs that are related to security or entailing dangerous duties. In this way, being a soldier becomes a job for women.

Considering the dialogue between Naomi and Neil indicated above, being an author of a book also seems to be a job that is deemed suitable for women. This becomes clearer in the very last sentence of the novel when, in her correspondence to Neil, Naomi asks: "I know this might be distasteful to you, but have you considered publishing this book under a woman's name?" (Alderman 339). What Naomi, the character, implies is that people will not probably respect and read a man's novel if it is published under a man's name. She explains her suggestion of publishing the book under a woman's name as such: "You've explained to me how anything you do is framed by your gender, that the frame is as inescapable as it is nonsensical. Every book you write is assessed as part of 'men's literature" (Alderman 338-39). This, in fact, is a

direct criticism of the female writers' status in the nineteenth century, which Alderman highlights by reversing the gender of authors in *The Power*. For a long time during this period in history, women writers such as the Brontë sisters, and Mary Anne Evans—under the name George Eliot—had to publish their works under a male name. In this new social order in *The Power*, however, men are the ones who need a female name so that they can publish their works and get respect from readers. Therefore, Neil's struggle for existing as a male writer indicates that literature is another area that women dominate and leave little room for men after the emergence of skein.

Neil tries hard in the writing process because Naomi—as the mentor/editor—finds most of the issues tackled in his fiction (such as the existence of male soldiers and male police officers or the destruction women cause) an exaggeration. For this reason, Neil tries to survive in the publishing sector as a male author because Naomi as a female editor patronizes him. Also, being a soldier is assumed as a job suitable for women. Considering the socially-constructed positions of female and male characters in this society, drawing on Judith Butler's argument about gender construction and socially-expected gender roles can be helpful in understanding this relationship in the novel. Accordingly, Butler stresses that there is no origin to any gender, and it is "a construction that regularly conceals its genesis," because the idea of gender is constituted through various acts of gender, and "without those acts, there would be no gender at all" ("Performative Acts" 522). On that account, Butler states that one can speak of "doing" a gender instead of "being" a gender ("Performative Acts" 525). So, this is one of the ways that make gender performative. In this way, she dismisses the idea that gender is a predetermined concept for each individual in accordance with their biological sex which is also a constructed category according to Butler (*Bodies* xi). Also, gender performances can vary, and new types of genders may occur in time, according to Butler. However, in the novel, there are strict gender roles which are closely related to whether an individual has a skein or not. In this sense, the skein works like an organ that determines the biological sex of the person as a reproductive organ does. By extension, whether one has a skein or not determines how a person must act, behave or work in public. This is why anything Neil does is framed by his gender because he belongs to the group of typical men who are devoid of skein historically. Because of this fact, he is not expected to be taken seriously or even to write a book.

The reason is that like in many fields, men are also withheld from engaging in literary practices.

Regarding this discrimination, Butler argues that "gender is made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which not only contradicts its own performative fluidity, but serves a social policy of gender regulation and control" ("Performative Acts" 528). Butler's argument might be related to the truth and falsity of gender acts as reflected in the novel. The society trivializes what Neil wishes to express through his books, because his attempt is socially not approved. Accordingly, through time, writing a book becomes one of the gender roles assigned to women. In one of the correspondences with Naomi, Neil explicitly brings up this issue: "Gender is a shell game. What is a man? Whatever a woman isn't. What is a woman? Whatever a man is not. Tap on it and it's hollow. Look under the shells: it's not there" (Alderman 338). Through the example of the shell game, Neil, and by extension Alderman herself, demonstrates the flexibility of the positions of genders, and dismisses the binary stances regarding genders. Therefore, like the pea under the shells in the shell game, gender does not stand in a fixed place but it has the capacity to go or not go under other shells that are assumed to be over the pea—that is, it can be performed by people who are not following the assumed consistency between the "appearance" and the "reality" of their bodies (Butler, "Performative Acts" 527).

Alderman presents issues about gender discrimination through the condition of Jocelyn and Ryan as well. Both characters are marginalized from the society because neither of them meets the expectations of the binary gender structure. Butler approaches such an issue through the "intelligibility" of people according to cultural norms: "[T]he 'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person' are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility" (*Gender Trouble* 23). Accordingly, it is culture and/or society that decides on who is coherent in accordance with certain norms. Butler further explains how intelligible genders function:

> "Intelligible" genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire. In other words, the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological

> sex, culturally constituted genders, and the "expression" or "effect" of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice. (*Gender Trouble* 23)

In that sense, the position of the "incoherent" or "unintelligible" individuals is determined according to the intelligible ones who are considered to follow an expected pattern among their sex, gender, and sexuality. From this perspective, Jocelyn and Ryan perform "unintelligible" genders because they do not follow the pattern between their sex and gender according to the "gendered norms of cultural intelligibility" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 23). Jocelyn as a girl has a skein but it does not function like other girls' skeins, and it gets fluctuations. So, she cannot completely perform her gender in accordance with her sex, that is, in accordance with her skein. Ryan as a boy also has a skein, which is not expected of a male body to have. As a result of this, people make fun of Jocelyn's condition: "There are nasty names now for a girl who can't or won't defend herself. Blanket, they call them, and flat battery. Those are the least offensive ones. Gimp. Flick. Nesh. Pzit. The last, apparently, for the sound of a woman trying to make a spark and failing" (Alderman 64). Margot later sends Jocelyn to the Northstar camp to work on her problem about her skein, and girls humiliate her there too: "[T]hey laugh at her quite often" (Alderman 206). Furthermore, people like Jocelyn and Ryan are ridiculed as "deviants and abnormals," and most men do not want women to awaken electrical power in their own body even if that was possible (Alderman 153). The reason is that they do not want to be associated with "weirdness" and "chromosomal irregularity" (Alderman 153). Because of these cultural codes, the characters in the novel embrace certain ideas about being normal and abnormal. Jocelyn, for instance, tries to convince herself that "[i]t's better with a man who can't do it; it's more normal, anyway" (Alderman 208). Also, she believes that the drugs she takes begin to improve her skein, so, "[s]he is normal now, completely normal. What would a normal girl do now?" she asks herself (Alderman 208). Therefore, she tries to regulate her acts so that she can fit into society. Such examples of gender construction and the predicament that Jocelyn, Ryan, and Neil are subject to exemplify the repercussions of the agency of matter like the skein.

Considering these issues that Jocelyn and Ryan deal with, one can analyze their condition as an analogy for transgender experience as well (Miller 428). From this perspective, it is also possible to draw parallels between the skein and the phallus.

However, rather than considering phallus in Lacanian terms which might denote an absence, it would be more relevant to consider it as a body part. Such an interpretation would be parallel to what Alderman demonstrates by reversing the patriarchal order: she sticks to the essentialist views about both female and male bodies in this matriarchal world as well. Alderman replaces the organ of phallus with the organ of skein in this matriarchal world. Both the organ of skein and the organ of phallus are indicative of an individual's biological sex, and both of them are made to signify power in time in society. From this vantage point, skein bears a similar capacity to phallus: when one speaks of having/wielding a skein, one is aware that this act is related to a woman. Such a reversal of the gender roles through an analogy between the phallus and skein needs to be noted as another example of how material and social aspects of human body that determine the power relations are mutually constructed.

Regarding such essentialism, Miller suggests a similar point by giving reference to the Book of Eve in the novel: "It signifies a notion of power as stemming from the natural world and connects such cosmic insight with a tradition of religious testimony and historical discourse" (406). The reason is that Allie, who goes by the name Mother Eve later, indicates in her own holy scripture—the Book of Eve—that "[w]e are electrical. The power travels within us as it does in nature [. . .] nothing has happened here that has not been in accordance with the natural law" (Alderman 3). In this way, Allie naturalizes and essentializes the violent and oppressive power of women which stems from the skein. Thus, "the statement is also a mimicry of scientific attempts to justify gendered differences by way of biology" (Miller 407). For this reason, one may argue that Alderman critiques biological determinist views about differences between a male and female body. Just as patriarchy deems the female body passive and the male body as strong and potent as a result of their nature, the matriarchy in *The Power* considers the female body as potent because this is what its nature requires as a result of natural law. As Ellison and De Wet also put it, "[t]he tendency to seek biological explanations for human social phenomena reflects [. . .] also the subliminal cognitive biases that privilege biological explanations over social and political accounts" (3). Similarly, Allie chooses to explain this phenomenon of skein through an essentialist bias because it serves the purposes of convincing her community easier due to such cognitive bias that Ellison and De Wet note. Ultimately, Alderman presents how

repression and dominance can still prevail no matter if the genders of the actors of this dominance are reversed or not. Miller also agrees that this matriarchy in the novel does not provide a new possibility but it "underline[s] an existing dynamic in which self and other perpetually collide" (407). Again, the novel draws on the agency of skein to discuss such issues that patriarchy brings out.

The fact that the name of Neil's book is not just "The Power" but with the subtitle "A Historical Novel" hints at the problem that Neil deals with as a male writer. Apparently, Neil's book carries historical elements because it has the basis of the setting from the real events in the past. This is made clear from the correspondences between Neil and Naomi, which situates the two in a future society where skeins no longer function after the Cataclysm. Furthermore, Neil attaches illustrations from archaeological findings at the end of each chapter of his novel, to convince his readers that the novel is not about a complete fiction. These illustrations include photographs of male skeleton graves from a few thousand years ago, and some portrayals of male genital mutilation on a rock, and a picture of the statue of a male sex worker among a few others. Under each illustration, Neil includes an explanation informing the reader about their age and about other qualities like their names or depictions. So, Neil's novel is not completely a work of fiction, as he endeavors to demonstrate to his readers. However, Naomi as a female character approaches the story as if it was a complete work of fiction, and takes great pleasure in reading the unpleasant circumstances the male characters are subject to in Neil's fiction. This is one of the methods that Alderman uses to criticize the way patriarchy has ignored and even perpetuated the troubles women have faced. As Froslie also argues, "[a]lthough genders are [. . .] essentialized throughout *The Power*, the imitation is not for the sake of perpetuating gender roles or pointing out the differences between genders. The imitation is meant to showcase the absurdity inherent in [. . .] gender roles" (13). To this end, Alderman points out this issue by reversing the genders and putting female characters in the position of the oppressor so as to expose patriarchal oppression.

The occurrence of the skein results in an array of outcomes some of which are irreversible. Being forced to practice strict gender roles is one of the outcomes of the agency of skeins. The way that the electrical power circulates between people and

causes various effects in various parts of the world resembles the way a rhizome works. One can draw parallels between the operation of the electrical power coming out of the skein and Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of rhizome. Their rhizome metaphor bears similarities with certain new materialist understandings like the actor-network theory explained in this chapter and the introduction of this thesis as well. Deleuze and Guattari make distinctions between a tree and a rhizome to emphasize the hierarchy and order in the organization of a tree and the absence of such order in a rhizome. While there is similarity in the structure of a tree, a rhizome includes multiplicity within its entity. Interestingly, the shape of power in the novel is likened to the shape of a tree, rivers, and lightning in the very first page of Neil's novel as part of a chapter from the religious book, the Book of Eve. In this way, the order and hierarchy that the tree follows are indicated through words such as "root to tip," or "orders travel from the centre to the tips [. . .] [and] [r]esults travel from the tips to the centre" (Alderman 3). However, it can be more useful to resemble the power coming out of the skein to a rhizome considering the elements and outcomes both have. In botanical terms, rhizome "is a horizontal stem growing across interconnected roots, throwing up shoots in different locations" (Dolwick 34). Also, it does not have a beginning or end, but "always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills" (Deleuze and Guattari 21). Through the rhizome and tree metaphor, Deleuze and Guattari critique the way that the Western thought has been shaped in accordance with binary thinking and dichotomies. Rhizome, on the other hand, includes heterogeneous elements, assemblages, "multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight," as well as multiplicities (Deleuze and Guattari 8, 21). In addition, "rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers" (Deleuze and Guattari 7). Skeins also have buds like a rhizome, and shoots electrical charge outside like a rhizome shoots plantlet. Also, because rhizome can assume different forms, the electrical current emerging from the skein can be considered as a rhizome in itself as well. The reason is that the way that the electrical power is wielded opens up various possibilities of consequences. Therefore, the electrical power released from the skein assumes different forms. For instance, one can use it to harm or threaten someone else, or use it as part of a sexual intercourse as in the case of Tunde

(Alderman 14-15). In this way, the electrical current assumes the form of threat or violence as well.

Such potential of this circulation of power to lead to various possibilities resembles the points and lines within a rhizome which can connect to other points. In that sense, every line within a rhizome is equal in terms of value, because each of them has the potential to connect with other lines. Similarly, in *The Power*, the circulation of electricity as a rhizome in itself and as part of another rhizome such as society is as important as the other parts of the society such as people and socioeconomic systems: each of them contributes to this rhizomatic system and produces something. At this point, Jim Dolwick's statement sheds light into understanding the social structures: "The point of doing exploratory rhizomatic analysis is to see how social units are related and arranged (or rather to see their potentialities)" (34). Thus, examining the social structure in *The Power* as a rhizome helps one to recognize that skein is an element of this social structure not only because it can be wielded by someone but also the effects of this wielding produce different consequences which also produce multiple other possibilities of consequences in society. This interconnection between people and the electrical power as a rhizome is articulated in the novel as well: "Power has her ways. She acts on people, and people act on her" (Alderman 328). This mutual acting on between the electrical power and people illustrates the agency of skein once again.

