
The Paradox of Protection: A Feminist Analysis of the Docile Female Bodies in The Water Cure

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Abstract

Sophie Mackintosh's The Water Cure (2018) depicts three sisters raised in isolation, their bodies subjected to disciplinary "cures" in the name of protection and survival. Existing scholarship has read the novel through eco-feminism, immunising insularity, and meta-modernism, but has not examined its female characters through the lens of embodied docility. Drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of docility in Discipline and Punish and Sandra Bartky's feminist extension of it, this paper argues that the novel constructs docile female bodies through three interlocking mechanisms: moralising control as protection, curbing autonomy through internalised self-surveillance, and regulating female sexuality under the premise of survival. Reading these mechanisms together, the paper shows how power operates on women's bodies not through overt coercion but by reframing oppression as care, a dynamic that extends Foucault's and Bartky's theories into a contemporary dystopian register and clarifies how protection rhetoric can function as a mechanism of control.

Keywords: docile bodies; dystopian fiction; The Water Cure; discipline and power; female autonomy

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Introduction

The Water Cure by Sophie Mackintosh, a dystopian writer, published in 2018, follows the lives of three sisters, namely Lia, Sky, and Grace, raised on a remote island. The King and their mother constructed a toxic, contaminated understanding of the outer world, deeply instilling fear, isolation, and regulation in their lives. Under the guidance of their parents, they undergo various cures that are designed to 'protect' and 'strengthen' them. Through the instance of the three men entering the island, the novel's narrative challenges the ideology the sisters were conditioned with, formulating contradiction and making them face the reality of their condition. The novel not only focuses on the haunting atmosphere but also on the subtle constructions of power and its implications on the lives of the three sisters. The novel popularly utilised the 'water cure' that consisted of drowning the bodies of the three sisters until they were unable to breathe, making the nature of control absolute in the process. The implication of power takes place through the structured form of discipline, which played an important role in the narrative. The bodies of the daughters were constantly monitored and controlled in the name of safety. The novel showcases the deeper realities of power and how it operates in a subtle yet powerful manner, especially upon the bodies of women.

The novel *The Water Cure* has been explored through the lens of dystopian eco-feminism, a failed immunising insularity narrative, and Meta-modernism. The scholar Almaarroof explores the novel through the lens of eco-feminism, utilising the ideas of the eco-feminist Vandana Shiva to highlight the domination faced by both nature and women. The scholar critiques the patriarchal society that dominated and controlled not only women, but also nature. The realities of the oppressive structure of human society were explored in depth. The scholar thus provides an ecological lens of marginalisation faced by nature and women. The writer, Rossi, explored the failed nature of immunising insularity, the idea central to the plot. The writer deeply explores the island of residence that was the symbol of immunising insularity, which, instead of protecting the daughters, provides the outer world access to the women seeking shelter on the island, thus exploring the failure of the 'purity' logic. The scholar Dhamani analysed the novel through the lens of meta-modernism, connecting the themes of marginalised women and toxic family dynamics to the larger issues of 21st-century society. The paper explores the domination faced by women not only by men, but also by the women of the society. In the novel, the daughters were made to procure the benefits of the 'cures' by their mother, critiquing the internalisation of patriarchy in human society. The underlying argument highlights the urgency of the issues presented in the novel as real-world issues. The scholars thus analyse the novel through the ideas of eco-feminism, a failed immunising insularity narrative and Meta-modernism.

Even though the novel *The Water Cure* has been explored through the lens of eco-feminism, insularity, and Meta-modernism, existing research, as suggested earlier, lacks the exploration of the novel and its characters, especially the female characters, through the lens of bodies. Rather, the 'trapped' nature of the female bodies in the novel. The why question explores why the novel, *The Water Cure*, utilises the construction of docile female bodies through the ideas of cure and survival. It establishes the core idea of the paper, i.e. the construction of the docile female bodies and their correlation through the lens of cure and survival. The ideas of protection are tied to discipline and safety, to obedience. This embedded belief shapes their understanding of the world and their identities that are moulded by the same idea. The 'cures' are presented as mediums of protection, sensitising pain, suffering and control, making them necessary aspects of their lives. Survival thus became not only interconnected with cure but also used to justify any act of discipline, thereby transforming control into a positive quality. This research aims to explore the novel's dependence on the protection of constructed female bodies through the ideas of Michel Foucault and Sandra Bartky, the latter viewing and exploring Foucault's ideas through the lens of Feminism. The critic Michel Foucault's idea of docility from his book, *Discipline and Punish* are of key importance to this research. The feminist critic Sandra Bartky, in her essay, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernisation of Patriarchal Power", explores the idea of docility from a feminist perspective. This researcher aims to explore the aspects of docility in female bodies through the system of discipline, safety, protection and cure.

