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Re-envisioning Disparate Polarities: A Metamodernist Reading of Ali Smith's *Winter*

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Abstract

The study examines Ali Smith's *Winter* (2017) in light of the discourse of 'relationality' as it is formulated in 'metamodernist' theoretical speculations. Smith's text utilizes the aesthetics of 'metamodernism' and its salient features to re-envision alternative forms of binary distinctions namely; death and rebirth, vision and truth, past and present, transience and permanence, superficiality and depth, as well as the dialectic and dialogic thinking. Such disparate polarities are no longer regarded as oppositional extremes that exist in vacuity, but they negotiate as interrelated, mutually inclusive and simultaneously operative contentions. Textual analysis reveals the complex process *Winter* undertakes to reclaim the fractured state of the individual subject, construct spaces of dialogic communication, reimagine utopian desire of tolerant and collaborative world.

Keywords: metamodernism, relationality, disparate, polarities, fragmentation, dialectic, dialogic, intersubjective, Christmas Eve, utopian desire

The twenty-first century began with ... deeply politicized contexts of a global war on terror, a backdraft global financial crisis, new concerns about global climate change, and national democratic movements aided and abetted by global technologies. (Elias 738-739)

Introduction

Postmodernism has failed in offering alternative solutions to address twenty first century challenging issues of globalization, transnationalisation, digital revolution, ecological threats as well as the political and socioeconomic instability. The failure originates from postmodern nihilistic tendencies represented in ethical vacuity, solipsism, dialectical thinking, dissolution of the self and the group, and skeptical views of objective truth. The perplexing and suspicious values have induced a “move forward out of the postmodern” (Vermeulen and van den Akker, “Notes” 5) into a new paradigm.

Theorists such as Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker find it necessary to experiment with “new structure of feelings” (“Notes” 2) or cultural paradigms that guide human fellows in a new direction that counteracts the alarming increase in disjointed human relationships and reinstates the subjects’ positions in the spaces of the new millennium in a way that transcends ethnic divisions and national boundaries. In contrast with the postmodern ontologically and modernist epistemologically grounded paradigms, they suggest “the metamodern” (Vermeulen and van den Akker “Notes” 5) that emphasizes ethical imperatives.^{1&2} To be more precise, metamodernism aims to restore people’s concerns for ethical commonalities in a way that revisits the values discarded by postmodernism namely; “the protection of the innocent and the disempowered, compassion, empathy, altruistic love, forgiveness of past injuries, respect for difference, creativity, and ingenuity” (Dumitrescu 18). Along these lines, metamodernism encourages the aesthetics of ‘relationality’ according to which people embrace the notions of multiple subjectivities and dispersed subjecthood.² Accepting the dialogic interactive thinking is conducive to new potentials.

In his view, Christian Moraru extrapolates that relationality epitomizes an underlying principle and “vehicle for a new togetherness [and] ... solidarity” (5). This premise derives from Moraru’s vision of human realization of positive and intersubjective interaction in the context of connectivity with other human fellows, the environment, the land and the cosmos in its entirety. Relationality further embodies an ethos of indebtedness which, as Moraru explains, constitutes “another way of saying that ‘we’ owe it to others, but also to ourselves, to own up to how much we owe them, by behaving accordingly” (21). Such view indicates a pitfall in giving prioritization for either the self or the other and thus placing all emphasis on what Nicoline Timmer calls “a structural need for a we” (45 emphasis added). Within the spectrum of this structure, relationality takes “alterity” which is a constituent part of “the self and the plurality of the human world as its starting point” (Topolski xiv), thus synthesizing the individual voice with the community while preserving its uniqueness and specificity.

In fact, there is a unanimous agreement that relationality is the defining principle of metamodernism and it is fundamental to the healthy continuity and well-being of human life. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit regard it as “the ontology

most congenial to an *age of information*” in which “being” is synonymous with “relationality”. It is “the principle of connectedness assumed by all technologies of transmission” (17 emphasis added). In a similar vein, Alison Gibbons conceives ‘relationality’ in terms of inter-subjectivity, “our human connectedness [,] ... ethical obligations to each other ... [and our] ... complicity in the state of global affairs” (31). In these terms, relationality opens up spaces of living connection, response and reciprocity where the “the borders between the ‘I’ and the world dissolve and a new world appears, in which inside and outside are no longer opposites” as argued by Robert Musil (qtd. in Vermeulen and van den Akker “Utopia” 63). In metamodernism, disparate polarities are revisited and are no longer regarded as diametrical opposites, but overlapping and simultaneously operative contentions and negotiations that terminate egocentric paradigm of one individual interpretation in favour of the plurality of views.

The aforementioned diverse critiques instate relationality at the core of metamodernism and the underlying structure that shape human interactions. The extensive terrain of concepts of relationality share an emphasis on, as Amy J. Elias states, “interactivity ... activated spectatorship; intersubjective relationship; remix; participation; collaboration; connectivity; conversation; poetics of relation; translation; cosmopolitanism” (739). As such, the world has no meaningful existence, as Castree, Rogers and Kitchin presume, “outside various more-or-less stable, more-or-less enduring relationships and processes” (423). This outlook underlines the emphasis of metamodernism on forming not only dialogic but also collaborative thinking that engender balanced relationships with the circulating ideologies.

In the terrain of creative writing, the concern with ‘relationality’ and its various ramifications engender a generation of writers who have been labeled metamodernist.⁴ This is due, most prominently, to their rejection of the deconstructing percepts of postmodernism in favor of reconstructing relational, ethical, and affective global sensibilities that invigorate ethical concerns of social commitment. Textuality in this respect, function as effective means to counter the damages of postmodern fragmentation and alienation. Furthermore, they utilize the principles of relational opposites such as that of the self and the other to forge a synthesis that can, in the words of Monica Germanà and Emily Horton, “fill the social vacuum left open by the postmodern condition” through reasserting “the importance of community and communication” (7). In the field of metamodernism, the self and the other are mutually inclusive; everything else is interrelated and cannot exist in vacuity. Elements of the human and the natural are defined in relation to each other. Metamodernism as a worldview seeks to eliminate ideological barriers that have been conducive to populist isolationism and dilemmas of people forced out of their homelands due to outbreaks of wars.

In this study, I examine Ali Smith’s *Winter* (2017) in light of the discourse of ‘relationality’ as it is formulated in metamodernist theoretical speculations. The analysis is primarily concerned with the way Smith employs perceptions specific to this approach in an attempt to suggest ways to reclaim the fractured state of the individual subject, construct a platform for dialogic communication, reimagine utopian desire, and re-envision global order thus ultimately evolving prospective of a brighter future. In this respect, *Winter* is one of the earliest narratives that utilizes the metamodernist approach to ethical imperatives of relationality mainly; the

negotiation between disparate opposites so as to construct a space of togetherness, collaboration and tolerance, which in turn, eliminates ideological divisions and barriers.