Another crucial impact that the skein has on the organization of the society manifests itself in the rearrangement of political structures. Accordingly, the blind pursuit of power and its inevitable result of corruption is examined very closely in *The Power*. Regarding the desire for power, Thomas Hobbes argues for the "general inclination of all mankind a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death" (ch. 11). Hobbes explains that the reason for this perpetual desire is that "he [a man] cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more" (ch. 11). From this vantage point, there is a sort of fear of losing the current ability to maintain a good life, so, one wishes to obtain more and more power each time to get assured that they will be fine. Hobbes exemplifies this desire and implied fear with kings' practices:

> [F]rom hence it is that kings, whose power is greatest, turn their endeavours to the assuring it at home by laws, or abroad by wars: and when that is done, there succeedeth a new

> desire; in some, of fame from new conquest; in others, of ease and sensual pleasure; in others, of admiration, or being flattered for excellence in some art or other ability of the mind. (ch. 11)

This constant seeking for power is portrayed in the motivations of Tatiana and Margot. For instance, to fight better in her war against the four countries, Tatiana plans to buy a special drug for her female army. The drug is called Glitter, and it includes a certain amount of cocaine as well. It helps women to enhance and intensify their skein's power as well as their bodies' strength. Hence, Tatiana endeavors to get as much power as possible, to win the war that she starts. Roxy is involved in this business, and she is responsible for the distribution of Glitter with the help of a group of women. So, Tatiana suggests this to Allie to cooperate together, and she convinces Allie:

> 'The real war hasn't even begun yet. They're still fighting with conventional weapons up there in the hills. They try to invade, we push them back [. . .]'
> 'Electrical power's no use against missiles and bombs.'
> Tatiana sits back, crosses one leg over the other. Looks at her. 'Do you think so?' She frowns, amused. 'For one: wars aren't won by bombs, they're won on the ground. And for two: have you seen what a full dose of that drug can do?' (Alderman 188)

Allie already knows to what extent a few doses of Glitter can enhance women's power, but she remains hesitant at first. While discussing if Glitter would be enough to win, Tatiana says she has chemical weapons left from Cold War (Alderman 189). She adds that "If I wanted to 'destroy them utterly' I could do it. No' – she leans forward – 'I want to humiliate them. Show that this … mechanical power cannot compare with what we have in our bodies'" (Alderman 189).

Tatiana's words indicate that winning the war is not sufficient for her, she wants to humiliate, and she wants the enemies to understand that they are weaker in essence. Her desire for humiliating the men from the enemy states is another indication for her "restless desire of power after power" in Hobbes' words (ch. 1). By humiliating the enemy, Tatiana reinforces her superiority with her army's skein power. While doing this, Tatiana takes revenge from men as well. Her ambition grows even further, and she collaborates with Margot to employ the girls from the Northstar camp to join her own army. Tatiana uses her words carefully as a politician: "All we want [. . .] is American dream, right here in Bessapara. We are a new nation, plucky little state bordered by a terrible enemy. We want to live freely, to pursue our own way of life. We want opportunity. That's all" (Alderman 221). Following these words, Margot understands

that Tatiana wants to hire the Northstar group and the two smile at each other. They, too, become allies because it benefits both parties: Tatiana can win the war with enhanced skeins, and Margot can earn a lot of money through this agreement.

The desire to maintain and augment the existing political power brings about manipulation of the masses as well. Both Margot and Tatiana manipulate their community in certain ways. While Margot uses social media for this, Tatiana mostly resorts to rhetoric. Van Dijk elaborates on this issue of manipulation at the social level, and argues that in addition to power, manipulation involves domination, which is an abuse of power (360). In this sense, manipulation must be only in the best interests of the manipulator, and against the best interests of the manipulated/recipient (Dijk 363). He is also wary of the difference between legitimate persuasion and illegitimate manipulation. If the interlocutors are "free to believe or act as they please, depending on whether or not they accept the arguments of the persuader," then it is a persuasion (Dijk 361). If, however, "the recipients are unable to understand the real intentions or to see the full consequences of the beliefs or actions advocated by the manipulator," then manipulation occurs (361). Also, manipulation can be carried out through methods such as communication, social practices or through written texts or mass media. Considering this, Margot as a manipulative politician plays for the believers, and includes a line from the Bible while giving an interview: "In times like these, we should probably remember what the Bible says: the highest among us aren't always the wisest, and the older generation isn't always the best to judge what's right" (88). In this way, she employs a religious discourse to influence a certain segment of the society as well. Everyone around Margot including governor Daniel believes that the plan of creating the Northstar camp will result in the establishment of a terrorist organization, and they try to stop Margot from doing this. Although Margot says that they are just girls, and the only aim is to help the girls for society's benefit, she definitely wants to enhance the power of the skeins, and become more popular in return. Within just a week, she collects more than a million dollars from various public and private organizations as well as from parents. There also appear individuals who want to invest in this initiative. Eventually, the opponents of Margot turn out to be right, and Northstar is transformed into a military camp. The girls begin to be trained to enhance their skein for defense.

Margot's agenda about the Northstar camp follows similar patterns with what Foucault calls disciplinary power. According to Foucault, "the chief function of the disciplinary power is to 'train,' rather than to select and to levy; or, no doubt, to train in order to levy and select all the more" (*Discipline* 170). Therefore, what Margot aims is to train the young girls in her private army to enable them to wield their skein in full capacity so that other countries hire them for their own armies and make Margot richer. Foucault argues that the architecture of the places where the disciplinary power is exercised helps "transform individuals," and "make[s] it possible to know them, to alter them" (*Discipline* 172). Therefore, surveillance and information about the individuals, and the place the individuals inhabit are crucial elements for the exercise of disciplinary power. Accordingly, Margot first arranges "safe spaces" to collect the young girls of the army so that no outside forces can intervene easily or know about the details of the army's operation (Alderman 88). Jocelyn as one of the members of the Northstar is taken care of by the Northstar army: "For more than a year, the army had been giving her a small regulation packet of a purple-white powder every three days, 'for her condition'" (Alderman 259). In this way, the disciplinary power in the Northstar camp, to use Foucault's words, "knows" and "transforms" individuals such as Jocelyn. Another crucial aspect of the disciplinary power is that it operates on individuals' bodies and souls as well (Sawicki 22). It does not only make people more docile but it also increases individuals' power as it is the case in military trainings, as Jana Sawicki further notes (22). So, like real soldiers in military camps, the Northstar girls become more powerful physically, and they get to become more docile by following directions and rules of the army. One of the reasons that these girls become more powerful is the supply of the drug called Glitter into the army. Therefore, nonhuman matter like Glitter is once again in the interplay with humans as an important part of the disciplinary power in the Northstar army. Gradually, Margot gets a promotion because of her Northstar initiative. She first becomes a mayor, and then the senator. As Dijk argues, manipulation aims at reproduction of power, and it may also reproduce inequality (363-64). In Margot's case, her way of manipulation becomes successful in her reproduction of power, but in the meantime, however, after these girls return from the camp more powerful in both the literal and figurative sense, the world turns into chaos. Girls can now easily knock a man over if he annoys them somehow. Some news begins to appear

on the television about the violence by the girls on the streets as well. Hence, Margot's manipulation and use of disciplinary power in the Northstar bring with it inequality between girls and boys as well.

Margot does not only manipulate the political community and people who vote for her, but she also uses manipulation on her family as well. In order to keep her reputation untarnished, Margot does not want Ryan to be close to Jocelyn. For this reason, she tells Jocelyn that Ryan is on the side of the men that organize terror attacks under a false name. When Jocelyn asks how they are able to know that it is Ryan, Margot simply says: "Oh, I don't know. They have their ways" (Alderman 191). While explaining the methods used in manipulative discourse, Dijk refers to certain cases when a dominant party wants to deter the recipient from understanding something that is not for the benefit of the dominant/manipulative group. For instance, he says, such speakers speak in a less distinct way, using abstruse words, or mentioning subjects that are not quite familiar to the recipient (366). In this way, they can highlight what they want to put forward, and make the recipient ignore what they want to hide.

Dijk emphasizes that his analyses like this one are applicable to a group of people, citizens or public, and there may occur other dimensions if it is analyzed on an individual level such as the emotional condition of the recipient; so, it is better to handle these arguments taking a group of people into consideration. However, it is obvious that Margot uses similar techniques she employs in public when she wants to manipulate her daughter as well. On that account, Dijk's argument about shifting the focus of conversation is observable in Margot's conversation with her daughter, too. She avoids Jocelyn's question and just says that "[t]hey have their ways" (Alderman 191). Following this dialogue, she also reminds her daughter of her "problem," and tells her that "[y]ou can be just like all the other girls. I know we can fix it for you" (Alderman 192). In this way, she canalizes the conversation for her own benefit. Accordingly, Margot follows very similar strategies when she speaks to her daughter to get her way. However, Jocelyn is not as naïve as the public anymore, and "she knows that her mother's got into the habit of lying so completely that she doesn't even know she's doing it. Jos felt something curdle inside her when she realized her mom might have deliberately lied to her" (Alderman 257). Therefore, the wish to get political and capital

power out of the skein makes people like Margot manipulate and trick even the closest people around them.

Tatiana is another central character in the novel that uses manipulative techniques when necessary and that leads to a revolution and profound changes in the social order. In her country, Tatiana introduces new regulations and laws that restrict the public actions of men to a great extent. She explains that the reason behind these regulations is the betrayal of men working for her enemies and the terrorist outrages. She defends that "[w]e do not have to ask ourselves what they will do if they win; we have already seen it. We must protect ourselves against those who might betray us" (Alderman 242-43). She refers to the injustices against women especially in Moldova until then, and now she is changing most of the old regulations. Reminding the public about the violence conducted by men against women in the past is a manipulative technique that Tatiana employs. Dijk argues that

> the general goals of manipulative discourse are the control of the shared social representations of groups of people because these social beliefs in turn control what people do and say in many situations and over a relatively long period. Once people's attitudes are influenced, [. . .] little or no further manipulation attempts may be necessary in order for people to act according to these attitudes. (370)

Accordingly, Tatiana aims to shape the public's perception about men in order to convince her people to get the public onside. In this way, she can easily put the regulations into force, without facing opposition. Her desire for power has some grounds though. She marries President Viktor Moskalev when she is seventeen and he is forty-two. While talking with Tunde about this, she says that at least he saved her from the small town she grew up in (Alderman 96). However, age has not been the only problem for Tatiana. Moldova turns into a center for sex-trafficking worldwide over the years. In addition to that, several rape cases have been noted during the period of Viktor's government. However, Viktor ignores this issue completely: "[Viktor] has held this country together by making a series of alliances and by turning a blind eye to the vast organized crime syndicates that have been using his little, unassuming nation as a staging post for their unsavoury business" (Alderman 93). In addition to this, certain organs of the country such as the police force support this corruption as well: "It wasn't just those men who hurt us," a twenty-year-old woman, Sonja, tells him (Alderman 94). She continues: "We killed them, but it wasn't just them. The police knew what was

happening and did nothing [. . .] The Mayor knew what was happening, the landlords knew what was happening, *postmen* knew what was happening" (Alderman 94). Hence, as the wife of such a leader, who realizes the destructive potential of this huge tangible power, Tatiana decides to overturn her husband and establish her own country from scratch. The foreshadowing of Tatiana's taking over the country appears in this dialogue between Tunde and Tatiana:

> 'You are going to be very successful,' she says. 'You have the hunger. I've seen it before.' 'And you? Do you have … the hunger?' She looks him up and down and makes a little laugh through her nose. She can't be more than forty now herself. 'Look what I can do,' she says. Although he thinks he already knows what she can do. She puts her palm flat to the frame of the window and closes her eyes. The lights in the ceiling fizz and blink out. She looks up, sighs. (Alderman 96)

In this dialogue, Tatiana implies that the first and biggest step of her revolution will become possible through her skein. After this step, however, she turns the country into chaos. Five days later, Viktor Moskalev is found dead in his sleep, claimed to have died from a heart attack. Right after this case, Tatiana collects her weapons and wealth, and a small army on the border of Moldova. Tatiana now declares war on four countries at the same time. The name of this new country, Bessapara, carries a responsive meaning to the old Moldova that Viktor governed. Tatiana calls her country Bessapara because the ancient people lived there and interpreted "the sacred sayings of the priestesses on the mountaintops" (Alderman 98). In other words, Bessapara has a symbolic meaning and it signifies female authority.

The wish to maintain a superior power and dominance over a certain group, as argued by Hierro and Marquez, stems from the "fear that without it they [the dominant groups] will not be safe or they will be impotent" (176). Tatiana's motivation in pursuing this power can be explained with this argument which also bears similarities with Hobbes' argument about the perpetual and restless desire. She starts to obtain influence and power after she discovers the potency of her skein. If she loses it somehow, she may turn back to her old way of life which involves ignorance of her existence as a woman. Although the starting point of Tatiana's new government may seem to be the opposite of Viktor's and aim at humanity and justice, Bessapara ends up becoming a different version of Viktor's Moldova: women rape and kill men throughout the country. Furthermore, the new regulations that Tatiana introduces demonstrate that

Bessapara is not a country for men to live freely anymore. The regulations require that every man's passport and official documents in Bessapara must be stamped with the name of his female guardian. So, the government appoints each man a female guardian so that she can monitor each step of his. Also, men who do not have any female relatives must report to the police station to register themselves so that the safety of the public is ensured.

The long list of this declaration includes such restrictions as the following: men cannot drive cars, or own businesses anymore; they cannot gather in groups of more than three without a woman, and they cannot vote anymore: "[B]ecause their years of violence and degradation have shown that they are not fit to rule or govern" (Alderman 243). Regarding the situation of foreign journalists and photographers, a woman can employ them when needed. The minister of justice then reads all the other details about emergency situations and detailed adjustments. Finally, she says: "That is all [. . .] No questions" (Alderman 244). Eventually, Bessapara turns out to be a totalitarian government ruled by a brutal leader. In this sense, Tatiana ends up establishing a government that works in ways similar to the one she overturns. Froslie addresses the inevitable result of corruption due to the desire for power: "At the heart of Alderman's novel is the idea that men and women are not so different—both genders have the capacity to be corrupted by the allure of power" (2).