This paper analyses the construction of the docile female bodies through a series of three connected arguments. The first being the idea of control having a positive moral quality, the second being the curbing of autonomy and internalising the process, and lastly controlling the sexuality of the three daughters on the Island. Through the ideas of the critic Sandra Bartky in her essay, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernisation of Patriarchal Power”, this researcher aims to explore the Foucauldian ideas of the female bodies being controlled through the ideas of moralising control, curbing autonomy, instilling internalisation of obedience, and controlling the sexuality of the daughters. The female body is naturally presented as vulnerable and in need of protection; the ideology that moralises the process of control provides a positive connotation. Under constant warnings about the outer world and the male body as being toxic, control eventually appears as necessary. The exploration of control blends into the curbing of autonomy and its gradual settlement into the system. By the association of independence and autonomy with fear and survival at large, the process of internalisation is transformed into a natural one. This research, at last, explores the control of female sexuality altogether at the stake of survival, revealing the depth of docility in female bodies. Thus, this researcher aims to explore the novel *The Water Cure* and why it outlines the construction of docile female bodies through the ideas of cure and survival to provide control as a positive moral value, curb autonomy and naturalise continuous internal self-surveillance, and to control female sexuality. The ideas of cure and survival through the construction of the docile bodies allot a moral value to control, making it appear necessary rather than oppressive.

The novel *The Water Cure* utilises the construction of the docile female bodies through an ideological framework that transforms oppression and control into natural phenomena. Through the rituals performed, the lives of the three daughters, Lia, Sky and Grace, are governed by a strict framework. The practices penetrate through every action performed on the island, which ultimately not only disciplines the bodies of the daughters, but moralises control for them, rendering it as necessary. The novel positions the female body as vulnerable and inherently fragile to the toxic external world, framing control and oppression as not only necessary but moral. By framing masculinity as toxic, harmful and in possession of an existential threat, the rituals are legitimised and transformed into life-sustaining practices. Through the ideas of control, the disguised underworking of patriarchy is revealed, and how control is portrayed as care. The idea of control at large is not only legitimised but is also naturalised to the extent that the island was an active location of treating “broken” women, showcasing the immense control the larger power had over the apparently vulnerable category. Through this argument, this researcher focuses on the process of control being naturalised and its impact on the three daughters on the island. The first argument argues that *The Water Cure* achieves this ideological work across three interlocking mechanisms: the naturalisation of female vulnerability, the construction of male toxicity as moral justification for control, and the framing of bodily treatments as survival practices that appear virtuous. The ideas of cure and survival, thus, through the construction of the docile bodies, allot a moral value to control, making it appear necessary rather than oppressive.

The novel constructs the female body as inherently vulnerable and in need of protection, making control moral and necessary. The three sisters, namely Lia, Sky and Grace, from the very start of the novel are conditioned to believe that their bodies are susceptible to harm. The world outside the island is pictured and presented as something that will cause harm to them because of what they are, women. Their bodies are considered chariots of danger, to be protected at all costs. Ultimately contributing to making their bodies the centre of all issues. Their ‘femaleness’ and their very physicality are presented as being at risk. The ideas of Bartky resonate here strongly. “The bodies of humans in society, especially women, are sites of experimentation for patriarchy at large, making control not only mandatory for survival, but also whitewashing it as positive and moral. The cultural construction of the body is always gendered” (McLaren 6). The vulnerability of the power was essential to present control as ethical. The characters of King and Mother play a crucial role in practising this mindset; they portray themselves as protectors rather than controllers, thus conditioning the three daughters psychologically. She does not have the characteristics of a mother, as her toxicity has blinded her. “She only follows the instructions of the King, and eventually has no say when it comes to him” (Dahmani 61). The