Smith admonishes the readers that *Winter* is not a “classic sort of story, perfectly honed and comforting” (30) in the sense that the construction of the narrative appears neither plot nor character driven. The narrative tells the story of a dysfunctional family that occupies center stage. The family is composed of Cleves, Sophia, her son Arthur and her sister Iris. Sophia is an elderly, unhappy businesswoman who lives alone estranged from her family in deserted ‘Chei Bre’, an old Cornish country-house large enough to accommodate fifteen people. Political dissensions have driven Sophia and Iris apart; they have not spoken for thirty years. Sophia is a right wing affiliate who feels no pity for the immigrants whereas Iris is a Greenham Common veteran helping refugees in Greece. Arthur is trapped in the middle as a victim of the conflict between his mother and his aunt. As a child, he is cut off from his roots, pushed away and learnt how to fend for himself residing in a private boarding school. As an adult, he lives as a blogger posting fictional encounters with the natural world and the seasonal cycles in a blog entitled ‘Art in Nature.’ It is a family whose members are riven with disparities, solipsism and dissension which are most explicitly manifested before Christmas Eve, that in general and in the context of the narrative is noted for family gatherings. Christmastime, for this family, becomes an appropriate context to underline the fragmentation of this family unit. In Christmas Eve, Arthur is supposed to visit his aging mother, who seems a stranger to him, in the company of his girlfriend Charlotte. Yet when a rift takes place between the couple, he pays a Croatian girl named Lux to impersonate the role of Charlotte to join in the gathering of his fractured family in Christmas Eve.

In the narrative, the familial fracture prevails on both levels, the thematic and formal construction. As the narrative progresses, the family recedes to the background giving way to themes of connections, memory, love, desperate children, and hard-hearted parents, intrusion of strangers, immigration, xenophobia, digital technology and identity. There are recurrent digressions that choreograph global conflicting worldviews on the social and political planes, the division of the British community between Brexit and the EU referendum, the crisis of the refugees and environmental problems, all which stir up a sense of existential alienation, debilitation and vulnerability. On another plane, the form of the text is liberated of temporal-spatial constraints. It incorporates flashbacks and flash-forwards. It is interspersed with allusions to and adaptations of British classics, and a shifting mode of narration swinging between third person and internal monologues. Linguistic features further enhance the effect of fragmentation with the use of wordplay, irony, puns and fantasies in depicting minute details in the family affairs.

1. Negotiation between Opposites

Unlike postmodernism that celebrates “inherent insularity of individuals, the intrinsic fragmentarism” (Vermeulen & van den Akker “Misunderstandings”), that distance the self from other subjects, groups and the society as well, metamodernism seeks to collapse distances especially between “things that seem to be opposites, to recreate a sense of wholeness ... to ... transcend our environment

and move forward with the aim of creating positive change in our communities and the world” (Abramson, “Metamodernism”). Such tendency is at the core of metamodernism and *Winter* undertakes to capture it as distances collapse between oppositional pairs. In the course of the narrative process, Sophia, Iris, Arthur, Charlotte and Lux, despite the fractures that govern their relationships, are awakened to their full creative potentials, and engage the reader in a perpetual movement and negotiation back and forth between varying ideals, mindsets and positions. Disparate states of death and rebirth, despair and hopefulness, vision and truth, past and present, transience and permanence, empathy and apathy, dialectic and dialogic thinking, and apprehension of similitude and differences as well as digital technology and machine are seen more as projecting holistic synthesis and configurations of simultaneous operations. Eventually, it becomes clear to the reader that the crises of the twentieth first century is capable of instigating utopian desires and aspirations for alternative solutions of a collaborative atmosphere that overshadows the postmodern dialectic.

a. Death and Rebirth

In *Winter*, paratextual elements such as the title and the epigraphs in addition to the pervasive intertextuality alluding to literary and cultural works are all suggestive of a simultaneous process of death and rebirth. The title itself is reflective of the dichotomous realms of the narrative; the season of winter brings up several connotations to death and rebirth that are both literal and metaphorical. Emblematic notions of death including darkness, cold, desolation and isolation that dominate most of the winter season reflect the fragmentation and alienation of the Cleves family members at the beginning of the narrative. On another plane, the narrator explains that the light of the icicles, the snow that covers the landscape and the “bright sunny post-millennial global-warming Christmas Eve morning” (5) are references to the potential of rebirth. It is a literal rebirth but it also indicates the new relational structure of feelings that dominates the Cleves family during Christmas Eve. Once they gather, Sophia, Iris and Arthur experience a new state of dialogic intersubjectivity. In an intimate tone, Iris tells Sophia that the only reason for coming back is to get at Sophia. She proceeds, “I left everything behind, all my work, any chance of a Christmas rest, and drove all the way last night and did everything I did today including all the dishes after the lunch I made. All to get at you” (231). Obviously, it is the effect of the human ambience that surfaces and overcome the divisive forces.

Additionally, citations in the epigraphs foreshadow death namely; Charlie Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator*, Elvis Presley’s *G.I. Blues*, the paintings of Cézanne, the legend of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and the sculptures of Barbara Hepworth. The lines from Philip Sidney’s “Ring Out Your Bells” allude to the death of love and the quote from Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” announces the death of Old Marley. Yet, a quotes from Shakespeare’s play *Cymbaline*, “Nor the furious winter’s rages” (1) augurs a forthcoming rebirth in spring which encapsulates a release from the hardships of endurance.

Winter’s intertextuality is highly informative not only as an accentuation of the theme of death, but also as an embodiment of a core characteristic in metamodernism. In contrast with the postmodern utilization of intertextuality as a stylistic device of “social critique and irony” as argued by Seth Abramson (Five), metamoderist texts appropriate intertextuality as “substantive and objective rather

than idiosyncratic and merely stylistic relationship between texts” (Five). Accordingly, intertextuality emphasizes the notion of relationality and interconnectedness between individual texts and thus it creates a sense of community as no text exists in a vacuum; the same applies to fellow men and women.

In fact, moving between poles of death and rebirth predominates early on. The text opens with a monologue which evokes the Nietzschean apocalyptic vision of the eventual collapse and chaos of modern civilization. The first line pays homage to the first line of *A Christmas Carol*, “Marley was dead; to begin with” (9). The monologue rings out chilling proclamations about the death of God along with concepts and designations:

[R]omance was dead. Chivalry was dead. Poetry, the novel, painting, they were all dead, and art was dead. Theatre and cinema were both dead. Literature was dead. The book was dead. Modernism, postmodernism, realism and surrealism were all dead. Jazz was dead, pop music, disco, rap, classical music, dead. Culture was dead. Decency, society, family values were dead. The past was dead. History was dead. The welfare state was dead. Politics was dead. Democracy was dead. Communism, fascism, neoliberalism, capitalism, all dead, and marxism, dead, feminism, also dead. Political correctness, dead. Racism was dead. Religion was dead. Thought was dead. Hope was dead. Truth and fiction were both dead. The media was dead. The internet was dead. Twitter, instagram, facebook, google, dead... the computer? Dead. TV? Dead. Radio? Dead. Mobiles ...Batteries ... Marriages ... conversation ... Leaves ... [and] Flowers were dead. (3-4)