Miller, on the other hand, interprets the establishment of Bessapara as an example of productivity of power:

> [T]he rhetoric of Bessapara, which focuses on rebuilding the nation state in exclusively female terms, highlights Michel Foucault's conceptualization of the productive nature of power. In this framework, while Tatiana's wielding of control is ultimately a "negative, coercive . . . repressive thing," it is also a "necessary, productive and positive force" (Gaventa 2003, 2) that compels widespread institutional change and radicalizes global politics. (412)

In that sense, Miller draws on Foucault's analysis of power in terms of power "as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" (Foucault, *The History* 92). Therefore, according to Foucault, domination—like that of Tatiana—is only one of the "terminal forms power takes" (*The History* 92). Indeed, these few lines through the end of the

novel correspond more or less to Foucault's conceptualization of power: "Power doesn't care who uses it. The skein doesn't rebel against him [a man], doesn't know that he's not its rightful mistress. It just says: Yes. Yes, I can. Yes. You've got this" (Alderman 297). Although a skein typically exists in a female body, it does not, by its very nature, have an inclination to hurt men. It is women who decide to exercise this electrical power in the process of waging war against other countries or to use its capacity to threaten men. For this reason, since women in *The Power* wield their skein at the expense of men, men regard the skein as something to stand clear of, or something to wipe out. On that account, one can draw parallels between the wielding of skeins and Foucault's understanding of power relations: "He [Foucault] describes the social field as a myriad of unstable and heterogeneous relations of power. It is an open system which contains possibilities of domination as well as resistance" (Sawicki 25). In this sense, the inequalities created between men and women in the novel are one of the forms that power assumes in the society. Similarly, the fact that Darrell forcibly takes out Roxy's skein from her body (Alderman 234-35), or that Tatiana creates a repressive regime in Bessapara are examples of power's existence in different forms. This indicates that an exercise of power can result in a wide variety of outcomes.

The destructive potential of the electrical power shapes the course of events and indicates that the desire for power—be it political, religious, patriarchal, capital, or electrical power (skein)—results in unexpected outcomes. The repercussions of the manipulative use of skein are manifest in Tatiana's country, and within Margot's community. For this reason, how far the characters in *The Power* would go when it comes to getting benefits out of the electrical power, and what the electrical power would make the characters do are worthy of consideration. Bruno Latour's actor-network theory provides some insights into the influence of a non-human entity such as an electrical charge on social relations. Latour stresses that what we call social and sociology needs to be redefined. He contends that "social" is not a homogenous thing although most social scientists call it this way (*Reassembling* 5). Instead, he reconceptualizes it as a "trail of associations between heterogeneous elements," and redefines sociology "not as the 'science of the social', but as the tracing of associations" (*Reassembling* 5). In this way, he suggests that all of the heterogeneous elements take

place in a network that he calls as actor-network, and this network is like a big global entity ("On Actor-Network" 372). Furthermore, there is no hierarchy, no boundary, no inside or outside in this network, and an actor-network "is an entity that does the tracing and inscribing," unlike an engineer, for example, who tracks and inscribes networks in engineering (Latour, "On Actor-Network" 372).

In addition to all these, the actor in the actor-network is not necessarily a human individual; it encompasses all nonhuman entities as well. All the relationships between different entities through different channels—no matter how intricate and various they are—constitute this network. Social effects are also a result of this contact within this network. In the light of these, the skein in *The Power* is definitely one of the actors in this actor-network, and the encounters and relationships this skein has with other actors bring about different results depending on who encounters it. For example, Darrell—Roxy's brother—desires to own a skein, and for this reason, he cooperates with his father and forcefully takes it from her sister's body via surgery. Tatiana, on the other hand, wants to strengthen her political influence after her encounter with her skein. For this purpose, she kills her husband and acts cruelly toward her assistants. The same skein evokes different desires for different characters; so, they endeavor to meet their goals accordingly. Latour adds that "actors are not conceived as fixed entities but as flows, as circulating objects undergoing trials, and their stability, continuity, isotopy has to be obtained by other actions and other trials" ("On Actor-Network" 374). Therefore, all actors are always open to malleability, which also means that people who wield their skein, people who are subject to the wielded skein by another person, and even the skein itself are constantly open for transformation. In this sense, the fact that Allie acknowledges her command over her power—which is an actor in Latour's terms—and that she manipulates her believers by using this power by showing off before cameras is another example of this network. Gradually, Allie creates a new religion and this changes the believers' perspective about the religion they used to believe in. In this way, the simple electrical current is transformed into something that they revere, fear, escape, or desire. On that account, this power flows and transforms itself as an actor as part of this network. Thus, as John Law puts it regarding this network, "the stuff of the social isn't simply human. It is all these other materials too" (381). One of the constituents of

the social in *The Power*, the electrical power, takes on different meanings depending on who is subject to it and who can wield it. Power also enables people to use it in multiple ways such as jolting a man, intervening with the blinking of the lights, or sending out electrical current through water as a way of defense.

The way this material power opens up possibilities for different uses is closely related to functionality. As noted by Graves-Brown, functions of things can change in time, and functionality itself is already a part of culture, society, and social process ("Introduction" 5). While engaging with an artefact or an object, different types of function may occur depending on the aim of the user. Beth Preston categorizes functions into two types, namely, proper function and system function. The proper function occurs when one uses an object as it is originally aimed to be used. Preston exemplifies this with spoon: the proper function of a spoon is to stir a meal or to pick up food (25). However, a pair of spoons can be used in folk music where one plays for musical rhythm, too (25). This type of use constitutes a system function of a spoon. Considering these characteristics of proper and system functions, one may argue that the use of electrical power in jolting men is an example of system function. The proper function of electricity, however, is to provide lighting, or enable electronic devices to run in daily life. Preston indicates that system function is about a thing's capacities and dispositions, therefore, "it is a matter of what you can do with it, as opposed to what you are supposed to do with it" (42). Also, an individual can use an object in a unique and idiosyncratic way as opposed to its proper function, and this is a quality of system function as well. In this sense, female characters in the novel utilize the capacity of electricity for harming, intimidating, and taking revenge from men. Hence, this specific function of electricity contributes to the ultimate transformation of the social system in *The Power*.

Regarding how nonhuman entities collaborate with humans, John Law points out that "almost all of our interactions with other people are mediated through objects of one kind or another, [and] various networks participate in the social. They shape it" (381-82). Here, Law exemplifies these networks by the example of communication through text. For this, he says, simple gadgets such as a computer keyboard, paper, or a printing press will be required (Law 382). In addition to all of these, mediation such as a postal system (Law 382) is necessary for the text to reach the receiver. Thus, all of these

materials and mediations constitute these texts, and these aforementioned materials direct the way this type of communication occurs. Also, this network is not composed of homogenous but heterogeneous elements (Dolwick 36). In this sense, the relationship with materials is determinative in every area of individuals' lives, as is the relationship with skeins in *The Power*. Furthermore, actor-network theory does not distinguish between subjects and objects, social and natural, inside and outside, individual and group, and instead is "in favor of treating everything [. . .] as relational effects" (Dolwick 36). The new matriarchal system as an actor-network in *The Power* is also made up of heterogeneous elements as well.

The new societal system in the novel is shaped by the successful manipulation of skeins, politicians, religious figures and journalists, cameras, social media, and other similar gadgets. For instance, Allie manipulates the masses via her rhetoric and by using religion; Tunde, as a journalist, uses social media to spread the news about the wielding of skeins around the world. Margot, as an ambitious political figure, cares about taking advantage of tools such as cameras and social media in this network. These examples demonstrate that nonhuman matter and objects contribute a lot to the shaping of an organization or a society. Regarding the concept of agency, Dolwick points out how it is not only about humans but it also includes a variety of actors, and it is an "action that is shared with the world" (38). Hence, embracing a more extensive and comprehensive definition of agency as "the capacity to act and matter and make a difference in the world" means being cognizant of the collaboration of nonhuman matter in social relationships (Dolwick 38). In that sense, one can distinguish the agency of skein in helping determine the political goals of Margot, for instance. She is a character who can push her limits to gain influence even at the cost of her family. For instance, after Jocelyn is in a fight with a boy and then injures him with her power, Margot arranges a TV program for Jocelyn and herself to attend. The reporter and Margot talk about this issue and when Jocelyn begins to cry about this case, the cameras immediately zoom in on her face. She states that "I hadn't learned how to control it. I was worried I could have really hurt him. [. . .] I wished someone had shown me how to use it properly. How to control it" (Alderman 87). The last sentence initiates the planning of the organization called the Northstar camp that Margot comes up with. Then, Margot says: "That day started me thinking, Kristen, about how we can really help these girls. The

advice right now is just for them not to use their power at all [. . .] my three-point plan is this.' That's right. Assertive. Effective. Short sentences. A numbered list. Just like on BuzzFeed" (Alderman 87-88). Accordingly, she plans to turn her daughter's case into an advantage. She then conveys her plan:

> One: set up safe spaces for the girls to practise their power together. A trial at first in my metropolitan area and, if it's popular, state wide. Two: identify girls who have good control to help the younger ones learn to keep their power in check. Three: zero tolerance of usage outside these safe spaces. (Alderman 88)

When one of her colleagues asks her if she uses public money to help the girls to use their power more effectively, Margot corrects him and says "more safely" (88). Thus, she benefits from several tools for her political interests such as her rhetoric and the TV broadcasting. All of these tools such as social media, cameras, and television form parts of the network exemplified above. Each part of this network has its own role in shaping the public's perspective about the electrical power as well as about the public figures. It follows that the desire to have a political or monetary power has a direct relationship with the use of certain tools in the network in question. This, again, indicates the importance of taking the agency of skein into consideration.

Following a discussion of power politics as portrayed by Alderman through a fictional world that is full of injustice, sexism, and violence, it would be fit to further examine whether her account becomes a feminist dystopia or not. Alderman addresses several issues such as gender inequality, the pursuit of power, and its relation to corruption, most popularly conceptualized in feminist dystopias. However, the most prominent feature of Alderman's criticism is that this fiction portrays a world that is run totally by power-hungry and brutal women. In fact, Alderman criticizes patriarchal oppression as well by presenting the same patriarchal practices through positioning female characters as the actors of these practices. This is successfully handled through the use of language and rhetoric among other methods as well. For example, before Tatiana breaks the wine bottle on the waiter's plate, she scolds him and says: "Just like a man [. . .] Does not know how to be silent, thinks we always want to hear what he has to say, always talking talking talking, interrupting his betters" (Alderman 229). Another woman from behind the crowd at the same party agrees with her and says that he "[n]eeds to be taught some manners" (Alderman 229). Such examples indicate that there is an obvious essentialist view regarding the position of men in the society in the novel.

This essentialism is based on whether one has a skein or not. The critique of patriarchy is manifest both in politics and social relationships: just as a patriarchal order prioritizes male supremacy, the new matriarchal order prioritizes the benefits of the superiority of women in every field.

Being a man is presented in the novel as something that is equal to being inadequate. On this point, Nicole Cooke addresses the concept of binary thinking, and that such a method of thought divides individuals into binary sides, and makes one side consider the other side as the complete opposite and inferior (19). The same occurs in *The Power*, Cooke says, and continues: "Female characters often perceive gender equity as a direct threat to their newly acquired power. In an attempt to 'protect' this power, extreme groups create policies which violate men's human rights and then enforce these policies with their electrical power, often leading to deadly situations" (19). Ultimately, the oppression and violence against men result in a dystopia. However, it is not a dystopia in the traditional sense in that not all the citizens/subjects in the society are "interchangeable parts in the functioning of society" (Walsh 144) but only men are reduced to interchangeable subjects. Because the oppressed group is not women but men, the novel is not a feminist dystopia, either. Yet, the pattern in the novel works in similar ways as a feminist dystopia, by which way Alderman apparently aims to critique male oppression. José M. Yebra notes this similarity of feminist dystopian pattern as such: "It is not the female body that has to be disciplined. It is men who seem redundant, their sexual organs being disposable for reproduction, which, in its turn, is being replaced by replication" (74). Many women in *The Power* consider the male body only as a body that is useful for reproduction: "The subject is: how many men do we really need? [. . .] Men are more likely to suffer from diseases and they are a drain on the resources of the country. Of course we need them to have babies, but how many do we need for that? [. . .] Maybe one in ten" (Alderman 278) they say in the camp where Tunde is caged. Hence, the existence of gender oppression is one of the elements that renders the novel similar to a feminist dystopia.

The constant surveillance and control over the lives of men as it exists in Bessapara is another element that reminds one of a feminist dystopia. Although the oppressed group is men, the oppressive practices are employed in the same way in the

novel as they are in feminist dystopias. Men need to be appointed with a female guardian, and they are prohibited from meeting with other men if there is no woman among them, and so on. Practically, men are withheld from taking part in social and business life in public. Thus, the gendered practices are turned upside down compared to a feminist dystopia; however, this does not mean that this new social system provides more equality or justice. As Miller notes, "[t]hrough the inversion of gendered behaviors, the notion that 'you are the hunter or you are the prey' [. . .] is interrogated to highlight how such dichotomies only serve to perpetuate an imbalance of power" (429). Thus, Alderman narrates this frame from both perspectives: one is that one can submit to their ambition for power to a great extent, regardless of their gender. The other perspective is that the world that Alderman portrays reflects the typical patriarchal practices in a disturbing way, which serves to highlight her criticism of patriarchal oppression. In one of the correspondences between Naomi and Neil, Alderman criticizes this issue through the words of Neil:

> The world is the way it is now because of five thousand years of ingrained structures of power based on darker times when things were much more violent and the only important thing was –could you and your kin jolt harder? But we don't have to act that way now. We can think and imagine ourselves differently once we understand what we've based our ideas on. (Alderman 338)

In this way, Neil—and by extension, apparently, Alderman—argues that violence and discrimination throughout the world are doomed to prevail if people do not take a moment to think about and evaluate what they are fighting for. Considering Alderman's novel a dystopia, Malgorzata Warchal argues that, because of Neil's position and awareness in this society, one may see Neil as the protagonist of this dystopian fiction: "Not only the reality of post-coup Moldova but also the world which emerges after the Cataclysm can be considered dystopian. Although the novel seems to lack the genre-typical outsider or insider crashed by the dystopian society [. . .] the fictional male author of the novel himself can be perceived as such" (95). On that account, one can explore *The Power* as a dystopian fiction through various departure points. Warchal further argues:

> The situation of the fictional author is meant to reflect the situation of women under patriarchy, but also to illustrate the systemic nature of sexism, since, as pointed out by Moylan, [. . .] 'dystopia's foremost truth lies in its ability to reflect upon the causes of social and ecological evil as systemic.' Thus, the depiction of the imaginary future society 'elsewhere' (Moylan 2000: xiii) aims to provide reflections about the evils of the present time. (95)

Hence, the portrayal of the world and certain dystopian elements Alderman provides in the novel are indications that *The Power* can be interpreted as a dystopia which aims to criticize some of the operations in the society that the author is discontent about. Michael Schaub points out the relativity of this understanding of dystopia:

> The atrocities that women visit upon men in Alderman's novel—humiliation, torture, genital mutilation—are [. . .] things that happen today, but with the genders reversed. That is, perhaps, the point of the novel—what a man reads as a horrifying dystopia, a woman reads as a fairly accurate state of the world as it is today. (n.p.)

