

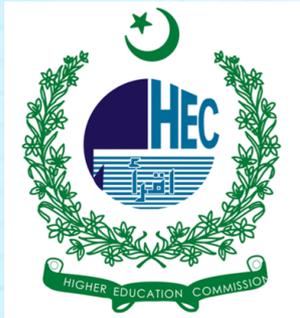
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**TO RE-EVALUATE AND REVISE THE IDEAS OF MODERNISM AND  
POSTMODERNISM: A METAMODERNIST READING OF TAKE MY HAND  
BY DOLEN PERKIN-VALDEZ**



**Mooneer Yousaf<sup>\*1</sup>, Dr. Ali Ammar<sup>2</sup>**

*<sup>\*1</sup>PhD scholar Muslim Youth University Islamabad*

*<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor of English Muslim Youth university  
Islamabad*

*<sup>\*1</sup>mooneer2001@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>dr.aliammad@myu.edu.pk*

**Abstract**

*This research paper aims to examine how *Take My Hand* (2022) by Dolen Perkins-Valdez employs strategies of metamodernism to re-evaluate and revise the ideas of modernism and postmodernism for the twenty-first century. Based upon Allan McKee's (2003) model of textual analysis and Vermeulen and Van den Akker's (2010) theory of metamodernism, this research examines how the novel oscillates between modernist sincerity and postmodern skepticism to suggest an emotionally resonant, an ethically engaged way of knowing and being. Through the analysis of main passages, the research contends that the narrative generates new methods of subjectivity and meaning-making that move beyond postmodern cynicism and irony, emotional association, confirming the possibility of ethical responsibility, and collective memory. This study shows that *Take My Hand* reflects that metamodernism strategies such as oscillation, relationality, ambivalence, and sincerity tempered by irony offer productive ways of re-engaging with meaning and reality beyond the impasses of postmodern nihilism and modernist certainty. It also proves that by embracing both irony and sincerity, critique and care, the *Take My Hand* not only endures eye witness to the past but also demands readers to enact and imagine a more just future. These oscillatory engagement upholds that meaning, though contested and provisional, remains both necessary and possible. This research also aims to chart and develop understandings of society about societal changes and transformation. Moreover this is also important because a breakaway from postmodernism is a great change in how society is moving forward and how society can be further developed and understood. It is a great breakthrough in the domain of social understanding and philosophy.*

**Keywords:** *Metamodernism, modernism, postmodernism, textual analysis, Take My Hand, Allan McKee, Dolen Perkins-Valdez, Philosophy*

## **Introduction**

In the continuing development of cultural criticism and literary theory, researchers have progressively questioned the appropriateness of modernist and postmodernist models to fully account for present-day literary production and its engagement with meaning, reality, and ethics. Characterized by its faith in progress, artistic transcendence, human reason, modernism sought to make general meaning and reveal truths through formal experimentation and self-analysis (Hutcheon, 2002). In difference, postmodernism famously put off such convictions, highlighting irony, skepticism, deconstruction, and the unfeasibility of stable meaning, frequently mocking both modernist standards and the institutions that sustained them (Hutcheon, 2002). However, as cultural theorists such as Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) have perceived, postmodernism's critique and relentless irony have themselves started to feel insufficient in addressing the injustices, crises, and affective needs of the present age. In reaction, they claim, a sensibility has developed known as metamodernism, which oscillates between the hopes of modernism and the skepticism of postmodernism while seeking to transcend the boundaries of each.

Metamodernism characterizes a “both-neither” stand, acceptance the likelihood of meaning

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while remaining conscious of its provisionality, inhabiting the space between hope and despair without collapsing fully into either pole and performing sincerity through irony (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010). Thus, this theory offers a procreative theoretical lens for understanding how present-day narratives exchange the emotional and ethical complexities of our era. In this perspective, literature becomes a privileged place for investigating how meaning and reality can be reconnected with beyond the dead end of modernist idealism and postmodern irony. Predominantly enlightening in this respect is *Take My Hand* by Dolen Perkins-Valdez, a novel that challenges the unforgettable past of reproductive injustice and medical racism in America while signaling toward rationality, healing, and the opportunity of emotional and moral accountability.

The novel, *Take My Hand* by Dolen Perkins-Valdez, is set in Montgomery, Alabama, in the 1970s and described retrospectively by a young black nurse, Civil Townsend, who gets involved in a family planning program that sterilizes two young black girls named India and Erica, without their consent. The story oscillates between Civil's present as an older woman grappling with the ghosts of her actions and attempting to bear witness to their consequences and her past as a naive nurse complicit in a system of persecution. Her journey focuses on the themes that resist naïve moralization and instead offers an oscillatory engagement representative of metamodernist thoughts such as the tensions between individual morality and institutional authority, personal accountability and collective history, care and complicity.