To emphasize the premise that life inevitable will prevail over the ‘wasteland’ atmosphere induced by the announcement of the death by almost everything in twenty-first century, the narrator states that “isn’t a ghost story” (4). The monologue closes with notes of hopefulness as it excludes “life, revolution and equality” (4) from the litany of the dead allusions. Significantly, as it swings between both death and life, the text engenders a new ontology of understanding of, what Jena-Luc Nancy states, “beings between us all, simultaneously- all the dead, all the living, and all beings” (99). Between mercurial constructions of the simultaneous existence of life and death, there is a typically metamodernist quality: a dusk-like state in between life and death arises; the world is dead and dark however, sunlight would shine over the world and give it life.

b. Vision and Truth

Following the announcement that the story is not a ghost story, the narrative introduces a ghost of a disembodied head that is visible only to Sophia. She declares that she has a vision of being haunted and visited by the ghosts of dead things and she skeptically wonders, “*Are ghosts dead or alive, are ghosts deadly?*” (4). Yet the narrator again indicates that this story is “about, *real* things really happening in the *real* world involving *real* people in *real* time on the *real* earth” (5 emphasis added). Like a pendulum, the text swings back to the vision of the disembodied head. Sophia wakes up on Christmas Eve and greets it. Despite the fact that the head is just a vision, the text presents it in a way that gives it the illusion of reality. Sophia speaks to it and considers it “abrasion, degeneration,

detachment, floater” (19). The way the narrator describes the head’s size adds more reliability to the vision: “the size of a real child’s head, a smudged, dusty child streaked with green,” and when it sleeps, “lacy green growth, leafy looking” settles around its mouth and nose” (19). Such a portrayal makes it appear as a life-like “summer child in the winter light” (19).

To give more credibility to the event, the narrator poses puzzling questions about the disembodied head: “How could it breathe anyway ... with no other breathing apparatus to speak of? Where were its lungs? Where was the rest of it?” or “Was there maybe someone else somewhere else with a small torso, a couple of arms, a leg, following him or her about?” (29). Despite the frightening mood the questions conjure up, the scene does arouse Sophia’s trepidation mainly because the head is presented in a way that is not associated with “a dead thing or the notion of the marauding spirit of a dead thing” (9). It is depicted rather as “sweet, well-mannered gentle, nonverbal, diffident, and bashful in its ceremoniousness” (9). Thus Sophia, the cantankerous woman, unexpectedly treats it with infinite kindness. The narrator further explains that among the striking features of the head are “the life in it, the warmth of its demeanour, and as it bobbed and nodded merrily in the air” (9). To be more precise, the sounds of “inhalation and exhalation in such a lifelike way” makes it convincing that it is a “real whole child” (28). Consequently, Sophia’s imagination renders the head a figure of vision and truth as well as death and life, yet mostly truth and life as it appears lively transforming from a child to an old man. In fact, the negotiation between dreams and visions on the one hand and reality on the other is an ongoing process in the narrative.

Like his mother, Sophia, Arthur cannot see reality and is haunted by horrid nightmares, typical of the postmodern condition, which are reflective of environmental threats. In one of the visions, he dreams that nature is out of joint, monstrous massive flowers chase him. He fears being swallowed alive by their “petals like jaws, stamen erect and quivering the sizes of a bettering ram” (151) as they punish him for his political unawareness/ apathy, and as the flowers approach he moans, “Stop bullying me. I am political. It’s pathetic” (152). To evade being eaten by the giant flowers, Arthur hallucinates about metamorphosing into a stone knight. This drives Arthur to presume that “it is the dregs, really, to be living in a time when even your dreams have to be post-postmodern consciouser than-thou” (158). As such, the dream corresponds to Arthur’s metamodernist swinging between two contradictory states: conscious ignorance and unconscious awareness of politics.

A further dream that is closely related to Arthur’s ecological dreams is manifested in his running through a cornfield when he and other children “had been poisoned just by breathing in and out getting on their skin the chemicals that the farmers have used to spray corn. And that though it was still a sunny day and the corn was still a lovely yellow colour they were all going to Hemelaar 4222946\ 67 die” (240).

During one of Sophia and Iris’s frequent fights about the contemporary Britain, Arthur realizes that a shower of little sprinkles of grit, tiny rubble is falling onto the dining table. He hooks up “a piece of rock or a slab of landscape roughly the size of a small car or a grand piano is hanging there in the air” (215) floating threateningly above his head. The slice of landscape “will crush them when it falls. But it hangs there. It doesn’t fall ... suspended by nothing” (216). The incident is

functional in two ways. First, only Arthur notices it and thus it resonates with the vision of the disembodied head that is only visible to Sophia. Second, it typifies an attempt to revitalize his political awareness through a positive connectivity with the environment.

Sophia attributes such terrifying dreams to Iris' ignorant way of bringing up children as a result of her insensitivity and telling them inappropriate nightmarish stories about environmental contamination that stimulates a sense of postmodern desperateness and fretfulness. Sophia herself live in self-denial as she embraces the other extreme of a utopia perspective. She urges Arthur not to believe "all the lies about the world being poisoned" (240). She tells him that the world is devoid of bombs and chemicals arguing "why would the people who do things in the world want anything but the *best* for the world?" (241).

Giving no lucid explanation of interweaving vision and truth, the text stirs the reader to discard modernist belief in universal truth and postmodern belief in the subjective and contingent truth. This is because modernist and postmodern percepts are no longer adequate as vehicles of addressing the crises of the twenty first century. A metamodernist approach transcends both sublimating an interstitial position between relativism and truth to construct a new configuration of the external truth with an individual or a group of individuals through their perception to better perceive and understand the way the world works.

c. Past and Present

The disembodied head further induces swaying to and fro between two other desperate polarities; namely, the present and the past as well as transience and permanence. On the one hand, the head guides Sophia into the past given that she is unable to reconcile with the present. It revives Sophia's reminiscences of her love to Ethel Walker, a real-life artist, who owned the rare portrait of Hepworth sculpture that has been neglected for a long time. On the other hand, the head demonstrates personal experience and connectedness to the aesthetics of art that perpetually swings towards transcendence rather than obliteration. This is clear in Sophia's remembrance of an array of chipped "headless stone torsos, headless Madonnas, baby Jesuses with missing heads or just necks or half-heads" (109) and "Madonnas and saints" being decapitated and scratched out in many portraits by fanatic vandals during the Reformation. Although Hepworth's sculptures of saints are nothing more than "headless, faceless, anonymous" (110) broken stones, as Sophia believes, they seem more like proofs of art's survival and endurance. In view of such significant associations, the text fixates on the head and the face as a manifestation and a synecdoche of human fellows whose fanaticism and intolerant ideologies have brought about fragmentation and factions throughout history.