Schaub's argument reminds one of Sargent's discussion about the distinction between a utopia and dystopia: "One person's eutopia may well be another's dystopia" (*British* 158). In that regard, the ones who can wield their skein skillfully have the potential to turn the world into a dystopia for the ones who do not own a skein. Because of this, the skein as a nonhuman matter is determinative in the designation of a societal order. Therefore, this new world order will inevitably keep harming some segments of the society, and will not provide a living space that is just and comfortable for all members of the society. So, it would also be problematic to call *The Power* a feminist utopia because the novel is not situated within a feminist viewpoint. The reason is that feminist utopianism rose as an important part of the feminist movement (Sargent, *Utopianism* 31) and it involves no oppression or inequality based on gender, unlike what *The Power* presents. On that account, one can examine *The Power* as a novel that contains several dystopian elements in general terms.

To conclude, *The Power* addresses several issues that are the mirror-image of the contemporary world of the reader. These issues include gender inequality, sexism, the endeavor to obtain power and influence on people in various aspects, and corruption. According to Warchal, "[t]he gender-reversal scenario mimics the treatment of women under different stages of patriarchy and suggests that the present is equally dystopian as the imaginary future" (96). In this sense, by positioning female characters as the cause of these unjust social practices, Alderman both makes the reader look at these issues from another side and indicates that both scenarios do not end well if one does not take the lesson. Miller also agrees that Alderman critiques male oppression in her novel: "The descriptions of abject violence, including mutilated corpses, the filming of sexual assault on mobile phones, and the desecration of bodies is undoubtedly disturbing, yet it

operates as a necessarily haunting reminder of the physical realities suffered by women" (421). In this sense, Alderman's criticism of patriarchal oppression is successful in that when one uses disproportionate force, the system is likely to fail no matter if it is a matriarchal or patriarchal one, because it fundamentally rests on a similar oppressive logic of operation.

The double meaning of power brings another perspective to the novel because both the literal and the figurative sense of the power are closely related to each other in the novel: only after the discovery of skeins is Tatiana able to end Viktor's government. Similarly, Allie is able to gain influence and fame among political figures and the public only because she can wield both her skein and rhetoric well enough. Margot acquires serious influence in public after she learns how to control her skein, and use it for promotion and make more money out of this. For this reason, the electrical power and the idea of political power in people's minds become inseparable. As this chapter points out, the recognition of the agency of nonhuman entities such as electrical power is one way to analyze how the system turns into a dystopia in the novel. After its occurrence, the skein begins to intervene—or put better, collaborate—in the operation of the society and the relationship between people. Thus, the skein turns out to be one of the actants in the network of this dystopia. It, for instance, leads Darrell to own a skein in illegal ways and by force. Or, it makes people like Margot hope to gain capital and influence thanks to the specific and developed use of skeins. It becomes a real threat for men because they have no control over the use of this power. Therefore, the agency of this electrical power leads to an eventual dystopia. All in all, Alderman depicts a dark vision that answers her question "when you wield the power, how long will it be before the power wields you?" (n.p.) in every possible way via her dystopian world.

# CHAPTER 2

## MATERIAL ENCOUNTERS IN SOPHIE MACKINTOSH'S *THE WATER CURE*

This chapter analyzes Sophie Mackintosh's *The Water Cure* with a special focus on the characters' relationship with their bodies and objects, the patriarchal oppression they are subject to, and the inevitable dystopia the protagonists are forced to live in. The double meanings of toxicity shape the framework of the novel in that the protagonists—three sisters—practice rituals to protect themselves from the toxins of the outside world while it is made clear that the oppressive figures like the father are the toxic individuals who make up this lie about the toxicity of the environment. The sisters apply several practices using objects such as muslins and talismans to protect themselves from toxins. There are also various therapies and rituals done with water that the sisters join. Their bond with these materials becomes quite strong in time, and they cannot think of surviving this world without these materials. However, the father designs this way of living for his daughters although they could live without these rituals. The existence of patriarchal oppression and the material practices designed by this oppressive figure build up a dystopia for the sisters. In the light of these, I argue in this chapter that the sisters' relationship with the water rituals and the existence of toxins—no matter if they are hypothetical or real—shape the sisters' lives substantially. For this reason, I analyze this chapter from a new materialist perspective while including concepts related to patriarchy besides analyzing the feminist dystopian elements in the novel.

The author of the novel, Sophie Mackintosh is also the author of several fictional and non-fictional works and poetry. Her works have been published in *The New York Times*, *Guardian*, *Granta*, and several other magazines. Her debut novel *The Water Cure* (2018) was longlisted for the 2018 Man Booker Prize, as well. The novel explores a setting where a family of three sisters, a mother and a father—who is called King—lives on an island far away from the mainland. The novel is divided mainly into three sections called Father, Men, and Sisters, respectively. Under these sections, the names of the sisters appear by turns, implying the perspectives of these characters. While some subsections appear with the title of only one sister, some appear with all three of them.

The novel begins with the section called Father and continues with the subsections Grace, Lia, and Sky—the names of the sisters.

The regular and repetitive rituals done with water convince women to believe that the mainland and all men carry toxins, and the only way to protect themselves is through following these routine practices. The possibility of getting intoxicated by men or by things coming from the mainland brings about the therapies and cures made up by King, and these regularly practiced therapies reinforce the sisters' fear. Furthermore, when they really feel sick, they think that it is because, for instance, they forget to do the ritual that day. For this reason, relationships and practices with matter play an important role in shaping the sisters' perception of the outside world other than the island. This relationship between matter and social practices is closely related to a new materialist understanding of agency that Karen Barad proposes. Barad argues that matter is not a static or passive entity ("Posthumanist Performativity" 821). She argues for the "intra-activity" of matter instead of the word "interactivity" to highlight the rejection of the precedence of independent entities. In other words, intra-activity rejects the understanding that humans preexist nonhuman entities. It also suggests that humans are not end products, either (Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity" 821). In this sense, "matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency" (Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity" 822). Such an argument leads to the conclusion that "[t]he dynamics of intra-activity entails matter as an *active* 'agent' in its ongoing materialization" (Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity" 822). Thus, if matter can be an active agent, then it can have effect on the operation of simply anything, because its intra-activity produces something like the dirt that perpetuates itself, and mingle with the soil to produce food (McWhorter 166).

Such examples entail a detailed observation of materialities and their agency. At this point, one can draw parallels with what Stacy Alaimo states about auto-immune diseases, which is also related to the women's condition in *The Water Cure*. She says that "since auto-immune diseases are affected by countless known, suspected, and unknown factors—such as stress, diet, or the weather—they illustrate Barad's sense of material agency as 'doing'/'being' in its intra-activity,' in which myriad forces are constantly in play" (Alaimo 250). In this sense, a human body can transform itself in its

intra-activity by simply being subject to stress or a different diet. Such functioning of the body can bring about visible outcomes such as auto-immune diseases or some other disorders related to psychological reasons. Similar occurrences regarding the agency of the human body can be observed in *The Water Cure* as well. For instance, Lia says that when their father prepares to go to the mainland, they frequently faint: "One of us daughters always fainted. Sometimes it was two or all of us" (Mackintosh 29). She does not explain the reason for this fainting; however, considering the life they lead, it seems that their bodies react to the constant fear of failing to survive if they catch toxins somehow. This is one of the examples of the body manifesting its agency when confronted with fear and stress. Other examples are listed under the title of Symptoms on the board in the entrance of King's house: "Withering of the skin. Wasting and hunching of the body. Unexplained bleeding from anywhere, but particularly eyes, ears, fingernails. Hair loss. Exhaustion. Trouble breathing. Tightness of the throat, the chest. Agitation. Hallucinations. Total collapse" (Mackintosh 32). These symptoms again, like fainting, can be linked to the stress that the women are under because of the fear of intoxication. As their bodies keep reacting this way, the sisters become more anxious and follow the rituals more fervently.

The agency of the body causes some visible effects such as fainting, and this very effect makes the sisters continue to intervene in the working of their bodies. In time, this turns into a cycle and this agency indirectly leads the girls to live a restricted lifestyle under their father's watch. The body's agency appears obvious in Lia's words as well: "Trauma is a toxin that hooks into our hair and organs and blood and becomes part of us, the way heavy metals do, our bodies nothing more than a layering of flesh around everything ingested and experienced (Mackintosh 44). Lia also makes other similes between emotions and physical objects:

> These things sit inside us like the misshapen pearls we sometimes prise from oysters. Fear calcifies in our veins and the chambers of our hearts. Pain is a currency like the talismans we sewed for the sick women, a give and take, a way to strengthen and prepare the body. (Mackintosh 44)

She compares trauma to toxins, fear to an object that calcifies in the body, and pain to talismans, all of which are objects that she is familiar with. The fact that she connects such emotions with the objects like her body and talismans demonstrates the abovementioned cycle between the effects of the body's agency and her responsive

actions against these negative effects. In this way, Lia acknowledges that the body cannot be unresponsive to factors such as pain or fear. These emotions manifest themselves in the body in different shapes. Therefore, such emotions transform into visible qualities on the body.

The influence of material forces on people's practices and behavior is argued by Jane Bennett as the vitality of materiality, which can be easily observed in the use of salt water in the novel. Bennett's starting point for such an argument is to "detach materiality from the figures of passive, mechanistic, or divinely infused substance" (xiii). She argues for a vitality of bodies in the sense that any animate or inanimate body has a capacity to affect other bodies as well as enhance or weaken their power (3). When considered from this point of view, the vitality of salt water consumed by the visiting women in the novel becomes more obvious. The salt water is both an agent and a vital body that shapes various practices from communication between people to cleaning habits. After the women in the novel drink the salt water, they repeatedly throw up, and "[t]heir bodies convulsed" (Mackintosh 22). Furthermore, they drink glasses of this water as a healing practice in King's house, because they come to the island sick. Although the water makes women throw up, they see it as a miracle because they believe that it will heal their bodies whatever the problem they have. On that account, the effects of the salt water on women's bodies are an example of this vitality of the body. Bennett calls this capacity to affect as "thing-power" (xvi).

To make the idea of thing-power more understandable, Bennett exemplifies the various organisms living inside garbage piles. She indicates how author Robert Sullivan observes a garbage hill through which a dark ooze seeps through the road. In this garbage and the leachate, there are various microorganisms growing and reproducing. They can emit carbon dioxide and warm moist methane which is not favorable for human life much, and the leachate can even join streams. On the other side of the story, however, Sullivan sees that a mallard in a bit farther area swims on the pool of this very ooze (Bennett 6). So, while the leachate is not healthy for human life because of its components, it forms a habitat for an animal like a mallard. Given this example, Bennett concludes that "Sullivan reminds us that a vital materiality can never really be thrown 'away,' for it continues its activities even as a discarded or unwanted commodity" (6).

She provides similar examples for the thing-power including the working of minerals in human body. Bennett expresses that in our evolutionary history, mineralization created bones, and bones enabled human and nonhuman animals more physical mobility (11). In this way, she contends that this mineralization contributed to the creation of human bodies: "In the long and slow time of evolution, then, mineral material appears as the mover and shaker, the active power, and the human beings, with their much-lauded capacity for self-directed action, appear as *its* product" (11). Thus, mineral material manifests its agency when it produces bones.

The transformation of the body through omega-3 fatty acids is another example that Bennett provides. Bennett includes studies and experiments done with different groups of people. One of the experiments includes the reduction of offences at a rate of 35 percent among a group of 231 prisoners who are given omega-3 fatty acids (Bennett 41). Another group is made up of students: they are students who have difficulty in "learning, behavior, and psychosocial adjustment" (Bennett 41). They made progress after they took omega-3 supplements, as the study indicated. What Bennett reaches from these examples is that agents like fats can bring about patterns of effects sometimes in unpredictable ways (41-42). These examples provided by Bennett indicate that whether people are aware or not, matter affects the operation of the body one way or another, just as the salt water makes the women's bodies convulse in *The Water Cure*. In this operation, body itself has a role as well: it cooperates with matter. In addition, as in the example of the leachate, non-human matter demonstrates its capacity to proliferate and provide a habitat for certain bodies. In *The Water Cure*, Lia demonstrates an acknowledgement of this vitality of matters:

> In my own bathroom, later, I inspect all the new bruises that have bloomed on my skin since the men came. I hadn't noticed them happening at the time, but here they are. Perhaps there is a virus ripening inside my blood. Cells bursting with their own fruitfulness. Love as a protest within my body. Or perhaps it's just that I am unused to touch, am out of practice. Bodies do not lie. This all acts as proof that he has touched me here, here, here. I pinch the back of my forearm, an unmarked spot, with satisfaction. (Mackintosh 164)

Lia is quite aware that toxins can easily work their way into her body to make her susceptible to diseases. She knows about viruses and blood cells, and the statement "[b]odies do not lie" is a recognition of the human body's porosity to allow certain entities inside. The fact that she has new bruises is probably because her body is not used to being in a place other than her house. Lia, however, follows Llew to wherever

he wants to go in the forest. As a result of this, she gets new bruises on her body. She also says that "[m]y body, up until now, has been just a thing that bled. A thing with vast reserves of pain. A strange instrument that I don't always understand" (Mackintosh 82). As she has unfavorable experiences with her body for a long time, Lia finds it difficult to live in harmony with her body whose agency fails her most of the time.