This research work examines *Take My Hand* by Dolen Perkins-Valdez through a metamodern lens and by using Allan McKee's (2003) model of textual analysis to establish how the novel re-evaluates and revises the ideas of modernism and postmodernism for a twenty-first-century context. McKee's model stresses understanding texts as ideologically and socially situated, examining their character positions, construction of reality, and ideological work. This methodology lines up with metamodernism's ethics, consideration to affect, and relationality as dimensions of meaning-making beyond both modernist universality and postmodern relativism.

The significance of this research is in its contribution to the emerging theory of metamodernism and its ability to highlight how contemporary fiction can aid us in imagining and inhabiting more ethically agreed-upon modes of being. In doing so, the study claims that *Take My Hand* endorses a metamodernist insight not only as an aesthetic approach but also as an ethical imperative for engaging with the sufferings of history and the desires of the present day.

By highlighting both the insights and the inadequacies of modernism and postmodernism's paradigms, *Take My Hand* by Dolen Perkins-Valdez demonstrates what has been termed as affective realism, the ability of literature to move readers ethically and affectively while remaining conscious of the contingency and constructedness of the novel itself. The testimonial structure of the novel, its acknowledgment of both historical trauma and ongoing hope, and its refusal to offer simple resolutions, embody the oscillatory rationality at the core of metamodernism.

To sum up, this study aims to establish that *Take My Hand* by Dolen Perkins-Valdez does not merely revive modernist or postmodernist insights but instead expresses a metamodernist reaction to their boundaries, proposing a literary expression of what it means to live relationally, ethically, and affectively in the current age. This oscillation between the poles without agreeing to either permits for a nuanced engagement with reality and meaning that neither modernism's universalist ambition nor postmodernism's ironic detachment could completely withstand on their own.

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## Research Methodology

This chapter carries the methodological procedure of the current research employed in the present study, which explores the strategies of metamodernism in Dolen Perkins-Valdez's *Take My Hand* (2022) by means of Allan McKee's (2003) model of textual analysis. The procedure combines theoretical insights from metamodern cultural criticism and an organized textual analysis of the novel, positioning the reading within its socio-historical and ideological contexts. This methodology allows a critical yet effectively engaged analysis of the novel, concentrating to its oscillation between modernism and postmodernism paradigms and its expression of a metamodernist sensibility.

## Theoretical Framework

The principal theoretical framework of this research is metamodernism, which is an emergent cultural paradigm acknowledged by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) as "characterized by an informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism, a moderate fanaticism" (p. 5), and most characteristically, an oscillation between the attitudes of modernism and postmodernism. This oscillation recognizes the dead end of stable meaning and universal truths (a postmodern insight) while instantaneously claiming the necessity of striving for such sincerity, meaning, and ethical engagement (a modernist impulse). This 'both-neither' logic allows the interpretation of the novel as negotiating irony and sincerity, critique and hope, and care and despair without subsiding into either pole (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010).

The metamodern insight, as Gibbons (2015) further contends, is often articulated through affective realism, wherein texts invite ethical reflection and emotive investment even while sustaining critical distance from their constructedness. Thus, this theoretical framework is mainly suitable for an analysis of *Take My Hand*, a novel that reexamines the reproductive injustice and historical trauma of medical racism in America while making a voice that is at once detached, self-critical and hopeful, and extremely invested.

## Method of Analysis

To make the metamodernist framework operational within a robust methodological structure, this research work uses the model of textual analysis suggested by Allan McKee (2003). He states textual analysis as an attempt to bring to the surface the explicit and implicit meanings of texts to comprehend how they position readers and reality (McKee, 2003). His model positions texts as cultural and ideological artifacts, highlighting their role in shaping, reflecting, and contesting power relations and social values. According to McKee, actual textual analysis continues along three interrelated dimensions. These dimensions are the ideological, the semiotic, and the narrative. These are outlined below as they apply to this research:

## Ideological Analysis

The dimension of ideological studies that examines how the text positions its readers and characters concerning knowledge and power, constructs social reality, and expresses ideological positions often implicitly through its narrative strategies. In *Take My Hand*, this includes studying how the text portrays gendered violence, systemic racism, and medical ethics, and how it contests or reaffirms central ideologies about gender, race, and care. Specific attention is given to how the text oscillates between affirmation and critique, embodying the both-neither logic of metamodernism in its ideological positioning.