Furthermore, the incessantly ringing bells that hovers over Dickens' novella as well as *Winter at midnight* represents another incidence that evokes Sophia's past memories. They take Sophia and the reader back in time: "Imagine [Sophia and Iris] arm-in-arm in the warmth, one swinging the bag jangling the lengths of chain in it and singing to make the other laugh, jingle *bells* jingle *bells* jingle all the way" (43). The scene points out the endeavors to revive the sisters' past familial kinship and shared history to recover whatever can bring about empathy. In fact, as a 'totalizing' paradigm, metamodernism is based on the integrity of past, present, and

future, and, as Vermeulen and van den Akker put it, thinking of “the past, present and future as a meaningful whole” (“Utopia” 66). It delves into the past to enrich the present through remembrances and clarifications and thus foreshadowing possibilities of future coexistence.

d. Dialectic and Dialogic logic

Reconciliation of dialectic and dialogic logic is among the other prominent polar opposites that *Winter* tackles. The dialectic thinking in postmodernism which rejects the middle ground of negotiation and gives priority to ‘I’ and its unilateral fixed interpretation is manifested in the relationship of Arthur and Charlotte. Metamodernism, by contrast, encourages the paradoxical and dialogic thinking that highlight areas of understanding “uniting its many overlapping dialectics and warring constituencies of meaning and ethics” (Abramson “Five”). In this respect, Smith maintains that it is one of the narrative ethics to write “the wranglings of radical democratic [and ecological] relations. ... the challenges it poses ask of readers a similar kind of engagement—a negotiation, that is, of our own ethical responses” (qtd. in Kostkowska 115). According to Justyna Kostkowska, the narrative is not to privilege and give precedence to one perspective over the other, but it attempts to embrace paradoxes and move back and forth between opposites. Individual would be conscious of concurrently belonging, with others, to “a world of encounters” (Seigworth and Gregg 2), characterized by collaborative social networks that transcend personal interests and views.

Before Christmas Eve, Sophia, Iris and Arthur and his girlfriend Charlotte engage in a contentious argument about life pursuits assuming irreconcilable standpoints towards politics, art and beauty. They bicker about their roles and fail to connect or make the debate meaningful. Significantly, this is reflected in the choice of names; ‘Cleves’ alludes to the social cleavages that play against the backdrop of profound familial connectivity and empathy. Besides, as a setting, ‘Chei Bre’, an old Cornish country house, accentuates a schism in mindsets as it denotes ‘House of the mind, of the head, of the psyche’ (270). Although family name and setting move between oppositional spaces, the characters inhabit both of them simultaneously connoting a metamodernist worldview that opposites may be juxtaposed.

Sophia stands out in the narrative as the typically introverted conservative Eurocentric model of a successful business woman, in her seventies and inhabiting a large house in Cornwall. Ironically, the Greek origin of her name stands for ‘wisdom, intelligence and skill; nevertheless, she lacks wisdom. Like her father who inherited “an abiding hatred of people from particular other countries” (113), Sophia abides by a xenophobic attitude towards the sufferings of other races and ethnicities. Oddly enough, despite such aversion, she has made a significant amount of money selling imported “Afghan coats” (122). Moreover, Sophia’s exclusive anglocentric antipathetic attitude is manifested in showing no empathy for the “Refugees, Children in ambulances. Blood-soaked men running to hospitals or away from burning hospitals carrying blood-covered children. Dust-covered dead people by the sides of roads. Atrocities. People beaten up and tortured in cells” (29). Evidently, Sophia carries on as a forlorn person ensnared in a wasteland of spiritual dryness with her systematic rejection of not only other races, but also of those who love her most; namely, her son, lover and sister.

Iris is the opposite extreme. Her name has biblical references to the hope of saving what is best of human race. She is called “the wild one” (206) because she lives as an estranged political activist and a lifelong socialist defender of the environment and human rights protesting at Greenham Common against the US nuclear weapon on the British soil. Smith deploys political protest as a means to disclose how the connectivity and collaboration of the protestors joining their efforts empowers them to endure the extreme crises and antagonisms that they face. One of the protestors declares, “*We in Europe will not accept the sacrificial role offered us by our North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies*” (145). They are adamant in their objection to the existence of the US nuclear weapons on the soil of the UK, to mass destruction of millions of innocent human beings and to the damages of the environment. In her monologue about the starving refugees arriving in Greece and Turkey, Italy and Spain, Iris debunks the lies about “thousands of exhausted holidaymakers arriving every day from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, for city-break holidays” (232). She directs her scathing criticism toward Sophia and her friends who do not identify with the starving people: “Tell your friends it helps if you've had a bit of experience in how to put together out of nothing a place for people to live in or sleep” (232).

Unquestionably, Iris' reactionary approach towards political and ecological issues is characterized by what Timotheus Vermeulen called “depthiness” (2015) in comparison to Sophia's superficial and apathetic communal lifestyle; a characteristic of the postmodern. To Sophia, the activism of Iris is a “weak excuse for living irresponsibly. Illegal dirty hippy-hangover pseudo-romantic squat” (117). In a flashback that goes back to the Christmas Day of 1977, the narrator demonstrates how Iris's activist friends, who inhabited the Cornish House before Sophia bought it years later, tried to change her shallowness and reorient her in relation to political injustices and the catastrophic ecological issues. They told her in an impressive tone about the fatal repercussions of the chemical leak from the Italian factory manifested in death of trees, birds, cats, rabbits and other small creatures that “had fallen dead out of the sky” (119). People who live nearby the factory started “taking their children to the hospital because their faces had broken out in rashes and boils” (119). Furthermore, the activists scrawled the names of the chemical warfare agents on the walls. Yet, detached from ecological issues and preoccupied only with the superficial exteriors, Sophia contends that the scribble looks like “a nonsense Scrabble game the people living here had painted round the room's cornicing, still quite elegant regardless of the disrepair” (120). In fact, the lack of an insightful vision of the universe that Sophia represents is typical of other members of the community. It lead to ignoring the leaks have taken place in Britain where a secret factory makes chemical/ biological warfare (CBWS) (121). She heedlessly states, “It was terrible what could happen in other countries” (121). Evidently, the swinging between the poles of superficiality and ‘depthiness’, as represented by the different figures in the narrative, aims to increase the readers' awareness about global crises.

More emphasis on Sophia's shallowness and her concern with the surface appearance appears in her distrust of digital technology and her suspicion about its reliability. She believes that search engines like Google resemble “door-to-door

salesmen ... [who] can never be trusted” (193). In postmodern terms, digital technology distorts reality and does not offer the equivalence or knowledge of the actual world. Yet, a metamodernist approach reveals a profound concern with an “increased digitalisation hyper-reality of society, conscious of the shifting relationships in a globalising world, and it hopes for a shared sustainable future, however untenable it might be” (Gibbons 31). It becomes an ethical imperative to increase human consciousness about challenges to connectivity through the “merge with technology, collapsing traditional binaries between mind and machine” (101) as noted by Marlo Starr. Distancing herself from digital technology, Sophia is incapable of changing what she perceives and how to perceive it as well as failing in transcending the confines of the physical world.