researcher Dahmani highlighted the internalisation that has taken place in all the women of the Island, without any questioning. The absence of questioning highlights the meltdown of the boundaries of control and domination. The bodies of the daughters were moulded to live in specific circumstances. Involvement in any unfamiliar circumstance exposed the lack of skills to survive without the support of their protectors. “There are no therapies for this unknown crisis” (Mackintosh 10). Abiding by the way of therapies was their way of living; however, in the presence of a situation outside the curriculum, it deepened the vulnerability of the daughters. The idea of vulnerability was accepted as a fact and as a necessity by the daughters, and in the process also accepted the necessity of control. The ideas of Michel Foucault highlighted by Bartky are instructive here: the management of bodies in the name of their health and survival is one of the most effective means by which power operates without appearing to do so. The novel *The Water Cure* personifies this idea through the presentation of the female body as vulnerable and naturally in need of protection.

The repeated warnings about protection from male toxicity construct the idea of control as moral. Throughout the text, men or the idea of men is presented as toxic and contaminated. After the death of the King, Mother continues the ritualistic procedure of following the patriarchal mindset imposed upon them by the King. The exposure to men and the world at large posed great harm and danger to their bodies. The presentation of this framework functions at multiple levels. “We pray for protection against the bodies of men” (Mackintosh 86). This line from the novel validates the isolated residence of the three daughters from the external world, and it also justifies the positions of the King and the mother. After the great storm ended, three men, specifically two men, James and Llew, and a young boy, Gwil, wash up on the shores of the Island; however, the reaction of the daughters highlights the immense internalisation of the ideologies that they had been conditioned to believe. They appear to be fearful, suspicious, and unsettled, not only because there was danger in the form of the male body present in front of them, but also due to the internalisation of the mindset of danger. “A woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other” (Bartky 34). A significant critique of this situation was the understanding of danger and it being associated to the male body. The usage of the body, particularly the male body, showcases the inner workings of power. Bodies were used against bodies to further the moral mindset of control. Survival played an integral role here; it was used as one among the many levers to present control as necessary and moral. “Our whole life has centred on survival” (Mackintosh 80). The daughters became voluntary victims of isolation from other humankind, only for their bodies to be subjects of imposing control. Control of movement, desires, relationships and life at large; it was moral as it presented protection against the existential threat the daughters possessed otherwise. The idea of the male body being toxic is utilised to legitimise the moralising of control.

The continuous treatments in the novel imposed upon the daughters’ bodies are consistently framed as necessary practices of survival, legitimising the moral idea of control. The novel presented various treatments of purification and survival upon the bodies of the daughters. One of them stems from the title of the novel, *The Water Cure*. The bodies of the daughters were pushed and practically drowned under water to purify them of the toxicity of the external world, and as a survival ritual necessary to be practised for existence. The treatments were presented as care, when in reality they were brutal practices that had to be followed for superficial survival. They were forbidden from coming in contact with any natural substance growing on the island for fear of their succumbing to the contest of survival. The bodies of the daughters thus exist under a constant framework of regulation.

The daughters, as mentioned earlier, were refused to face the aspects of life the King and mother deemed to be unfit, one of them being feelings, or as seen in the novel, unfamiliar energies. “Especially dangerous for women, our bodies are already so vulnerable in ways that the bodies of men are not” (Mackintosh 16). Emotions were rendered as unnecessary and unfit, especially for the bodies of women. The daughters were passed through the ‘love ritual’, disposing of any unnecessary emotion from the bodies of the daughters. They were required to kill a rat or any small animal, not only draining them emotionally, but robbing them of emotions altogether. The

presentation of control through the ideas of cures in these arguments contributes to the larger participation of power in their lives. This correlates closely to the concept of docile bodies; the bodies of the daughters were thoroughly regulated, making control appear necessary and natural. The interwoven nature of survival and cure resists control as negative, ultimately legitimising it.