Graham Harman analyzes this relationship with objects through a philosophy he calls "object-oriented ontology" and argues that "[a]ll objects must be given equal attention, whether they be human, nonhuman, natural, cultural, real or fictional" (Harman 9). The fact that he includes fictional objects is one way that his argument differs from other new materialist approaches. To exemplify the influence of fictional entities, Harman addresses the fictional character Sherlock Holmes: while Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote his Sherlock Holmes stories, he made up the address 221B Baker Street as the house of Holmes and Watson. Although there is a real Baker Street in London, the number of blocks was not as high as the 200s when Doyle wrote the stories. After a while, the fictional address of Holmes became real after the numbers on this street reached 220s (Harman 33). However, while visiting this address, which is now a museum, some fans of Sherlock Holmes have a misconception that Holmes was a real historical person (Harman 33). What he aims to reach through his example is that when people assume fictional objects as real entities, people may act accordingly. In this way, even objects somehow created in peoples' minds can direct people to act in certain ways. One can extend Harman's argument about the effect of fictional objects to the effect of fictional entity of deadly toxins and deadly men in *The Water Cure*: the daughters imagine a male figure in their mind, which can be defined as a fictional entity—to use Harman's words—and their daily practices are now shaped according to the assumption that they can easily catch diseases from the fictional entity of toxic men. For this reason, they regularly practice rituals not to catch toxins of men living in the mainland when King comes back from the mainland. Or, when the sisters see James and Llew arrive at the island for the first time, they rush to get inside the house, and they keep their distance from the men for a certain period of time (Mackintosh 63).

Another one of the basic principles of Harman's object-oriented ontology is that "[o]bjects are not identical with their properties, but have a tense relationship with those

properties" (9). Here, Harman basically dismisses smallism which reduces objects to the sum total of the parts and pieces that constitute the object, and argues that all objects are more than what they are composed of, and there are other dimensions that make up the meaning of objects besides their material pieces (Harman 30-32). Taking this as a departure point, one can argue that when one engages with an object in a certain context, that object can take on a new meaning, which may result in different outcomes as can be observed in the sisters' use of muslins and talismans. These objects take on a specific meaning for the girls in the island because they use them to specifically protect themselves from toxins. At this point, an intentional interaction with objects gets involved, unlike the self-transformation and agency of the fainting body.

Harman's claim about objects and their relationship to their properties reminds one of Michael Schiffer's argument about functions. To briefly recall his argument: Schiffer divides objects' functions into three categories, namely technofunction, sociofunction, and ideofunction. The first one signifies the original aim of the use of an object while the second and the third indicate the object's function's relationship with social facts and values (Schiffer 10-11). Schiffer's argument about functions indicates that people's inevitable dependence on objects in daily life can lead them to value these objects in certain ways. Accordingly, this special value for certain objects makes objects perform sociofunction and ideofunction in time. Schiffer says that "[a]rtifacts performing sociofunctions act as signs or symbols, making social facts explicit without words, and so directly influence behavior in activity areas" (10). He exemplifies this situation through the use of jewelry or uniforms. Besides being accessories to wear, jewelry can express social standing and ethnic affiliation, says Schiffer (10). Similarly, besides being a cloth to wear, a doctor's uniform identifies the role of a doctor (10). In this way, a symbolic meaning is added to the utilitarian function of such objects. From this perspective, one can argue that the muslins and talismans that the female characters use in *The Water Cure* can be considered to express a sociofunction. The female characters wear muslins and sew talismans to be protected from the toxic materials in the air. In this way, these objects take on an alternative meaning that represents protection, safety, and cleanness. Therefore, the way that women approach these objects indicates that they have special concerns with these objects' relationship to their health. King, for instance, sells the talismans sewn by his daughters to the sick women's

brothers or husbands when he goes to the mainland. Eventually, women believe that the talismans protect them from danger. Lia describes the psychological effect of these objects on the women as such: “The patterns were abstract and mysterious, and he [King] sold them to the husbands and brothers of sick women on the land, who saw hope or magic in the dreamy repetitions of our hands” (Mackintosh 29). Therefore, the sick women in the mainland hope and believe that talismans will be helpful in their recovery.

Their establishment of this bond with such objects can be better understood with Alan Costall’s argument about the meaning of things. He argues that “[p]eople are not just ‘users’ (even collectively) of things. People are involved with objects in a host of ways: designing them, maintaining them, ‘policing’ their use, and introducing them to others” (Costall 77). By referring to James J. Gibson, Costall highlights that the meaning of objects is not completely lodged in people or in things (77). In this sense, the meaning created is fed from both the object itself and the one who observes or uses it. At this point, it would be useful to include what psychologist James J. Gibson says about this relationship. He coins the word “affordance” to demonstrate the inevitable interaction between nature/environment and animals. He states that the affordance of an environment means what it affords to the animal, which means “what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill” (Gibson 119). Although Gibson’s point of departure is the relationship between natural environment and animals, a similar relationship exists between objects and people. For this reason, Costall accommodates this way of thinking to the relationship between objects and people, and states: “Even though the object does not uniquely ‘determine’ any particular use, neither are we free to do anything we wish with it” (Costall 83). So, people attribute meaning to objects within a sort of restricted framework. Still, there is more than one meaning that objects afford to people. From this perspective, the female characters in *The Water Cure* attribute a special meaning to objects such as muslins. Muslins, for example, to use Gibson’s words, “afford” protection from toxins. However, this is not the only function a muslin provides people with. The female characters could choose to use it to wear it on their heads, or as an accessory like a scarf on their neck. Yet again, women choose this specific way to wear their muslin out of a few alternative ways: they cover their mouth with it. Because they choose this specific way of wearing

a muslin, it evokes the meaning of protection, and apparently safety as well. This situation corresponds to Costall's argument that "[t]he meaning of things are revealed and realized within activity" (77). On that account, an object like a muslin takes on a specific meaning for women after they are used in a specific way. Therefore, such use of materials has certain effects such as evoking feelings like being safe. In this way, the way women use or are made to use such objects determines the meanings of such objects for themselves. Ultimately, these practices determine the way the characters lead their life as well.

The discussions provided by the above mentioned writers contribute to the argument that interaction and engagement with matter shape people's behaviors and direct them to embrace certain practices and ways of thinking. Barad and Bennett approach this issue from the standpoint that acknowledges the agency and vitality of matter. They emphasize the self-direction of matter in that matter can create new forms of life by itself, interact with other bodies and cause new relationships to bodies. This self-transformation is observed in women's fainting or throwing up. Schiffer focuses on the way individuals deal with objects, which brings about different types of functions that depend on the purpose of the user. Harman indicates that objects have a tense relationship with their properties; however, they are not identical with their properties. Finally, Gibson develops a similar argument emphasizing the functional significance of objects for their users. He suggests that meaning and objects are relational and relative, and this is what affordances are mostly about. Accordingly, the common point these writers reach is that there is a mutual interaction between material objects and people. In *The Water Cure*, such interaction is manipulated to a certain extent in that King requires women to participate in rituals done with muslins and water. This mutual but forced relationship with matter and oppression performed by King end up in a dystopia for the sisters. On that account, matter, bodies, and objects play a big role in the shaping of this setting as a dystopia. Thus, approaching the structure of this feminist dystopia through a new materialist glance, too, makes the analysis of the novel more meaningful as indicated above. Accordingly, a new materialist outlook on the conceptualization of the body also helps us understand how bodies can work and display their agency. Body's agency in the act of fainting and throwing up is posited in the beginning of this chapter.

Besides these examples, it can be more insightful to include discussions put forward by Elizabeth Grosz, and Iovino and Oppermann to reflect upon the bodies' condition in their utter complexity. Grosz addresses the concept of body writing, and she compares the body to a text, thereby she introduces the metaphor of textualized body. She indicates that bodies are marked and constituted by "tools of body engraving" that are social, disciplinary, surgical, and epistemic in culturally specific ways (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* 117). In this writing process, the tools for inscription use "various inks with different degrees of permanence, and they create textual traces that are capable of being written over, retraced, redefined, written in contradictory ways, creating out of the body text a palimpsest, a historical chronicle of prior and later traces" (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* 117). Therefore, the body carries with it the effects of some of the past experiences it has been through. One can draw parallels between this body writing which produces the body as a chronicle of traces and the sisters' bodies in the novel. In her review of *The Water Cure*, Da Kunha Lewin argues that the relationship between women and men in the novel is always unpleasant and worrying, and "[t]he death of the patriarch in the opening page does not diminish his presence, and his predilections for creating the rules of his daughters' lives continues" (n.p.). The parents' influence on the daughters' perspective about men and the outside world is felt from the beginning until the end of the novel. The girls must always examine their bodies: "Step always with caution. The body is the purest sort of alarm. If something feels wrong, it probably is," as Lia repeats her mother (Mackintosh 72). In this way, the rules taught by King is articulated over and over again, and this enables, in Grosz's words, the traces to be written over. While portraying the body like a page to be written over, Grosz, however, does not locate the body in the position of a passive substance. On the contrary, she even emphasizes body's capacity to respond when faced with certain restrictions, for instance: "[I]f the body is the strategic target of systems of codification, supervision and constraint, it is also because the body and its energies and capacities exert an uncontrollable, unpredictable threat to a regular, systematic mode of social organization" (Grosz, "Inscriptions" 63). Furthermore, she highlights that "[t]he messages or texts produced by this body writing construct bodies as networks of meaning and social significance, producing them as meaningful and functional 'subjects' within social ensembles" (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* 117). In this way, Grosz

portrays a new materialist understanding of bodies, which locates the body in a subject position. Such conceptualization of the body is useful to apply in this study to approach the women's condition in a more comprehensive manner instead of looking into the novel only from the perspective of gender inequality.

When looked at this issue from a material ecocritical perspective, Iovino and Oppermann's discussion about storied matter contribute to the discussion of body writing as well:

> Bodies, both human and nonhuman, provide an eloquent example of the way matter can be read as a text. Being the "middle place" where matter enmeshes in the discursive forces of politics, society, technology, biology, bodies are compounds of flesh, elemental properties, and symbolic imaginaries. Whether performing their narratives as statues in a square, teachers in a classroom, plankton in the ocean, fossils trapped in a stone wall, or chickens in industrial factory farms, bodies are living texts that recount naturalcultural stories. The key point in this argument is that all things and beings, as David Abram reminds us, "have the ability to communicate something of themselves to other beings." (6)

What Iovino and Oppermann highlight here is that the impending encounter, cohabitation, and coworking of matter and discourse produce several stories. In that sense, matter itself is posited as a text whose stories may be "perceived or interpreted by the human mind or not" (Iovino and Oppermann 7). By any means, they suggest, "these stories shape trajectories that have a formative, enactive power" (Iovino and Oppermann 7). Hence, the discussions put forward by both Grosz and Iovino and Oppermann meet at the ground of acknowledging the cohabiting and co-affecting of all bodies and discourse as and in a dynamic enmeshment. Considered from this standpoint, the way that the sisters perceive and interpret the stories of their bodies becomes quite crucial because the specific way of perceiving their bodies helps them escape from the island. Lia, for instance, realize that her body does not react in a negative way when she gets close to Llew. Similarly, the sisters also realize that their bodies are not affected negatively when they skip doing a ritual. It takes a while for the sisters to understand these changes within their body, yet eventually, they decide to kill James and Llew and escape the island. This change in their lives owes much to their ability to read their bodies' stories.

The potential of the textual traces for change that Grosz argues can be observed in the novel as well. The textual traces are "capable of being written over, retraced, redefined, written in contradictory ways" (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* 117). In the novel,

too, one can look into the contradictory ways of writing the sisters' bodies after meeting the men. The sisters' perception about the island, men, and the mainland begins to change gradually after they meet Llew, James, and Gwil who arrive at the coast near their house. It is the first time the sisters see men except for their father. They approach the men quite cautiously because the men are not from their island, and they may carry diseases that they can transmit to the sisters, which is another textual trace produced by King's manipulation. Gradually, the sisters, especially Lia, figure out that they do not face anything dangerous after their encounter with the men: "[M]y body feels no different really. My eyes do not redden. My ears do not bleed" (Mackintosh 145). This, for instance, is an example of what Iovino and Oppermann suggest regarding the storied matter: Lia interprets her body as a text, and finds out that her interaction with the men does not cause any negative effects on her body. It is also the men that make the girls realize that the real world outside is quite different than they imagine: "The world is not what you have been told,' he [James] says . . . 'I mean, the world is very terrible, but you have been told a number of things that are untrue.'" (Mackintosh 218). The women stop visiting King's house as well. Lia says that "[t]hat they have stopped coming could mean the world has improved, or that it is worse than ever" (Mackintosh 172). Although Lia is not stating out loud the possibility that the women also realize they did not need rituals all this time, she considers this possibility when she is alone. Although it takes a while for the girls to completely break away from this restricted lifestyle, King's long-time absence begins to change some ideas he puts on his daughters' minds at some point: "I love to cry, though. With King gone, I have forgotten to feel guilty about doing it," says Lia, for instance (Mackintosh 68). Thus, after King is lost, the practices he teaches to the girls start to be questioned and abandoned one by one. This demonstrates the causal relationship with the male authority and material practices: when the authority disappears, the practices created by this authority have the potential to lose their effect on the sisters. However, the fading effect of rituals and therapies after King's disappearance does not demonstrate that they did not affect the sisters before; their bodies carry the traces of these practices to some extent. Yet, they observe that they can survive if they do not engage in rituals especially after they meet the men, and this enables them to interpret their bodies as texts, and to take action accordingly.

A concluding note on this part of this chapter may work as a supplementary example of what was discussed until this point: Grosz' metaphor of Möbius strip. Mathematically, it is a strip that is formed through attaching a strip's end to the other end by a one-half twist. This shape produces a one-sided surface, and looks like "the inverted three-dimensional figure eight" (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* xii). Grosz takes this example to support her argument about how "[b]odies and minds are not two distinct substances or two kinds of attributes of a single substance but somewhere in between these two alternatives" (*Volatile Bodies* xii). She posits that the relationship between mind and body is similar to the Möbius strip:

> The Möbius strip has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another. This model also provides a way of problematizing and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of the one into the other, the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside. (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* xii)

In this way, Grosz also attempts to highlight the potential of bodies to demonstrate an action or resistance because it is as active as a mind is considered to be. Furthermore, thinking the body/mind relation as a Möbius strip renders it impossible to distinguish between the two. She argues that such a model can be helpful in the formulation of the understanding about sexual differences as well: neither only biology nor culture shapes the understanding about sexual differences (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* 191). Both of them affect each other, such a model as the Möbius strip evokes a new materialist understanding in that it rejects a priority or precedency between material entities and meanings. So, similar to the storied matter and body writing, the Möbius strip helps in the conceptualization about the intermingling between matter and meaning.