Furthermore, Sophia seems firmly enthusiastic about beauty of surfaces and she is reluctant to dig deeper and is unable to see global atrocity. She states that “beauty is the true way to change things for the better.... Beauty is truth, truth beauty. There is no such thing as fake beauty. Which is why beauty is so powerful. Beauty assuages” (211). Sophia criticizes the younger generation for seeing everything through filtered screens and denounces what she claims to be their failure to grasp the true beauty of art. A case in point is the Mona Lisa painting in front of which people are standing and “no longer even bothering to turn towards it. They mostly had their backs to it because they were taking pictures of themselves with it; these days that old painting was smiling its superior way at people’s back” (12). Typically, she trusts the politically and socially constructed ‘truths’ presented by governmental figures on TV and does not endeavor to delve into what lurks beneath their claims. Watching a TV interview between Iris and an expert of ecology, she believes, without any scrutiny, the point of view of the expert that Iris’ thoughts about ecological pollution are “laughable and untrue” (129). Her captivation with television is obvious in her obsession with one, as Arthur states, that is “bigger than any television [Arthur] has ever seen” (176). Mulling over postmodern constructed truth and metamodern virtual reality, Seth Abramson writes, “Whereas the postmodernism of the Age of Television encouraged those interested in its cultural paradigms to use ornate “deconstructions” to understand the small screen’s theoretical bases, the post-postmodernism known as “metamodernism” that underwrites all virtual reality projects is best understood experientially” (“Virtual Reality”). *Winter* endorses the essential need for interaction between humans and digital technology; virtual reality is the means through which people can be released from the confines of the physical world through a process of “disembodiment that generate chimerical, hybrid identities” (Starr 101). In so doing, people can perceive the crises and challenges of the world from experimental angles.

Arthur and his girlfriend Charlotte figure as counterparts of Sophia and Iris. Like Sophia, his mother, Arthur is concerned with beauty and art and he envisages himself as a nature writer. He posts a blog about the natural world entitled ‘Art in Nature’ reacting against ‘nature films’ that he regards as “grit and litter” (160). Although the disposition of the art Arthur practices in his blogs is unpolitical, the blog itself unravels political implications. This is because the blog addresses “natural unity in seeming disunity” of snow and wind. It deals with “how unity can be revealed against the odds by the random grace of snow’s relationship with wind direction, the way that snow lands with an emphasis on one direction even though a

tree's branches go in so many directions" (53). The connection is revealed in "the give and take of water molecules," and "the communal nature of the snowflake" (53).

Charlotte, in contrast with Arthur, espouses a keen interest in politics and a dystopian outlook on the present and future of post-Brexit Britain. This disposition resonates in her recurrent dream in which she is "cutting herself open in a zigzag at the breastbone with a pair of chicken scissors, the bonecutting kind, then into four pieces like a chicken for soup" (55). In her view, what propels such a vision is the fury of people especially after the last vote and the exploitative and callous stance of the government vis a vis rage against the leadership in the UK and the US. She muses that they are a scrooge, a reference to *A Christmas Carol*, who are indifferent to both history and people. She rants against them describing them as "new kind of being ... who'd been birthed not by real historied time and people but by... plastic carrier bags" (58). Besides, they are 'unhistoried,' "inhuman," "brainless," and "unknowing" (58). The text denounces the state of the political chaos triggered by such unprofessional politicians who falsely proclaim progress and advancement to camouflage political bankruptcy.

With the failure of every attempt to find a way to reconcile her political awareness and Arthur's political ignorance, Charlotte engages in a dialectical dispute with Arthur. She demeans him repeatedly, fights break out with him and she lectures him about how he is 'missing the point' the same way many nature writers do. She addresses him contemptuously, "You, a nature writer ... Make me laugh. You can't just make up stuff about wandering around in a field or beside a canal and put it online and then call yourself a nature writer" (54). For her, he represents the kind of nature writers who are "habitually self-satisfied and self-blinding and comforting themselves about their own identities in troubling times" (53). In accordance with such assumption, she infers that he is "selfish-fraud" (49), "naïve" (57), "dead ... like [his] political soul" (60), and his blog "*irrelevant reactionary unpolitical* blog" (58). This is justified by his refusal to connect with real political issues in general and the Brexit dilemma in particular. In a retort to Charlotte's declaration that the Brexit is a culmination "of forty years of political selfishness" (55), Arthur responds that it is really ludicrous to claim any knowledge about the effect of forty years of political selfishness since she is only twenty-nine. He further clarifies that the contemporary political occurrences are transitory, unconnected and fleeting whereas 'nature' maintains a permanent cycle of growth and regrowth.

Arthur's disconnection from politics becomes tangible when he is incapable of detecting the political associations of the 'hedgerows' that refer to the constructed barbed wires erected to stop the flow of immigrants and refugees. Like several European politicians, he exonerates himself from all the responsibilities for the catastrophes that befell the immigrants claiming that "They chose to come and live here. They ran that risk. It's not our responsibility" (55). Evidently, Arthur, in his indifference, takes after his mother who partitions people into hierarchal groups based on race and ethnicity. In this sense, he focuses on the exterior and cannot figure out and capture an ethical principle to choreograph a whole vision of his local and global contemporary political situation. Arthur's apathy is the target of Charlotte's sarcasm, she observes, "Is [it] ... *their choice* to run away from their

houses being burned down and bombed and then *their choice again* to get into a boat that capsized?" (54). The words underline the ethical values neglected in postmodernism, the empathy needed for the helpless and disempowered and the respect one owes to others who are different.

Unable to collapse the distance between him and Charlotte, Arthur breaks up with her. She takes her vengeance and vents her fury against him by hacking his Twitter account crushing his posts "sending out fake tweets", telling his followers that "he'd seen the first brimstone of the new year cycle. *3 months early the first sieg thing* of brimstone !" (49). She deliberately makes spelling mistakes to disclose his stupidity and clumsiness. These fake tweets stir up frothing anger, derision and hatred; "one tweet ... said if you were a woman I'd be sending you a death threat right about now" (50). As a result, Arthur starts undergoing apprehensions about his reliability, thinking that "he is not the real thing" (49), "he himself is dead as a disappeared grammar, a graveyard scatter of phonemes and morphemes" and that "he is the last living speaker of himself" (87). In his self portrait, he sees himself not as "an idiot" but as "an idiolect" (87); namely, he speaks a language and embraces an idiosyncratic style that no one else still alive in the world utilizes. The wordplay discloses Arthur's muddle: he feel that he is detached from the contemporary society and thus he has nothing to contribute to it.

Indeed, Arthur's dilemma of his obliviousness to the surrounding material reality is rooted in being trapped in the middle of the dialectic mindsets of his mother and his aunt and their frequent fights. Charlotte's instigation to participate in world affairs and her apocalyptic vision produces the opposite results in Arthur who distances himself and immerses in a state of apathy, lethargy and narcissism. Charlottes hoped for a change in Arthur to become an affective subject forming interpersonal and interactive connection with others as well as the world at large. Charlotte's incessant endeavors triggers Arthur's "acute self-awareness" of "how [he] will be seen by others" as argued by Adam Kelly. Accordingly, he is determined to "cut through false narrative with razor edge writing" (62) by inscribing a shining article for Art in Nature. In it, he tackles topics that restructure empathetic, altruistic and relational understanding that enables to synthesize and balance with nature and survive the benighted state of the fraudulent world of lies.