The three mechanisms of moralising control, namely, presenting women as vulnerable, constant warnings of the male toxicity, and the framing of treatments as survival, build the idea of control not only as necessary but morally sane. The three daughters, Lia, Sky and Grace, are not only introduced to this 'way of living' but are naturally trained into it. The above-mentioned three subsidiary arguments highlight the continuous nature of control that is present in the lives of the daughters; they are in an ongoing cycle of control, which ultimately contributes to their indifference to it. The monitoring of the female body in the name of survival is a common characteristic of a classic patriarchal society; power flawlessly merges itself with the ideas of control under the pretence of survival, and most importantly, care. The second subsidiary argument highlights the subtle yet powerful movements of power through significant aspects of the lives of the three daughters. The daughters, in the process of saving themselves from the threats of survival, became the ultimate victims of control. The final subsidiary argument explores the cures, rituals and therapies performed upon the bodies of the three sisters. The critic Micheal Foucault, through his work *Discipline and Punish*, explored the construction of docile female bodies by society to project their ideologies upon them. Through the above-mentioned facets, the practical idea of Foucault seeps unconsciously through the narrative, highlighting the reality and relevance of the idea. The wider idea of the construction of docile female bodies is legitimised not only to moralise control but also to ensure the vulnerable status of women's bodies, and ultimately framing masculinity as toxic and cures necessary. The novel constructs docile female bodies to curb autonomy and naturalise obedience in the form of continuous internal self-surveillance.

The second argument decodes the internal facets of control that govern the female bodies. The three daughters, Lia, Sky and Grace, inhabited a ritualistic ideological conditioning which was not only present externally but also internally. Through the deliberate way of living, the three daughters not only internalised the lifestyle of survival against the toxic world, but also self-monitored their actions unconsciously. The novel constructed the docile female bodies not merely to impose discipline from without, but to curb autonomy and naturalise obedience in the form of continuous internal self-surveillance. This idea stems directly from Sandra Bartky's essay, which highlights the by-product of power and control, the self-surveillance naturally utilised by the female bodies. The arguments also shed light on the act of curbing autonomy as an important aspect in the process of naturalising obedience. The flow of acts is, firstly, the curbing of autonomy to naturalise obedience and ultimately turning these acts into self-surveillance. The series of three interconnected ideas of autonomy being equated with danger, instilling surveillance in the daughters. Secondly, the naturalisation of discomfort and pain during the rituals and cures highlights the extent of naturalisation and its impact upon the daughters. Thirdly, the policing of their boundaries without any active monitoring highlights the internal compulsion instilled in the daughters.

Through the critique of the novel *The Water Cure*, larger realities of power upon the female bodies. Thus, the novel constructs docile female bodies to curb autonomy and naturalise obedience in the form of continuous internal self-surveillance.

The constant depiction of the outside world as toxic and contaminating equates autonomy with danger, instilling constant self-surveillance in the daughters. The setting of the outer world as toxic plays an instrumental role in the lives of the three daughters. Despite being a subtle detail, it multiplies the meaning that emerges as a result of the same. "There is an intensity to the natural world in *The Water Cure*" (Marta 5). Throughout their upbringing, the outer world has been presented as an active force of toxicity and uncertainty that possessed the ability to not only ruin them emotionally, but most importantly, physically. The curbing of autonomy and naturalisation of obedience is validated through this narrative. This narrative is an active ideology that they have been surrounded by. However, this ideological conditioning hampers the daughters' understanding of freedom and autonomy. They experience freedom differently from other humans. It is not legitimate

or necessary for them; it is reckless and threatening, and to escape that unpleasant experience, continuous self-monitoring is required. “There is no hiding the damage the outside world can do, if a woman hasn’t been taking the right precautions to guard her body” (Mackintosh 33). These lines highlight the logic that is absorbed by the daughters and their presentation as good.

The primary purpose of the daughters and the women who visited the Island was to ‘guard’ their bodies from the outer world, and as a result, make that very body a leverage for curbing autonomy and freedom. The boundaries of their confinement are not physical walls but an ideological mindset of internalised beliefs. The critic Bartky highlights this idea laid upon the bodies of women to impose power. “The body’s time, in these regimes of power, is as rigidly controlled as its space” (Bartky 26). The daughters were constantly reminded of their vulnerable status. “Life is cruel, Mother tells her. If you girls can’t make difficult decisions for each other now, you’ll never be able to” (Mackintosh 48). This reminder ensured their continuous self-surveillance. Thus, the depiction of the outside world as toxic and contaminating equates autonomy with danger, instilling constant self-surveillance in the daughters.