Besides a new materialist discussion regarding the issues dealt with in the novel, it would also prove useful to examine the examples of oppression that the women are subject to, and the sexist actions carried out by King to analyze the novel as a feminist dystopia. This, then, leads to a conclusion that the meaning of the toxic yields its place to a figurative toxicity of patriarchy. *The Water Cure* portrays a world in which patriarchal socialization prevails. Kate Millett argues that in a patriarchal society, the acknowledgement of women's subordination is done "through institutions such as the academy, the church, and the family, each of which justifies and reinforces women's

subordination to men" (35). In this way, women are subject to constant and repetitive subordination wherever they are, and this leads women to recognize their subordination either consciously or not. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir also elaborates on how men have been positioned as active, independent, and dominant in society while women as the opposite of these characteristics in many parts of the patriarchal world (567-95). In this way, a woman is pushed to a secondary position in society, hence hers is the second sex. Therefore, institutions including the family have substantial influence in shaping the position of women in social structures, as argued by Millett and Beauvoir. One can observe how such organization of society is shaped similarly in *The Water Cure* as well. For a long time, King manipulates his daughters and the other women coming to the island in such a way that they do not question the possibility of an alternative world where they do not need to participate in therapies. For example, Lia says: "It was a wonder that there were still safe places, islands like ours where women can be healthful and whole" (Mackintosh 12). She adds that "[i]nventing a new therapy always put him in an expansive, joyful mood [. . .] Day of happiness!" (12). Lia's statement about his father's happiness proves that he harms his daughters intentionally.

Beauvoir argues that the categorization and discrimination between men and women begins in the upbringing of children: "[T]he passivity that is the essential characteristic of the 'feminine' woman is a trait that develops in her from the earliest years. But it is wrong to assert that a biological datum is concerned; it is in fact a destiny imposed upon her by her teachers and by society" (284). Children learn how to identify and view themselves at a very early age by the institutions and people surrounding them. Millett also argues that in patriarchal societies, early childhood is determinative in learning the differences between sexes: "What does seem decisive in assuring the maintenance of the temperamental differences between the sexes is the conditioning of early childhood" (31). Sylvia Walby argues that this socialization goes hand in hand with a series of rewards and punishments (91). Therefore, by conditioning the child, patriarchal practices instill certain made-up ideas in the child's mind regarding the two sexes. Similarly, the island is the only place that the sisters know from childhood, so they do not know any alternative and safe places that they can go by their own will. To keep away from the toxic world, women (including the sisters Grace, Lia, and Sky) do not get close to any man, either. They try to distance themselves from

their husbands when their husbands come from a distant place, because they are conditioned in this way. These women are made to believe that they will be infected if they do not follow the regular precautions like the therapies and getting away from men and any other objects brought from the mainland. For this reason, they wear latex gloves before touching any object from the mainland (Mackintosh 31). Eventually, constant anxiety prevails throughout the novel. If they accidentally touch an object brought from outside the island, they start practicing breathing exercises or drinking salt water immediately (Mackintosh 22, 63, 177). These examples demonstrate how the patriarchal understanding constraints women's life when it is combined with certain material practices.

The practices of ice-bucket therapy, drowning game, love therapy, scream therapy, and breathing exercises that both the sisters and the women from the mainland participate in can be analyzed through the cultural perception of femininity and masculinity. Furthermore, because these practices are not ordinary exercises but are the ones that harm the women physically and psychologically, these are the products of patriarchal violence that aims social control over women (Walby 135). Moira Gatens suggests that "[m]asculinity and femininity as forms of sex-appropriate behaviours are manifestations of a historically based, culturally shared phantasy about male and female biologies" (*Imaginary Bodies* 13). She further argues that the concepts of masculinity and femininity are appropriated in accordance with one's sex, because for a certain period of time in history, the ovum was considered passive while the sperm active (Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies* 13). By extension, people regard penis as active because it can actively penetrate the vagina which is considered passive (although the forthcoming biological research maintains that "the ovum is not as passive as it appears—it rejects some sperm and only allows entry, or envelops, sperm(s) of its 'choice'" (Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies* 13). The sisters' life in the island is arranged according to such essentialism which typically exists in a patriarchal society. Because they are female, they inevitably fall under the category of feminine, which denotes features like passivity, docility, and susceptibility. They are forced to live on this remote island because of the danger of getting contaminated by the outside world. Besides the sisters, the women coming from the mainland to the island also believe that they need to protect

themselves against toxins; otherwise, they will die. So, as women, they are believed to have feminine features that include being sensitive to outside factors as well.

At this point, it would be better to clarify that King may not think that his daughters' bodies are fragile just because they are females—apparently, his most obvious aim is to suppress their life, the reason of which is not made clear in the novel. Also, if he thought that all females are fragile, then he would have to constrain her wife's life as well, but his wife does not join the purifying rituals. By any means, because of King's position in the family as the head and the oppression he exerts upon his daughters, it is an example of a patriarchal setting. According to the sisters' account, women used to visit King's house to participate in the therapies King makes up, until King is lost, which is stated in the very beginning of the novel: "Once we have a father, but our father dies without us noticing" (Mackintosh 3). Some of these women even stay in King's house, to get healed through these therapies. Not surprisingly, all of these therapies are challenging enough to harm the girls and other women. As part of the recovery process, women drink salt water, and throw up over and over again: "Their bodies convulsed. They lay on the floor but Mother helped them up, insistent" (Mackintosh 22). For the ice-bucket therapy, they put their hands and feet in ice water until they cannot feel their limbs. The drowning game, similarly, is built on enduring the suffering from a near-death experience: the sisters force themselves to stay underwater as long as they can. King forces them to stay below water until they feel like they will faint. Also, the love therapy includes, for instance, holding a flaming candle on the palm as long as they could. This, according to Mother (The mother's name is also referred to with capital letter "M" throughout the novel) and King, is a way to strengthen the body. However, it is obvious that these exercises are one of the ways that patriarchal violence manifests itself as a form of social control over women, as Walby also agrees—although Walby exemplifies only some of the most brutal violence such as rape in her book, she includes that other types of male violence can be deemed as a way of social control (135).

King and Mother call these painful practices under the name of therapy or a game to lessen the harmful reflections on their minds. At the end of each therapy, they are made to believe that they are better than before and purified of the toxins brought by air

and their husbands. The anxiety created by King about protecting the female body results in the containment of the body in a fixed place. To quote from Da Lunha Lewin:

> Mackintosh plays with the word "cure" as both a treatment and the process of preservation, suggesting the double-meaning that haunts the girls' lives. She contrasts the promise of protection and health with an eradication of desire and autonomy. To keep women "healthy" in the world of the novel is to keep them contained. (n.p.)

On that account, protecting the female body by containing it in a limited place is used as an alibi for patriarchal oppression, and can be observed as another way of social control. Another restriction enforced by King is that he does not allow her daughters to cry because it makes the girls' "energies suffocating" (Mackintosh 67). In this way, King makes up excuses for everything to control each step the daughters take:

> Crying lays you low and vulnerable, racks your body. If water is the cure for what ails us, the water that comes from our own faces and hearts is the wrong sort. It has absorbed our pain and is dangerous to let loose. Pathological despair was King's way of describing an emergency that needed cloth, confinement, our heads held underwater. What constituted an emergency was me and my sisters crying in unison, unable to stop. (Mackintosh 67-68)

There is a relationship between these toxic practices mentioned above and a misogynistic understanding that King and Mother embrace. The name of the father, King, and the toxicity he contains in a figurative sense are important elements in the novel. Both his words and actions are toxic while it is the literal toxins he claims to protect his daughters from. Even the name King speaks for itself: while mentioning their father, the girls do not call him father but "King." This indicates a hierarchy and distance within this family structure. Like a king of a territory, the father in the novel holds absolute power over his family. In this sense, the character King functions as a representation of both patriarchy and toxicity at the same time. Thus, the use of the double meanings of toxicity contributes to the critique of oppressive patriarchy. As Quinn argues, the novel is also about "the ways that families become their own toxic ecosystems" (n.p.). Lia's question in a way sums up this condition: "What must it be like, to live in a world that wants to kill you? Where every breath is an affront?" (Mackintosh 138). The world that wants to kill her is in fact the patriarchal order shaped as a contaminated environment. In addition, every breath is an affront both because she is made to believe that the air is poisonous and the patriarchal order monitors each step she takes. A similar double meaning of toxicity is obvious when Grace says: "James

could have contaminated me. Who knows what disease the men truly carry" (Mackintosh 231). Again, the danger that patriarchy holds is underlined through the words like disease and contamination.

The father excludes himself as a toxic individual although he is also a man who visits the mainland and the island on a regular basis. When he comes from the mainland after shopping, he does not get closer to the girls for three days; however, he still positions himself as less harmful than other men. This hypocrisy holds true every time he speaks of how other men are harmful to the girls' health. In this way, King also legitimizes his figurative toxicity as well with the excuse of the real threat of toxicity: "One of us daughters always fainted [. . .] When that happened, King would become agitated. 'You see?' he would tell us as we surrounded the fallen sister, as we flicked water against skin. 'You see how quickly you'd die out there?'" (Mackintosh 29). In this way, King reiterates the vulnerability of his daughters. When they ask about how the men beyond the border are, King

> spoke of perverse appetites. He spoke of bodies grown strong despite the toxic air, men like trees grown against the wind, knotted, warped. Some thrived on the poison; it was like their bodies had learned not just to overcome, but to need it. He spoke of danger. Men like that tracked around the toxins carelessly. You would feel the effect in their breath, the touch of their hands. Men like that would break your arm without thinking. 'Like this,' he had said, demonstrating on us [. . .] 'And worse.' (Mackintosh 41)

In this way, in addition to the physical manipulation, King manipulates his daughters by telling certain lies about men. Mother, as part of the patriarchal institution of family, considers that "daughters are hard-wired for betrayal" (Mackintosh 14). For this reason, she believes that her daughters can kill her at any time while she is sleeping. One day after the mother sees Lia with Llew—who recently arrives at the island with his brother and son—in the same room, she rearranges the existing rules. She demonstrates that she has been fighting for her daughters' safety for years, and implies that the daughters "should feel guilty about this [. . .] Daughters are always thankless, we know by now [. . .] We're vain, senseless, arrogant" (Mackintosh 73). In this sense, the mother, who internalizes the patriarchal practices already, acts as toxically as King.

The author, professor, and old psychotherapist Phyllis Chesler studies the issue of patriarchal imposed necessity in her book *Women and Madness*. According to her, "[m]any intrinsically valuable female traits, such as intuitiveness or compassion, have

probably been developed through default or patriarchal imposed necessity, rather than through either biological predisposition or free choice" (Chesler 318). This patriarchal imposed necessity exists in the novel as well, and it creates similar characteristics that are claimed to belong to women such as being fragile. In this sense, the daughters are taught that they are frail simply because they are female. The fact that Mother as a healthy female character behaves in this way is a proof that their claim about frailty is a fabrication: the mother cares so much about the therapies the daughters perform every day; however, she does not join them. Yet, still, she keeps being healthy and protected from toxins. Chesler explains: "Women who live in patriarchal settings are defined by certain traits, or by the absence of other traits" (319). King's daughters and other women that come to the island are defined with several attributes in the same way as Chesler states. For example, the women are made to internalize the belief that they are fragile human beings, unlike men. Because of this, they believe that they need constant affection, which eventually turns out to restrict each of their steps. In addition, binary oppositions are being practiced repeatedly: women belong to nature and men to culture. As Chesler analyzes: "Men are often victims of nature but women are 'nature.' When women seek to be something other than 'natural,' they experience their limitations or victimization at human male hands, and usually not through earthly—or divine—circumstances" (319). According to this understanding, one can expect a woman to act more emotionally or lose her mental health more easily because she belongs to this category. On the contrary, men belong to the category of culture that shapes and dictates the "raw" nature. Correspondingly, King as a male figure creates the therapies to dictate and control the female body constantly.

Another example of this relationship between patriarchy and toxic gendered practices in the novel is that it is always women who are portrayed by King to be in danger. At the end of the novel, Grace points to this fact and says that

> There was so much you and Mother kept from us about our own bodies. Let us think them incapable, weak, when nothing could be further from the truth. Kept us only in a twilight health, our bones always painful, our teeth rotting where they lay in our mouths. Vitamin pills [. . .] 'Deadly for your sisters,' Mother intoned darkly. When she turned away I was able to read the back of the packet, which said otherwise. (Mackintosh 228)

Thus, after a certain point, the daughters begin to realize the lies told to them. Throughout the novel, Lia is represented as the most emotional, fragile, and naïve

female character. She usually cries, and her family tries to act carefully around her so that she will not be affected by what is going on around her. One can draw a parallel between Lia's situation and the condition of hysteria considering the history of the emergence of this condition. According to Gilbert and Gubar, hysteria in fact by definition is a "female disease" (53). The root of the word, "hyster" means womb in the Greek language (Gilbert and Gubar 53). Back in the nineteenth century, people believed that women display symptoms of hysteria because of their womb that causes this disease: "[T]hroughout the nineteenth century this mental illness, like many other nervous disorders, was thought to be caused by the female reproductive system, as if to elaborate upon Aristotle's notion that femaleness was in and of itself a deformity" (Gilbert and Gubar 53). However, it is not related to the fact that they have wombs, but these diseases are the result of patriarchal socialization in various ways, so, "patriarchal socialization literally makes women sick, both physically and mentally" (Gilbert and Gubar 53). This is particularly the point that Mackintosh indicates in *The Water Cure*: Lia realizes that she survives even after Llew kisses her on the mouth because nothing bad happened to her. For Lia and her sisters, this was an inconceivable concept, because they are brought up with the thought that men are filled with toxins, and they should not get closer to them. Hence, this makes Lia question the earlier times when she felt sick, supposing that it was because of the toxins brought by men. What they can conclude is that all the precautions taken against the toxins throughout the years are only one way to keep them under control.