In order to perceive the real personality of nature and its reactions to winter season, Arthur goes out into the streets and connects with a handful of the earth of the city. He finds that it "*is dying is divided into twenty four [,] is doomed [,] is destroyed is dead*. It reminds him of it stiling to hard and frozen when the temperatures fall and thawing back to pliant again when they rise" (66). In winter, a specter-like bleak and hard atmosphere in which all the aspects of life withdraw is ever present. This seemingly lifeless background is only transient; a preparation for becoming colorful and lively in the season of spring. In *Illustrated Bestiary*, Maia Toll opines that "In winter, Spring Peeper hunkers down in the mud at pond's edge and freezes into hibernation. In spring, he thaws a new life" (37). The narrator indicates how the bright snow symphony of winter invigorates the beauty lurking beneath high frost and how the "dull tarmac" (30) of the roads shines when the weather is cold enough. The narrator goes further and adds "how somber yet bright the major-symphony of winter is and how beautiful everything looks under a high frost" (30). Delving deep into the implication of winter, Arthur reflects, "*That's what winter is: an exercise in remembering how to still yourself then how to come*

pliantly back to life again. An exercise in adapting yourself to whatever frozen or molten state it brings you” (66). So inspirational is the effect winter as a constant reminder not only of spring but also of adaptation of the self to the incessant natural changes. Winter emotionally floods Arthur with hope and realizes that it is the adaptability rather of the subject that can reconstruct genuine interconnection with others as well as with nature.

The recollection of how several families of birds came in and out in their house in winter over the years reminds Iris of the adaptability with nature. She contends “They made a lovely soft sound. We gave them a box full of straw to nest in but they brought their own twigs and took bits of the straw and wove them together, built nests up in the rafters and only used this room when it was rainy or cold. They mate for life, you know, those birds” (234). The scene is revealing as it underscores Iris’ aspiration for the connectivity that saturates the natural world of birds. Unable to grasp this meaning, Sophia does not embrace such a romantic vision and repeatedly calls her sister a mythologizer; “*I think you’ll find that’s a myth*” (234). Yet, Arthur, unlike her, realizes that this is due to the relational aesthetics winter communicates. Insead of “this half-season grey self-sameness” (214) that does not perform, he longs for the real winter where snow covers the woods as well as ‘the troubles of Art’ and his family and releases him from disastrous artificial world of the xenophobic leaders’ restricting and misleading policies.

In fact, Arthur ends up formulating a new conceptualization of the significance of the plural and diverse voices and perspectives manifested in his mother and aunt. He perceives that their differences, as Van der Merwe argues, are “formed only because self and other are always already “entangled”, always already in a relational patterns and meshes with each other and interacting/intra-acting with each other” (235). Such a perception deepens Arthur’s awareness of political issues on one hand and propels him to change his blog “Art in Nature” into “a co-written blog by a communal group of writers” (318), on the other hand. Arthur is thus finally able to see reality and to connect the public events to his personal life, nevertheless he continues his quest to reveal nature’s beauty. What reinforces such a quest is the fact that the isolated parts in the novel written after Christmas are blog posts that conclude with the phrase “Art in Nature.”

Basic determinants for establishing efficacious kinship are constituted in reciprocal and collaborative views, relational perception, dialogic logic, empathy and acceptance of differences. Though Sophia and Iris embrace diametrical ideological views and frequently engage in dialectic speculations, yet they intrinsically, the course of the narrative shows that they have a tendency “to become, to desire, to reach beyond themselves” (Greene 372). They no longer antagonize each other as two opposing forces; a middle ground of negotiation emerges for them to express their divergent worldviews “lightly” and “fondly” (297). A revealing case in point is manifested in Sophia’s claim that Iris’s story about the lies and fraudulence of the government towards “huge numbers of people who’d been victims of the mustard gas attacks” (297) is a typical anti-establishment folktale. She further explains that the state is not responsible for paying all the “wounded men and their families a war pension” (297). In response, Iris lightly

states, "Not even you, Soph, with all your powers of wisdom, all your business acumen and all your natural intelligence, can make something not be true just by declaring it's not true" (297). The quote conveys the notion that, albeit Sophia and Iris are different, they come to realize that the truth about external realities may be confused with what they believe to be true in the sense that there are multiple configurations of truths. As the narrative unfolds, they disclose an area where their views overlap and show a utopian desire for a world devoid of wars as they "work for something else" and their hearts are made of "other stuff" (301). In this sense, dialogic logic incites the participants to be communicative, and foreshadows a possibility of reconciliation through interaction and conversation even if it is never conclusive.

In contrast, Charlotte and Arthur move towards areas of dialectical struggle that destroy their relationship. In their altercation, Charlotte forces on Arthur an appalling image of the world and attempts to impose her unilateral views and fixed interpretations concerning politics and ecology. It is only seeming victory that she achieves over him as she gloats in her revenge. For Arthur, the new phase begins with Lux working to form the interpersonal and interactive dialogic connection.

2. Christmas Eve: A Reimagined Utopian Desire of Relationality

Smith believes in her willpower as a writer and, like John Keats "straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness without any bearing, clearly values the strength of and imaginative potential in such a state in the face of the unknowable and unpredictable" (271). In other words, it seems as if she embraces Michel Foucault's notions of imagining the present, "otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it, but by grasping in it what is" (311). In so doing, the narrative world of *Winter* does not espouse the postmodern vision of utopia reducing it to be a mere critique of the existing present. It embodies Vermeulen and van den Akker's conceptualization of a utopia yearning as 'a looking glass' for 'scanning this world and others for alternative possibilities. It is not invoked to get us away from something according to this or that dogma' ("Utopia" 65). Vermeulen and van den Akker further explain that their 'utopia' represents a possibility "of thinking the past, present and future as a meaningful whole" ("Utopia" 66) and "flooding and losing oneself," so as to obliterate the "the borders between the I and the world" and recreate a new world in which "inside and outside are no longer opposites" (qtd. in "Utopia" 63). In this vein, the metamodernist utopia transcends the limitation of not only the present but also of the individual. In light of such postulation, utopia is not "appeasement and rest, but ... constant integration and differentiation" (Benhabib 1448). Further, "utopia itself can never finally be reached" (Brunton 62) because it is the "impossible possibility" (Vermeulen and van den Akker "Utopia" 65) to realize final alternative solutions with respect to the drastically arbitrary world of political, economic, and ecological hazards. However, this does not aim to cultivate escape mechanism. On the contrary, it instigates human fellows to exert incessant efforts to keep utopian desire alive and generate new experimental alternatives and ideas for a better future.

Intertexting with Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," the text utilizes Christmas Eve in looking for alternatives that reimagine post-truth era in general as an appropriate context to converge the fractured family in particular.⁵ The text depicts Christmas Eve as a utopian story of

peace on earth, goodwill to all men; a story in which there's no room for severed heads; ... where there are *no* heads divided from bodies hanging around in the air or anywhere, either new ones, from new atrocities or murders or terrorisms, or old ones, left over from old historic atrocities and murders and terrorisms and bequeathed to the future (31).

The quote is insightful and suggestive in two ways namely; it triggers people's concern with ethical demands for altruism and forgiveness, and it collapses the temporal distance between the past and the present regarding them, not as opposites, but as a synthesized whole.