As a result of the absence of autonomy, endurance of physical discomfort during the cures became natural to the daughters’ bodies. The act of endurance plays an important role in the lives of the daughters. Alongside the previously mentioned acts, endurance largely impacted the routines and is closely accompanied by the rituals, therapies and survival. These rituals are not only demanding but also physically painful. However, through the continuous practices of these rituals, the discomfort has been rendered as normal and thus naturally a part of their lives. This researcher relates the normalisation of pain to the erosion of the female body and its autonomy, highlighting the eradication of the boundaries created to protect oneself. Interestingly, the association of pain takes place with the success of the treatments, successfully constructing docile female bodies. As Foucault highlights in *Discipline and Punish*, discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies (138). The experience of pain denotes the process of purification working, also indicating the safety of the female body. “We move on to the next exercise, Mother rolling hard, varnished balls for us to swerve away from or catch in our hands, red and blue. She aims to crack them into the bone of our ankles” (Mackintosh 19). This line, being one of many, showcases the brutalities imposed upon the bodies of women under the pretence of protection. The human body’s natural response to danger or discomfort was transformed into a requirement for survival, handicapping the daughters of their instinct necessary for survival. That process contributed to further justifying the construction of docile bodies to further the agenda of power, especially on the female body. In the narrative, the capacity of resistance is not only suppressed but dissolved altogether. Compliance and obedience are naturalised as opposed to autonomy. However, the ‘training’ provided to the daughters normalised the idea of the abnormal. Thus, the resulting absence of autonomy transforms the endurance of physical discomfort during the cures becomes natural to the daughters’ bodies.

The daughters actively police the boundaries of their own bodies, restricting touch, movement, and proximity even without direct instruction. After the death of the King and the mysterious absence of their mother, the daughters, Lia, Sky and Grace, naturally police their boundaries closely, external touch, movement and proximity being of key importance in their lives. The intensity of docility in the three daughters highlights the extent of internalisation of the rules provided to them. Lia was the only sister in contact with one of the men who washed up on the island, yet her internal conversation highlighted her urges to resist the new way of living. However, Sky and Grace were stout followers of their old lifestyle. The interesting analysis is the dynamic between Grace and Lia, the constant judgment that Grace imposed on Lia, which highlighted the internalization of their ideology. “I go into my bathroom for a glass of water, take a little time away from him in the spirit of caution, the spirit of being a responsible woman, sticking my face out of the window to reach air he hasn’t breathed” (Mackintosh 103). These lines by Lia showcase the conditioning done to the daughters. The sisters, including Lia, perceive themselves as cautious individuals who are aware of the consequences of their actions and reactions. “The body becomes a “political field,” inscribed and constituted by power relations” (Deveaux 2). This line highlights the outcome of the female body. The idea of docility is highlighted here: the process succeeds when no

external guidance is required, and the bodies themselves follow the ideology. This process, though the novel's narrative is present, is evident in the actions of the daughters. The ongoing process of internalization present without any instruction, highlights the successful construction of the docile female bodies. Thus, active policing of the boundaries of their own bodies, restricting touch, movement, and proximity, even without direct instruction, highlights the 'natural' self-surveillance done by the daughters.

The interconnected ideologies of equating autonomy with danger, normalising physical discomfort through the cures, and the internalisation of bodily self-policing reflect the deeper power constructs that function in a human society. Despite being isolated from the external world, these ideologies were functional, showcasing brutalities at large. The autonomy of the daughters was not forcefully taken away from them; it was systematic conditioning that eventually naturalized the process, ultimately equating autonomy with danger. With no scope of external exposure, the enforcement of these practices became natural to the daughters. The patriarchal construct, through the equation of autonomy with danger, conditions the female bodies to monitor their surroundings, eradicating the ideas of instinct and consent. The disregard for personal boundaries in enduring pain demonstrates the success of the rituals. In the process, dismissing autonomy and equating it with danger, the idea of discomfort is normalised. The control of female sexuality positions women's bodies as sites of use and reproduction, reinforcing their status as regulated and expendable.