Parallel to Gilbert and Gubar's arguments, Da Kunha Lewin, too, points to the issue of feminine disease in her article, referring to the rituals and tests performed in *The Water Cure*. She relates these rituals to the old treatment methods of women's bodies: "The 'therapies' seem to directly link to various treatments used by doctors in Western medicine for a variety of 'feminine' ailments'" (n.p.). She also points to the fact that the relationship between water and the treatment of the female body dates back to older times, and water was used to heal young women who experience hysteria for a long time. With the history of the healing of the "female diseases" in mind, one can argue that both the emergence and the treatment of conditions like hysteria are totally biased. Furthermore, such diseases "were not always byproducts of their [the Victorian women's] training in femininity; they were the goals of such training," say Gilbert and

Gubar (54). Therefore, it is an organized schedule from the very beginning: train women according to the rules created by patriarchy, wait for them to show symptoms of psychological disorders, and pretend to treat these disorders.

Although Gilbert and Gubar focus on the Victorian era, the practices they elaborate on draw several parallels to Mackintosh's twenty-first-century feminist dystopia: King creates a territory for the daughters claiming that this is the safest place in this toxic world. Then, he makes his daughters believe that they need to practice certain rituals repeatedly not to get sick. As a result, the girls suppose that each time they feel sick, it is because they did something against their father's instruction. However, it is highly possible that the fact that they feel sick is the result of psychological pressure from King. Therefore, when the daughters get sick or feel sick, it may be a psychological effect on their bodies. Building on the arguments put forward by Chesler and Gilbert and Gubar, an analysis of hysterical symptoms made by Moira Gatens can contribute to this discussion. Gatens elaborates on this issue by arguing that "all human beings have an investment (both positive and negative) in their own bodies and in the bodies of others" (*Imaginary Bodies* 31). She adds that this investment demonstrates itself in conditions like hysteria and anorexia; however, she states, "it is not only through the existence of these pathologies that we are made aware of our investments in the body" (*Imaginary Bodies* 31). On the other hand, "[o]rdinary friendships, familial and love relations reveal our investments in the bodies of those we love or admire by the way in which we typically 'acquire' their gestures, movements, habits of speech, and so on" (*Imaginary Bodies* 31). This indicates that certain social practices have an influence on the occurrence of hysterical symptoms, which also appear in *The Water Cure*: one of the sisters always faints when King goes to the mainland. Gatens also argues that the fact that hysterical symptoms appear to be homogenous is indicative of the social character of the body (*Imaginary Bodies* 12). In this sense, various historical and cultural factors shape this condition, and these factors include "a shared language; the shared psychical significance and privileging of various zones of the body [. . .] and common institutional practices and discourses (for example, medical, juridical and educational) which act on and through the body" (Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies* 12). As a result of these intermingling of the body with such factors, individuals express certain hysterical symptoms, which signals body's agency.

N. K. Jemisin approaches this issue in her review from a similar perspective and then asks how much money King has to have in order to maintain a family of five on a distant island, and adds:

> The family does get some income, it is implied, by treating women from the mainland [. . .] But since the reader also knows that being drowned has never cured women of any thing— quite the opposite— we are left to wonder what King has told these women, and why they believe him. And how powerful that belief must be, since sometimes the cure seems to be effective. (Jemisin 8)

Again, just as it is a psychological effect for the girls to feel sick and become hysteric, it is a similar effect to feel better after they complete the therapy of that day. In this sense, the meaning of toxic is questioned once again, as suggested by Annalisa Quinn: "We used to talk about patriarchy, rule by men, which carries a sense of top-down power and hierarchy. But now we talk about toxic masculinity, which instead reminds us of a poison that sickens poisoners and victims alike" (n.p.). In *The Water Cure*, there is both patriarchy and toxic masculinity. The family is ruled by the father whose name is even King, which resonates a patriarchal order. Toxic masculinity also prevails throughout the novel and when King reminds her daughters that they are vulnerable and they need to practice the purifying exercises. Furthermore, this toxic masculinity, to use Quinn's words, sickens the poisoners—King and Mother—in that both of them have to live in this unmanned island with their daughters, and one of them, the mother, is even killed in the end.

At the end of the chapter called "Men," there is an account of one of the women who write in the Welcome Book—in which the "damaged women" write their reasons for coming to King's house. It says: "It's an old story and I'm so tired of telling it – the oldest story in the world and yet I can't put it down, I can't stop it from dragging on my body, so don't make me tell it again. The story doesn't end or even begin with me. You can imagine. You can tell it to yourself" (Mackintosh 211). This is a loaded account because one can read this "old story" as the history of patriarchy. It is an old story which involves "patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby 20). Like many women subject to patriarchal tyranny, the woman who writes these words is also frustrated by this, and she is aware that patriarchy has left its marks on her body, and she cannot get rid of it completely however hard she tries. Her account also carries hopeless meanings because

she believes that what she has been through will not be the last unjust practice women will be subject to under patriarchy.

The argument by Elizabeth Grosz may contribute to a better understanding of the marks left by patriarchy on the female body. Referring to Foucault, Grosz states that "bodies are objects of knowledges," and bodies are affected and molded by several instruments such as working, food or moral laws ("Inscriptions" 63). Grosz also elaborates on Foucault's argument of power's inscription on bodies. She contends that the inscription of bodies occurs in two ways: one of them is violent, and the other is not explicitly violent but still coercive ("Inscriptions" 63). The violent way of inscribing the body is conducted in institutions such as prisons, hospitals, and psychiatric institutions. Here, the acts of violence may include the use of electricity for a shock therapy, or a police officer's beating and bruising a criminal's body. The second type of inscription is, however, more related to what Grace, Lia, and Sky experience. Grosz states that the "less openly aggressive but no less coercive" means of inscribing the body include "its [body's] rituals of exercise and diet, all more or less 'voluntary' inscriptions by lifestyle, habits, and behaviours" ("Inscriptions" 63). She adds that through these practices, "bodies are marked so as to make them amenable to the prevailing exigencies of power" (63). Considering the sisters' way of living on the island, one can find similarities between Grosz's argument and the exercises the sisters do. In this sense, the precautions like rituals taken against catching toxins mark the sisters' bodies in certain ways: their bodies feel the need to join the drowning game when they skip or forget to do it even for one day. Or, the scream therapy makes them feel relieved:

> Scream therapy then, in the early days, was supposed to tap our feelings out of us, allow us to expel the excess through the mouth [. . .] A pause, a breath. We gathered ourselves and then we let loose, we opened our mouths as wide as they would go and the blood flooded my face, there was no more air. My cheeks were wet with unexpected tears. It was such a relief, to do that. It was such a relief. (Mackintosh 44)

In this way, King inscribes his daughters' body with the help of exercises and by containing them in a certain fixed place. This inscription of the female body, constant gaze upon it, and the means to control this body contribute to the dystopian features of the novel.

*The Water Cure* incorporates several elements that appear in feminist dystopias. In this sense, one may argue that it is a more or less feminist dystopia if one needs to categorize it under a genre. Ildney Cavalcanti elaborates on this genre and contends:

> Despite the impossibility of devising the parameters which enable any conclusive judgements, one can reasonably argue that the narratives referred to as feminist dystopias here render pictures of imaginary spaces which most contemporary readers would describe as "bad places" for women because they are characterized by the suppression of female desire and by the institution of gender-inflected oppressive orders. ("Articulating" 9)

Cavalcanti highlights that oppression of the female body and mind is the main denominator of a fiction of feminist dystopia. Considering this quality, one of the reasons *The Water Cure* can be labelled as feminist dystopia is that it includes an oppressive male figure like King. In addition, the novel includes elements like surveillance and control of behaviors and actions of female characters. Suppression of female desire also exists and it is evident in Lia's case. She is very attracted to Llew, but her mother does not allow her to approach him. Control of the female body is also carried out by regular rituals and constant gaze upon the sisters.

Not only is the female body controlled, but it is also adjusted and inscribed as Grosz well explains above, which signals the aspect of the novel that is open to a new materialist interpretation. This exemplifies the oppressive order Cavalcanti states, and also, she indicates that "[t]he feminist dystopias portray patriarchal 'hells' of oppression, discrimination, and violence against women, thus mapping our contemporary social environment" ("Articulating" 1). The discrimination Cavalcanti mentions also takes place in the novel. King's daughters are not allowed to read magazines. On the other hand, Mother can read them, says Lia: "Magazines for Mother, handed over in three layers of paper bags and handled lightly by us sisters, who were forbidden to read them" (Mackintosh 30). They know how to read, and they can read the Welcome Book, but not a magazine coming from outside of the island. This is a useful strategy for King as the daughters cannot know what is happening in the real world. On the other hand, they can read the Welcome Book because it includes stories that they are familiar with—stories that motivate them to stay exactly where they are. In this way, the control and oppression are ensured through the disciplining of the female body. Cavalcanti includes violence as well in her analysis of the genre of feminist dystopia. Although violence towards women is not mostly presented in an obvious way,

violence manifests itself in various forms such as the challenging rituals and therapies. This kind of violence corresponds to the second type of Grosz's conceptualization of inscription of bodies, which denotes less explicitly aggressive (than violent inscription) but equally coercive inscription (Grosz, "Inscriptions" 63). In that sense, women force their bodies to complete the rituals no matter if their bodies fail to do them or not, because King repeatedly reminds them of the negative consequences of not following the practices. The fact that the sisters are not permitted to read something other than the Welcome Book is another type of violence exerted upon their freedom. So, all these elements enable the novel to be associated with a feminist dystopia.

Besides involving feminist dystopian elements, the novel hints at references to the concepts of utopia and dystopia by definition as well. For instance, at the very end of the novel, Lia kills Llew, and when leaving the island, the sisters look at Llew's body and say: "Our eyes avoid Llew, lying in the same place we left him. 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*. We hope they will see him and tell others of the dangerous women who discovered a way to save themselves" (Mackintosh 246). The message that says "this is no place" is closely related to the idea of utopia. By definition, "outopia" means "no place," serving Lyman Tower Sargent's definition of utopia which states "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space" (*British* 154). However, "utopia" is the combination of both no place (ou-topos) and good place (eu-topos) as Thomas More meant when he coined the word by taking the Greek roots of these words. A utopia is a no place because there is no exact setting like that of a utopian fiction in this world. It is also a good place because it refers to a better way of living compared to the current one. However, the island in the novel has always been, in fact, the bad place, in other words, dys-topia. Considered totally from the sisters' point of view, Sargent's definition of dystopia fits in describing their condition: "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" (*British* 154). Therefore, although the island is portrayed like a utopia at first, —both by the author and Mother and King—it ends up being a dystopia for the sisters because they are subject to various restrictions and control by a patriarchal figure. Furthermore, their realization about this

restriction develops gradually, and the actions they take against this way of living occur only through the end of the novel, and the novel ends just when the sisters cross the border. For this reason, the rebellion against this dystopian setting is not included in detail as opposed to the plots of the well-known feminist dystopian fictions such as *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The disappointment with the island's failure to meet the expectation of being a utopia is stated in the novel openly: "I think of Mother over dinner, one evening a long time ago, telling us, 'Even if it is a failed utopia, at least we tried'" (Mackintosh 222). This indicates that possibly, Mother wanted the island to be a good place for her daughters, yet she acknowledges that she and King failed this mission, and it harmed the girls eventually. Grace also expresses her disappointment about the island's expected quality of being a utopia:

> I have always believed our home to be an island. A healing place, untouched, something skipped over and forgotten. A geographical miracle. But it is mainland, like everywhere else. It is just another part of the coarse, toxic earth. You lied to us about this. And so what else? (Mackintosh 220)

One can extend Grace's disappointment about the island to her father: the father is not different from the so-called toxic men living on the mainland in the same way the island is not so much different from the mainland. The reason is that the island they are living in has King inside, who turns his daughters' life into a nightmare. At this point, Deborah Wills' argument about the ephemeral quality of feminist utopia is relevant to Grace's words: "[W]hile the traditional utopia and dystopia might be diagrammed as polar opposites, as prophecies or visions which negate or contradict each other, the feminist utopia and the feminist dystopia are more like images in a mirror, evidencing strange reversals but recognizable as the same image" (41). Corresponding to Wills' standpoint, the boundary between the utopia and dystopia for the sisters has already been blurred for a long time. Wills adds that "for women, utopia is always the anomalous blip on the time-line; the utopian moment is always blessed but ephemeral. Even in the most utopian of feminist imaginings, there is never world enough and time" (42). Hence, the utopian moment is fed by a dystopian past as well as an assertion about a forthcoming dystopian future (Wills 43). In this way, even "[t]he subtext of the feminist utopia is always dystopia," says Wills (48).

In connection with the link between feminist dystopia and feminist utopia, the novel is built on various binary oppositions as well as on their encounter with each other. For instance, there are damaged women on the mainland and healthy women on the island, and they meet at King's house. Other dichotomies include mainland and island, toxic and healthy (men), clean and dirty (air), right actions and wrong actions. Each of these elements meets at a common ground at some point in the novel: the alleged toxic men (Llew and James) arrive at the island where healthy women live. These encounters can be an example for Will's argument about the ephemeral quality of feminist utopia and permanence of feminist dystopia. Understanding this reality, the sisters say: "We leave behind our clothes, our weapons, our loved things. We do not even take canteens to hold our water. All the objects stay behind, and we rejoice" (Mackintosh 247). The island has been a permanent dystopia for Grace for a long time, because she gets pregnant, and the baby whom she gives birth to is from King. King tells Grace that she is not his biological child, so it is not a problem that they have a baby. The mother is complicit in this as well: "I asked for a memory about my real father, made bold by the changes in myself, but she [Mother] refused. She kept it from me because she could. I did not want her to be a fellow woman. Sometimes she was my enemy and sometimes she was just my mother, an enemy in a different way" (Mackintosh 228). Grace is also sad about what they have been through all these years: "You still have so many years of your life ahead of you,' James said. He looks at me with unbearable pity. *And too many years behind me*, I want to tell him. They gather like a bank of water. Like a heavy wave. I cannot forget those years, let them break over me. I will not" (Mackintosh 223). Hence, the promise of feminist utopia easily turns into an outcome of feminist dystopia as exemplified in the novel as well.