The advent of the Croatian-Canadian immigrant Lux in the middle of the cold winter adds to the specificity of Christmas Eve in the narrative. When Arthur finds it embarrassing to tell his mother that he and Charlotte have been separated after fussing about bringing her during Christmas Eve, he resorts to Lux to impersonate Charlotte. It is significant that she is introduced as a warbler or "a catalyst par excellence" (Pittel 65). Her name evokes St. Lucy who symbolizes patron saint of light in darkness which offers an inimitably alternative perspective that sheds light on a world shrouded by winter. Moreover, it underscores a new ontology of "being-with" in the sense that "being cannot be anything but being-with-one-another" (Nancy 4). This is especially important in the midst of cultural exchanges within the European Union and highlights an opposite stance to the anti-immigrant discourse that Arthur and Sophia embrace. The presence of Lux represents an endeavor to heal the fractured dynamics and the irreconcilable worldviews of Arthur and his mother as well as that of the two sisters in whom she reinvigorates the shared history and the possibility of renewing bonds. In his comments on Lux's arrival, Stephen Levin explains that it is an opportunity to "meet the other with a stance of radical hospitality, and an 'event' that creates the conditions for new modes of attachment and love" (46) and it "reconfigure[s] social norms and intersubjective bonds" (47).

Lux's rationale of her visit to the United Kingdom is rooted in her utopian vision of the country as a place of beauty and hope. She has an adamant belief in beauty as the true pathway to make and change everything for the better and thus there should be "a lot more beauty in all our lives" (p. 211). Lux describes most exquisitely a flower trapped in a manuscript of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*; seeing this as the most captivating mark made on words by a flower underscores her appreciation of beauty. Like winter which bears the seeds of rebirth, the traces of the flower epitomize the signs of life "reaching across the words on the page for the entire world like a footpath that leads to the lit tip of a candle" (319). Lux reflects, "It looks like maybe someone made a stain with water, like an oily smudge. Until you look properly at it. Then there's the line of the neck and the rosebud shape at the end of it" (212). As such, Lux in contrast with Sophia and Iris, is not only capable of seeing beauty in *Cymbeline*, but also she grasps what hope really suggests. Smith here presumes that beyond the threatening ghosts of crises that haunt the society, there is the "ghost of a flower not yet open on its stem, [as] the real thing long gone" (319). Further implication connotes that if darkness and despair are unremitting in history, so are light and hope booming even in inhospitable and harsh surroundings. It may not be farfetched to assume that

Christmas Eve with which the narrative begins bears resemblance to the ghost of the flower in the sense that they both replace the disconsolate litany of death and announce the coming back to life. They are harbingers of hopefulness, optimism and connectivity that counter the pervasive communal anxiety.

For Lux, the essence of Christmas Eve is “wishing everyone peace, peace on earth, goodwill to all men, merry, happy” (195) not only for the present few days, but also for the years to come. Arthur retorts that it “gestures to hope” (195). As such, Lux accentuates the assumption that utopia surpasses the limitation of the present. Since such a vision is discernable in Shakespeare’s *Cymbaline*, Sophia and Lux engage in a debate on the paly. For Sophia, the play portrays “a kingdom subsumed in chaos, lies, powermongering, division and a great deal of poisoning and self-poisoning” (200) with implications that this fraudulent disjointed world of the play corresponds to the modern world. Both worlds lack human connection and if people “could just step out of themselves ... they'd see it's the same play they're all in, the same world, that they're all part of the same story now” (201). Lux notes that the Cleves family members have lived separated from each other for roughly three decades “broken off each other’s worlds” (201). To keep the utopian desire alive, Lux demonstrates that such a “tangled-up messed-up farce of a mess” (200) would be resolved in the end “into this graceful thing it is at the end where the balance comes back and all the lies are revealed and all the losses are compensated” (200). To her, as Theodore Zeldin argues, “when problems appeared insoluble, when life seemed to be meaningless, when governments have been powerless, people have sometimes found a way out by changing the subject of their conversation, or the way they talked, or the persons they talked to ... Now it’s time for the New Conversation” (7). Along these lines, utopia “operates not as a clearly formed solution to contemporary problems but as a form of desire put to work as a mechanism for detecting “ (Brunton 62), what Vermeulen and van den Akker call “alternative possibilities” (“Utopia” 65). In light of this presumption, the text emphasizes the paramount need to reshape new percepts of understanding and interacting.

As a victim of the Brexit, Lux adheres to Iris’ political philosophies of solidarity, open-mindedness and inclusion of all who share the world. On another plane, although she adopts a diametrically opposite stance to Arthur and Sophia, she is able to connect with them through adding a human dimension to political issues they discuss. She stirs their ethical concerns about the reality of the political situation and debunks the myths of the anti-immigrant discourse.

In her novel *Hotel World* (2001), Smith identifies such profound understanding and appropriate treatment of the Cleves’ eccentric views as a “symbiotic field of exchange, a site of relations that extends beyond the layer of skin, beyond the merely human, and beyond the immediate present” (80). Every level of the narrative destabilizes the notion of the masterful egocentric self and invokes coexistence and interdependent understanding. The text therefore reiterates Seyla Benhabib’s concept of utopia as a space in which each individual ‘can appreciate otherness without dissolving in it’ and ‘can respect heterogeneity without being overwhelmed by it’ (1448). In Maxine Greens’s view, only ‘relational beings’ can grasp notions of tolerance and openness to the network of correspondences. This is due to their preoccupation with instigating a global interest in keeping themselves “pulsating, alive, and forever open to more and more

perspectives, to more and more dialogue, to more and more interruptions by persistent, unfailing life” (374).

Lux pithily tells Sophia that it is not a working solution to admonish millions of refugees and asylum seekers to go home and build fences and walls to block their streaming into European countries. She further castigates the whimsical inadvertent and deliberate exclusion and inclusion of the other marginalized groups of women, and indigenous people by one mainstream group of people. Lux tends to eschew fanaticism and eradicate ethnic divisions in an attempt to emphasize the determinants of the twenty-first century multiculturalism and subjecthood. Her approach thereby echos Adam Burke Carmichael’s view of relationality as “one of the core ideas that connect diverse Indigenous nationhoods”(136). Likewise, Shawn Wilson regards relationality as a “foundation of our ontology” and inevitable “epistemological beliefs in egalitarianism and inclusiveness” (92). To enhance this insightful proposition, Wilson maintains that “we could not be without being in relationship with everything that surrounds us and is within us. Our reality, our ontology, is the relationships” (76). Lux tells the family members about the destiny she would suffer as an immigrant and the possibility of not being allowed to stay in England, “now I can’t get a good job because nobody knows if I’ll still be able to be here this time next year or when they decide we have to go. So I’m keeping myself below the radar” (247). Nevertheless, Sophia is still insistent on her anti-immigrants attitude, ignoring Iris’ presence in the room, claiming that “*no room, the no more room*” (205) for the immigrants to come to Britain “because they want *our lives*” (205).

Lux’s political erudition and knowledgeable conversations subvert the stereotypical image inculcated in Sophia’s mind about the immigrants flooding Britain. Arthur also changes and relates more closely to human and ecological atrocities. He thereby becomes more mindful and aware of the radical threats the world faces. Mulling over the significance of conversation, Zeldin asserts that the 21st century “needs a new ambition – to develop not talk, but conversation, which does change people. Real conversation catches fire. It involves more than sending and receiving information” (1). Getting back to London, Arthur can now see the ecological atrocities that befall the city in general and “under the radar people “in particular” (313). He divulges the lethal impact of the Grenfell Tower fire on 14 June 2017. So terrible is the scene that Arthur describes it as a real “terrible mirage, a hallucination” (312). The incident helps to open Arthur’s eyes to the social injustices and political duplicity of standards. He realizes that the residences of the building are “people under the radar” not those with a lot of money; therefore, what will be central to arguments across the media and politics is the reference to the dead people only as numbers not individual subjects. This incident thereby reinforces Arthur’s connection to reality.