The novel presents a female body that is not merely a representation of regulation but also of use. The setting of the novel is an isolated island that claims to protect the daughters from a world that is toxic and dangerous; however, a different form of oppression takes place on the island, especially upon the female bodies. As the final strand of analysis, this researcher claims that the female bodies became chariots of others' ideas. An equal form of oppression takes place upon the female body: the suppression of their sexuality. Their sexuality is not a topic they are permitted to explore or discuss. They are submerged in the ideas of survival to prevent them from exploring their sexuality. By positioning their bodies as sites of use and reproduction, they are ultimately considered expendable. This argument is developed over the course of three main ideas: firstly, by employing the female bodies as tools used to serve male authority, highlighting their meagre status in the larger structures of power. Secondly, the normalisation of sexual access to female bodies erodes their identity altogether. Thirdly, the association of the daughters' desire with shame highlights the constant motion of ensuring their regulated status. These three ideas showcase the inner workings of power to maintain docility in the female bodies, making them not only regulated but expendable in nature. Thus, through these three sub-arguments, this researcher claims that the control of female sexuality positions women's bodies as sites of use and reproduction, reinforcing their status as regulated and expendable.

The strategic deployment of a woman's body to serve male authority reveals how female embodiment becomes a tool within larger structures of power. The female bodies in the novel, especially the three daughters, showcase how their bodies are half theirs and half someone else's. This idea is promoted by their placement in the narrative: "we are still fragile, and we are not allowed to forget this" (Mackintosh 121). Their 'fragility' as presented to them is one of the many elements that force them to naturally become tools of the larger structures of power. Throughout the novel, they follow a lifestyle regardless of whether they accept it or not. Their positioning is strategic in a manner that they fulfil the purpose of a force that was not even present in the narrative, the king. The King and the mother implemented control in all aspects available on the Island, not only the daughters. "The family's attempts to maintain their isolation and control over the island's resources echo how dominant power structures seek to exploit and deplete the natural environment for their benefit" (Luhaib and Almaarof). They referred to their father as the King of the Island, highlighting the dominant and distant relationship that they shared. Their bodies also existed in response to others. This is a strategic employment in the narrative as it serves the patriarchy deliberately and consistently. The victim of this structure is the mother of the daughters, who was not only the primary instructor of the system, but also an instrument to promote the larger ideas of power constructed to ensure docility in females. Their mother willingly participates in the

process, not only highlighting her placement as an instrument, but also the internalisation and naturalisation of control. “The internalisation of representations of the female body by women is fundamental to the formation of feminine identity” (McNay 6). The surprising exit of the father initially in the narrative and the revelation of his true motives by the three men on the Island place the mother clearly as an instrument to forward the ideas of the king in his absence. Thus, the strategic deployment of a woman’s body to serve male authority reveals how female embodiment becomes a tool within larger structures of power.

The casual entitlement assumed over women’s bodies reflects a normalisation of sexual access that erodes bodily agency. This argument explores access to female bodies and their normalisation. A striking observation by this researcher was the ease with which the male characters access the female bodies. The King of the Island used the body of his wife to promote his ideas on their daughters. One of the three men, Llew, formed emotional and sexual relations with Lia and ended them when he deemed it correct for him. “I hope he will stay with me, but he turns off the light and closes the door as he leaves, no kiss, just one small gesture of the hand” (Mackintosh 139). However, the most staggering event was the relationship between the king and Grace that ultimately left her pregnant. These events highlight the normalisation that has been established in the relationship between a man and a woman. The daughters were raised to believe that their bodies are naturally vulnerable and in need of protection. Additionally, the aspect of sexual suppression deepens that emotional void established in the minds of the daughters. Sandra Bartky’s observations on the female body are relevant here. She signifies that the female body is socialised to be other-directed, which is shaped and transformed by the experiences of the external world. The three daughters, through years of training in the form of the rituals, were ill-positioned to identify their situation. The novel, through the demonstration of the daughters and their bodily self-understanding highlight how it has been so thoroughly constructed around the needs and narratives of those around them that the erosion of their sexual agency registers not as a loss, but as a familiar and expected condition. Thus, the casual entitlement assumed over women’s bodies reflects a normalisation of sexual access that erodes bodily agency.