As part of the feminist dystopian tradition, resistance against the oppression and restriction by the patriarchy appears at some point in a feminist dystopian fiction. As Wills argues, body is important in resisting in dystopias: "Within the dystopian cultural economy, the body is the most important place in which resistance can be situated, and is therefore the only place it is clearly represented" (52). The reason for this is that oppression is exercised mostly on the freedom of the body's mobility in dystopias. Regarding this issue about body, Grosz has a similar argument to that of Wills: Grosz considers the body as a site of resistance besides being a site of knowledge-power. She

adds: “[I]t [body] exerts a recalcitrance, and always entails the possibility of a counterstrategic reinscription, for it is capable of being self-marked, self-represented in alternative ways” (Grosz “Inscriptions” 63). Although an example of such recalcitrance and resistance makes up only a few pages of the novel, it is depicted in quite a brutal way, and through bodily resistance. Through the end of the novel, the sisters learn from James that Mother is not lost, but is killed by Llew because she humiliated him once. James says that it was a self-defense, but Llew apparently did not foresee that such self-defense would lead to such an unfortunate result. (Mackintosh 223-24). He also helped Llew to close Mother’s eyes, putting fishing weights and leave her to the sea, says James. After learning this, Grace temporizes and grabs her knife and stabs it into James’ neck, and kills him. She says that “[i]t is the quieter option, the one that feels right. I am surviving, the way you [King] taught me” (Mackintosh 226). Later, Grace convinces Lia to kill Llew with a gun, and she does it. Hence, once they run out of other solutions such as escaping the island whenever they want, the sisters choose to remove the obstacles in their way first. This becomes possible through resisting with their body. This is, however, is also a risky move. As Wills contends: “The paradox of the resisting body is that it is also a body constrained, opened at one’s own risk” (54). So, the sisters may have failed their mission while trying to kill the men. In that case, their life may be at risk. Still, although their bodies are constrained in certain ways, the sisters manage to resist with the same oppressed bodies. This, again, contributes to the discussion of the agency of body in this study.

There is also anger that is building up in the body as well as constant constraint on the body. As a result of this, as Grace rightly says: “There is a new ruthlessness in me, or maybe it has always been there, waiting for the emergency—maybe you were the one to see it first, were right about us all along” (226). The sisters’ realization about the longtime oppression they are subject to ends up in a reaction such as ending the men’s lives. This kind of resistance demonstrates that a feminist dystopia can present scenarios which do not acknowledge the irretrievable despair of dystopia. However, this does not mean that it can turn into a complete feminist utopia after female characters succeed in resisting. As noted above, the dystopian past has the potential to haunt the female characters at some point. In such a case, one would not speak of a feminist utopia.

However, the ending of such dystopias can still indicate a hope for change, if not a promise of a utopian world.

Sargent examines this situation of hope from the other way around: he defines the "critical utopia" in which there are "difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve and which takes a critical view of the utopian genre" ("The Three Faces" 9). He does not provide a definition of a possible "critical dystopia;" however, he states that attention must be paid for a possibility of a critical dystopia ("The Three Faces" 9). In this case, a critical dystopia incorporates elements of hope that enable to subvert the dystopian order. Cavalcanti uses the term "critical" to refer to some feminist dystopias for the same reason mentioned above, and states that

> Regarding their function, it was stated that these fictions offer a critique of contemporary patriarchal society by foregrounding gender oppression. In so doing, they work as an antidote to the banalization of mysogyny that characterizes our society. Accompanying the negativity of this critique, I have observed a utopian impulse, both in the form of the women characters' resistance to dystopic orders and states, and of the projection of alternative possibilities. ("Articulating" 14)

On that account, as a genre, feminist dystopia is intrinsically critical, and in addition, they may carry elements of hope (Cavalcanti, "Articulating" 8). In this way, such critical dystopias differ from classical dystopias which leave no room for hope. In other words, Cavalcanti argues that utopian potential is already embodied in feminist critical dystopias, "because they are in themselves acts of hope and the products of a utopian imagination" ("Articulating" 31). Taking these arguments into account, *The Water Cure* can be an example of a feminist critical dystopia as well. The ending of the novel hints at new chapters and more freedom in the sisters' life.

This chapter thus analyzes Mackintosh's *The Water Cure* in terms of how it can be analyzed as a feminist (critical) dystopia by incorporating a new materialist perspective. The fear of getting intoxicated by the toxins brought from the mainland has considerably shaped the sisters' daily practices. The existence of toxins is mostly assumed in their minds, and apparently, the symptoms women's bodies show result from other reasons in relation to their patriarchal surrounding, which is indicative of the mutual shaping process between body and mind. Similarly, women in the island practicing the water rituals convince themselves that the water really cures them without questioning if their symptoms may result from other reasons such as psychological

manipulation by the male figures in their surroundings, or from other reasons like malnutrition. Matter, no matter if it is nonhuman, inorganic, or physically immobile, leads these people to take certain actions and embrace a certain way of outlook on their way of living. In this sense, matter has the capacity to influence actions. Therefore, both the agency of the body and the intentional inscription on the bodies of female characters play a critical role in understanding this novel as a feminist dystopia.

Besides the psychological manipulation by King, there is a serious oppression exerted on the female characters' bodies. Furthermore, the specific use of objects and matter such as muslins, talismans, and water, and their physical effects that are observed on the bodies entail a new materialist reading of this novel. Ultimately, the existing oppression in the novel is linked to a physical matter, object, or body: the sisters are not allowed to read magazines, which is a restriction on their bodies, for instance. In addition to that, they have to attend the rituals no matter if they feel that they need these rituals or not, which is another oppression exerted through materials on their bodies. Furthermore, their bodies eventually react to these challenging rituals either through hysterical symptoms or in other ways such as throwing up. In this sense, the body gets involved in this intervention, and works through the inscription methods—in Grosz's terms—together. Body's agency through coworking with factors such as anxiety, manipulation, water, and engaging with various objects does not only present itself as symptoms. As observed at the end of the novel, it can manifest resistant and violent actions, such as killing a man. In this regard, body is fully capable of action and reaction, instead of being a passive and inert substance waiting to be written over. Because of this both oppressive and oppressed potential of bodies as well as objects and things in shaping the lives of the characters, *The Water Cure* portrays the importance of analyzing matter's agency in both senses as a feminist dystopian fiction. The double meaning of toxicity is blatantly obvious for the sisters at the end of the novel: they realize that what is toxic is not other people outside of the island; on the contrary, the toxic people, in its figurative sense, live in the same house with the sisters throughout this time. Also, the island can be considered as a dystopia for the sisters because of the oppression and control that they are subject to. Finally, the novel can be considered as feminist critical dystopia because of the potential to find a way out of this patriarchal order.

# CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored how dystopian novels such as Naomi Alderman's *The Power* and Sophie Mackintosh's *The Water Cure* can be analyzed through a new materialist critique. New materialism highlights the interplay between human and nonhuman entities, and it indicates that both entities have an intricate way of interacting or intra-acting with one another. In other words, our environment, bodies, all nonhuman entities, cultural and social systems are inextricably dependent on this intra-action. From this vantage point, the interplay between humans and nonhuman entities has the capacity to bring out dystopian worlds as well, because of the agency of these nonhuman matters. In that sense, agency manifests itself in both forms. One is the agency of matter in itself, which denotes its capacity for self-transformation. The other form of agency reveals itself when something is put to use by human beings. Both types of agencies can become determinative in individuals' social relationships and their status in society. For this reason, the specific ways that individuals engage with matter can result in a dystopia as exemplified in the selected novels in this study. For instance, one may use electrical power in a way to oppress, threaten, and control others. When this becomes a widespread oppression in society, it might lead to dystopias. Ultimately, oppression and control of groups of individuals are the main constitutive elements of dystopias. While oppression is ensured via elements like rhetoric in some dystopias, it is ensured through the interaction with matter besides other elements in dystopias like *The Power* and *The Water Cure.* Furthermore, the turning points and upcoming resistance are also dependent on the engagement with materialities. For this reason, analyzing the material conditions in such novels helps one to construe the dystopian pattern in an intricate way in such novels.

This study has further analyzed in which ways and to what extent humans' engagement with matter can possibly result in. To this end, the material conditions of each setting in *The Power* and *The Water Cure* are examined separately and in detail. It has indicated that these selected novels share certain common elements in addition to the characters' close relationship with matter. One of them is the changing power relationships mainly between male and female characters. Another common element is the dystopian setting in which characters are under constant oppression and

surveillance. In both novels, all these three elements meet at a common ground at a certain period as nonhuman matters have the pivotal role to transform the settings into places where inequality rules and dystopic visions emerge.

This thesis has more specifically argued that in *The Power*, the skein is the most crucial form of matter that directs the systems of politics, economics, and the social. The new materialist agency of the skein yields its place in time to agency as an instrument to realize certain goals oriented towards domination and control by individuals that possess the skein. After the female characters get to know how to control their skein, they begin to use it against male characters and/or for gaining political, financial and social influence. This specific wielding of skein, however, leads to the restructuring of gender roles in society as it follows from this that women as the sole possessors of the skein become a dominant and oppressive group in society. In time, people associate the physical skein power with the meaning of political, social, and economic power because of the way it is wielded. However, the desire to maintain this power in both ways is accompanied by violence, oppression, and discrimination against men in society. Furthermore, it brings an end to certain characters' life such as Tatiana, because of her inability to consider the potential enemy near herself. Due to this extensive impact of the skein power, it is argued that both the literal and figurative power of the skein prepares the way to a dystopia in which women dominate all types of fields in the world. The study has also suggested that because of the striking similarities between the novel's setting and a traditional patriarchal world, it can be read as an effective critique of patriarchy. It criticizes patriarchy by mimicking a similar one with female oppressors who practice the same oppression that a typical patriarchal order already does. By doing this, Alderman also indicates that oppression and the blind pursuit of power result in disorder no matter if it is a patriarchal or matriarchal society.

In *The Water Cure*, a similar oppression occurs as it does in *The Power*; however, the one in *The Water Cure* comes directly from the patriarchal figure, King. The exercise of power and the resistance to such cruel conduct of power are in close relationship with the bodies of the victims, the women. For his daughters and women from the mainland, King arranges a space—the island—where he can isolate and subjugate them easily. For this, King benefits from certain methods such as different

types of therapies and rituals which include challenging practices with/under water, and with objects such as muslins. In addition, for a long time, King and Mother instill their daughters with the notion that their bodies are fragile and open to destruction easily. It can be observed that both the verbal manipulation and material practices like therapies affect the women's bodies negatively: they faint, throw up, or show various other symptoms. On the other hand, body happens to be the field where resistance begins: the sisters begin to quit joining in therapies, and realize how their bodies can function well without these compulsory practices. Similarly, they resist with their bodies by killing James and Llew, or by escaping the island. Since there is a possibility of a new life for the sisters at the end of the novel, *The Water Cure* can be called a feminist critical dystopia. Unlike a classical dystopia, a critical dystopia offers a sign of hope, and a way out of the repressive system in a dystopian setting. The sisters resist the dystopic patriarchal order by crossing the border of the island, and this hints at a new alternative way of living for them, which signals a feminist critical dystopia. Since patriarchal oppression is ensured mostly through the oppression of female bodies ending up in a dystopic world, studies of new materialism, gender, and feminist dystopia have provided fruitful insights in the discussion of the novel, particularly in relation to understanding its feminist dystopian elements. Compared to *The Power*, *The Water Cure* provides a criticism of patriarchy by incorporating a male character that has the leading role in the organization of this patriarchal order.

In both novels, the issue of oppression and patriarchy is commonly dealt with, though from different points of departure: although *The Power* portrays a matriarchal system, the operation of this system is exactly the same as that of patriarchy as both rely on sexism, psychological and physical violence against the subordinated group. In *The Water Cure,* the existence of patriarchy is directly represented through the existence of King: as a typical patriarchal figure, who restricts his daughters' lives via employing sexist rhetoric, depriving them of their freedom, dominating them not only through their bodies but also their psychology. In both novels, the oppressive system draws its strength mainly from specific material practices such as wielding a skein in *The Power* and forcing women to do water rituals in *The Water Cure.* Accordingly, women's bodily changes through these practices direct the dystopian order either to persist or

cease. The dystopia persists in *The Power* until the Cataclysm, and it comes to a halt when the sisters understand the true aim of their parents in *The Water Cure*.

It is demonstrated in this study that analyzing oppression and power only in terms of socially-constructed concepts would mean ignoring the bodily and material factors that significantly contribute to or have an effect on this power relationships. For this reason, the study has highlighted the importance of giving equal attention to both materiality and socially constructed concepts while analyzing the nature of power relations. It is indicated that both of them shape and transform each other. In *The Power*, for instance, the political and capital aims of the characters shape the wielding of the material power of the skein. This wielding of power affect and even harm certain characters physically, and this results in consequences such as shaping the societal order that constructs a dystopic world for men. In this way, this becomes a cycle in which both the material power of skein and the ideological aims of wielding the skein affect and transform each other constantly, which entails a new materialistic outlook. Similarly, in *The Water Cure*, the patriarchal aims and the specific use of matter such as water work hand in hand: as long as women do the rituals and practices, King can maintain his patriarchy. The prevalence of this patriarchy also depends on the maintenance of such bodily practices to a large extent. Therefore, to understand the dystopian features of these selected works, attention needs to be paid both to matter and other oppressive and ideological tools.

All in all, the present study has shed light on these contemporary novels by incorporating critical perspectives that draw on new materialism, dystopian studies and gender theories. It has contributed to the dystopian studies in that it involves matter and new materialism in the analysis of the novels, which is not the conventional way of analyzing dystopian fiction and which aims to emphasize matter's agency in dystopic power relations and gender issues. In this sense, the study paves the way for future possibilities of reading both the traditional and contemporary dystopian fiction through the lens of new materialism. It has investigated possible answers to the question of how an individual's engagement with the material world can determine their position in society. This thesis concludes that the interaction between human and nonhuman entities besides their agency have the potential to determine the dynamics of gender and

power relations, and the literal and figurative senses of power and toxicity become enmeshed, which ultimately creates dystopian systems as portrayed in *The Power* and *The Water Cure.*

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