The drastic change in Arthur emerges as he starts questioning the inhuman politics of anti-immigrants. What induces his anger is a piece of writing about “how people are crowdfunding, raising thousands of pounds, to fund a boat that intercepts and waylays the rescue boats sent out from the Italian mainland to help the migrants in trouble in the sea” (313). Shocked of how people pay money to hurt people, Arthur reads the article twice to make sure that he has not misread it. Then, he asks

his aunt and mother about the about the difference between politics and art. His mother replies that they are “*polar opposites. As a very fine poet once said, we hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us*” (217). Yet, in her response to Arthur’s texting, Iris explication is intrinsic to the philosophy of Smith: both politics and art are identical as the human will always surface in art no matter its politics and will be repressed or absent in most politics no matter its art (317). Plainly, Iris is not concerned with Sophia’s eccentric viewpoints as much as with the ‘human’ in politics or art. Yet, her unremitting involvement in a variety of political causes constitutes an impediment to form an authentic understanding of the idea of art. Accordingly, the new debates of Lux, Sophia, Arthur and Iris’ about politics and art are indicative of the dire need for strong authenticity and true combination of empathy, argumentation and intersubjective communications. This is because such tenets can eliminate solipsistic feelings and induce an acceptance of divergent standpoints in place of the monolithic viewpoints.

In fact, Smith seems ambivalent where to end the narrative; therefore, the closure of the narrative is problematic in many respects. On one hand, though the narrative opens with the announcement of the death of God, it unexpectedly ends with a supplication to God to help human beings through a quote from Dickens’s *Christmas Carol* stated by Tiny Tim: “God help us, every one” (p. 322). In this regard, it reflects the oscillating stance humans undergo in the modern age. On the other hand, despite the hopeful utopian desire that Smith pursues after Christmas Eve, the novel ends in a melancholic mood with President Trump addressing the Boy Scouts of America in July 2017, telling his audience in cliché praise that they’ll be able to say “Merry Christmas” again. Yet, Smith as well as the reader still believes that Christmas Eve is no longer regarded in such superficial perception as it acquires a new political dimension: it augurs spring that will come and the buds hope that will push through the murky and chaotic state of the world.

Conclusion

In its maupilation of the aesthetics of metamodernism, *Winter* redefines ethical dynamics that reinforce the discourse of retnality in response to the diverse crises of a chaotic and fragmented world. The text focuses on the dysfunctional Cleves family that is fraught with incongruities and conflicts, as a microcosm of the macrocosm. To Smith, Christmas Eve is an appropriate context to bring the disjointed family together and show the struggle of worldviews. In this way, Christmas Eve acquires a political dimension that seems much more profound than Trump’s cliché praise of Christmas alluded to at the closure of the narrative.

The relational world that the text explores is carried out on both the level of themes and the style and form of the narrative. the content morphs strange ideas and destabilizes binary distinction between desperate polarities of death and rebirth, vision and truth, past and present, transience and permanence, superficiality and depth, as well as the dialectic and dialogic. There is no clear reconciliation between dialectic mindsets of Sophia, Iris and Arthur. However, the text utilizes the introduction of Lux and the gathering in Christmas Eve as an appropriate mode to create and investigate overlapping spaces. Within the spectrum of these spaces, disparate polarities are revisited in the sense that they are no longer regarded as extremes, but as simultaneously operative contentions. In so doing, the text seeks to elicit emotional and moral responses to utopian desires of crisscrossing the threshold of egocentricism, solipsism, and a muddled reality to a relational, intersubjective, tolerant and collaborative world.

Notes

1. **Generally epistemology asks** "How can I know or interpret this world of which I am a part?"
2. Etymologically, the prefix 'meta' describes swinging between and beyond diametrical extremes. The term was coined by the scholar Mas'ud Zavarzadeh in the mid-1970s to demonstrate the move beyond the monolithic fictive construct of the modernist novel "towards a metamodern narrative with zero degree of interpretation" (69) and puzzling multiplicity towards the interpretation of reality. Then it became popular in the 1980,1990s and 2000s in response to the global crises. In 2010, the cultural theorists Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker utilized it as a move "forward out of the postmodern" and defined it as a structure of feelings that they described as oscillation between modern and postmodern practices in their essay "Notes on Metamodernism." In "Ten Basic Principles of Metamodernism" (2015), Seth Abramson expanded it and incorporate some new elements are primarily based on negotiation between modernism and postmodrnim, dialogic over dialectic, collapsing distances, simultaneity, optimistic response to tragedy.
3. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, Kaja Silverman and Bracha Ettinger are among the prominent theorists who provide an in-depth theorization of 'relationality' as an underlying organising principle of metamodernism.
4. Some of the most distinguished metamodern novelists include David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Franzen, Zadie Smith, Ian McEwan, Jonathan Franzen, Jeffrey Eugenides and Mark Z. Danielewski
5. **Post-truth**: a philosophical concept relating to a state in which people share no objective vision toward the criterions of truth and render arguments and debates based emotions and beliefs plausible facts. Furthermore, the referendum is considered the foremost vote in the era of post-truth politics.

المستخلص:

رؤية جديدة للمتضادات من منظور ما وراء الحداثة في رواية آلي سميث "الشتاء"
محمود إبراهيم رضوان

تتناول هذه الدراسة رواية آلي سميث "الشتاء" في ضوء خطاب العلاقات الارتباطية بين المتضادات من منظور ما وراء الحداثة؛ إذ يستخدم النص سمات نظرية ما وراء الحداثة من أجل التخلص من مفهوم الثنائيات المتضادة مثل: الموت والحياة والخيال والواقع و الماضي والحاضر و الخلود والفناء والسطحية والتعمق والحوارية والجدلية. في حين لم تعد مثل هذه المتناقضات في عداد المتعاكسات التي تتواجد في مطلق التعبير ، لكنها تناغمت لتتربط وتتآلف على نحو متبادل في حين محافظتها على إثارتها الجدل على نحو مستمر. في ضوء نظرية ما وراء الحداثة، والتي من خلالها تتبلور علاقة ارتباطية بين المتضادات، ولذلك فإن النص يسعى إلى بناء علاقات ارتباطية وحوارية تسهم في إصلاح حالة التشردم والتمزق التي يعاني منها الأفراد والمجتمعات في عالمنا الحديث. وذلك من خلال بث روح التفاؤل في الفرد والمجتمع من أجل تكوين عالم أكثر تسامحاً وتعاوناً يتسم بقبول الآخر واحتواء وجهات النظر المتباينة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ما وراء الحداثة، الارتباطية، المتباينة، المتناقضات، التشردم، الجدلية، الحوارية ، توافق الذوات، ليلة عيد الميلاد، يوتوبيا

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