The novel suppresses the daughters' desire and intimacy by framing personal longing as shameful, ensuring their dependence on the psychological practices performed on the island, and ensuring their regulated status. The ideology of suppression is functional in layers and in stages. The characters of the king, mother, and Grace participate in that progression of that ideology. After the mysterious disappearance of the mother, Grace forwards the association of desire and intimacy with shame. “Sex connects bodies, and this connection gives women an intimate space within which men's power can be subverted and resisted” (Holland et al. 15). Here, Desire as a human emotion is not presented as natural, but as a spot of weakness and in need of cure. Thus, this idea ensured continued dependence on the rituals performed on the Island. The process of associating desire with shame formulates an ultimate cure for control, internalising it; the daughters monitor themselves continuously, relying heavily on the cures and rituals performed on the Island. “Part of what made the old world so terrible, so prone to destruction, was a total lack of preparation for the personal energies often called feelings” (Mackintosh 16). “As I sweated out the bad feelings, a lightness came over me” (Mackintosh 21). The above-mentioned lines highlight the lack of awareness among the daughters and the solution offered for the unfamiliar emotion. The daughters were under constant surveillance by their mother after the three men arrived on the Island. Of the three, sister Lia was shamed the most for her curiosity about exploring her body, not only by her mother but also by her elder sister. She was isolated on multiple occasions for her exposure to men. However, at various instances, she herself corrected her behaviour, which was exactly what the King aimed for when he drafted these ideas. This association highlighted the comprehensive management of female interiority.

Thus, the novel suppresses the daughters' desire and intimacy by framing personal longing as shameful, ensuring their dependence on the psychological practices performed on the island, and ensuring their regulated status.

The ideas of serving male authority, entitlement over the female body, and the suppression of female desire and equating it to shame all contribute to maintaining the status of the woman’s

body as regulated and expendable. The daughters are raised on an isolated island that not only contributes to the above-mentioned factors, but also ensures the continuous practising of the ideologies that were instilled in them. The first argument explores the strategic deployment of the female body in opposition to the male body in the context of serving them. To ensure the maintenance of the system, they are not only presented as vulnerable but also fragile and in need of being placed in opposition to a dynamic and dominant force, the male contrary in this narrative. Every single female character in the novel is a victim of this system. The second argument explores the causal entitlement over the female body. The argument explores the relationship between the male and female characters, highlighting the access the male characters assume to the female body. The idea of the female body being other-directed is explored and established through this narrative.

The third argument explores the suppression of the female desire and equates it with shame to ensure the dependence of the daughters on psychological rituals and treatments. This argument sums up the entire idea of this paper: the inclusion of various practices to normalise control and maintain docility in women, thus the control of female sexuality positions women's bodies as sites of use and reproduction, reinforcing their status as regulated and expendable.

Conclusion

The novel *The Water Cure* presents an unheard understanding of cure and survival. The ideas conventionally considered positive and in support of humankind were disguised not only as the opposite of what they claim to do, but also as harmful. The narrative, told through the stories of three daughters and the broken women who come to the island to be 'cured', presents a distinct view of their world. Control was presented as a language of love and care, restriction justified in the name of survival, and female autonomy manipulated as an act of protection. Through the construction of docile female bodies, this researcher explored the ideas of cure and survival and why they were imposed, especially upon female bodies. Through an analysis of the novel using the ideas of Foucault and Bartky, a deeply flawed system in society is revealed. The inner workings of power under the guise of cure and survival are exposed. This research also establishes the relevance of the theories provided by Foucault and Bartky in the 21st-century modern world. The ideas in the novel *The Water Cure* outline the construction of docile female bodies through the ideas of cure and survival to provide control as a positive moral value, curb autonomy and naturalise continuous internal self-surveillance, and control female sexuality.

The arguments developed across this essay open several productive avenues for future research. One significant area would be a more sustained examination of the Mother as a figure of complicit patriarchal enforcement, exploring how the novel positions maternal authority as a vehicle of oppression and what this suggests about the intergenerational transmission of docility within female-coded spaces. A second area of potential inquiry concerns the novel's engagement with trauma and the body as an archive of suffering, particularly in relation to Grace, whose implied sexual abuse by the King represents the compound's most extreme and concealed act of violence. Future research might examine how the novel's deliberate narrative silence around Grace's experience replicates the cultural mechanisms through which sexual violence within family structures is rendered unspeakable. A third avenue concerns the novel's relationship to contemporary feminist theory and its relevance beyond the fictional frame, specifically, how the mechanisms of control depicted in *The Water Cure* illuminate real ideological structures through which female bodies continue to be governed, shamed, and instrumentalised in the present day. Mackintosh's novel, in its sustained and incisive interrogation of protection as a paradox, remains a profoundly urgent text, one that challenges its readers not only to recognise the systems it depicts but to examine, with equal rigour, the systems they themselves inhabit.

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