## Semiotic Analysis

This dimension aims to attend to the textual symbols, signs, and cultural codes that create

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meanings in the narrative. It includes a close reading of imagery, language, and metaphors to find how meaning is made and questioned within the text. The research considers how recurring ideas (such as family metaphors, medical language, and historical references) serve as both critique and sites of emotive investment, reflecting metamodernist claim on engaging meaning beyond postmodern irony and skepticism.

## Narrative Analysis

This dimension emphasizes how the structure, characterization, point of view, and temporal organization of the text form its ideological and emotive effects. McKee highlights the significance of understanding how the reader is positioned by the narrative to think, feel, and judge in specific ways. In *Take My Hand*, the retrospective description by Civil Townsend, spoken to both her daughter and implicitly to the reader, is fundamental to how the text endorses oscillation and offers metamodernist modes of engagement.

## Data Selection and Justification

The data for the current research consists of the novel *Take My Hand* by Dolen Perkins-Valdez, published in 2022 by Berkley. The novel was carefully chosen for its explicit commitment to historically positioned injustices, the forced sterilizations of two black girls in Alabama in the 1970s, and its testimonial structure, which both analyzes institutional violence and sustains the likelihood of relational care and ethical obligation.

Within the text of the novel, specific textual passages were selected for the analysis based on explicit articulation of oscillatory strategies and their thematic richness that characterize the metamodernist insight. These consist of instants where Civil mirrors on her care and complicity, her oscillation between personal ethics and institutional authority, and her emotional engagement with the reminiscence of Erica and India. Furthermore, passages that highlight ideological conflicts, such as the tension between maternal instinct and professionalism or between embodied experience and institutional knowledge, were selected because they expose how the text makes meaning beyond binary logics.

## Ethical Considerations

McKee (2003) prompts analysts that textual understanding is itself a culturally positioned act, informed by the emotional investments and ideological position of the analyst. This research work recognizes its positionality: as a contemporary scholar and reader engaging with a text that reconsiders gendered and racialized trauma, the interpretation pursues to remain aware of the power dynamics at play in both the text and its reception. The study does not assume to voice on behalf of the historical subjects presented in the novel but instead emphasizes how the text makes meaning and offers readers to engage ethically with the past.

## Limitations

The current research work centers exclusively on *Take My Hand* as a single text and does not claim to generalize its findings to all contemporary literature. Furthermore, while McKee's model offers a rigorous framework for textual analysis, it focuses certain aspects of the text (e.g., ideology, narrative) while bracketing others (e.g., reader response, historical reception). Further research could supplement this approach with comparative analysis or empirical studies of reader engagement with other contemporary literature.

This methodological framework, combining the theory of metamodernism and McKee's textual analysis, provides a nuanced and robust approach to understanding how *Take My Hand* re-evaluates and revises the paradigms of modernism and postmodernism for the twenty-first

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century. By focusing on the ideological, semiotic, and narrative dimensions of the novel and positioning them within the oscillatory insights of metamodernism, the research is able to disclose how the novel engages reality and meaning beyond the limitations of skepticism, irony, or universalist certainty. This methodology makes sure that the study remains sensitive to both the ideological and emotional complexities of the text, honoring its oscillatory negotiation of hope and despair, and critique and care.

## Research Question

The current research study aims to answer the following research question;

What strategies of metamodernism are employed to re-evaluate and revise the concepts of modernism and postmodernism, and how do these strategies articulate new ways of engaging with meaning and reality beyond postmodern irony and skepticism by Dolen Perkins-Valdez in *Take My Hand*?

The analysis will emphasize the following specific objectives to answer this question:

1. To pinpoint instants of oscillation between hope and despair, sincerity and irony, care and critique, as narrative strategies in the novel.
2. To study how the text of the novel resists the binary logics of modernism (certainty, progress) and postmodernism (nihilism, skepticism, irony) by suggesting an affective and relational mode of engagement.
3. To examine the ideological work of the novel as it stations the reader to come to terms with historical discriminations while upholding faith in collective memory and ethical repair.
4. To determine how Civil Townsend's testimonial expression functions as an oscillatory act of simultaneously confessing complicity, witness, and affirming the possibility of accountability and redemption.

## Literature Review

A strong literature review is very important for positioning this study of *Take My Hand* within wider scholarly and cultural discussions. This chapter reviews three intersecting groups of scholarship:

- (1) African American literature and the depiction of medical racism;
- (2) The cultural legacies of Modernism and postmodernism, and
- (3) Metamodernism and its emerging critical and theoretical frameworks.

By incorporating these constituents, this review explains how *Take My Hand* rereads and reimagines the paradigms of modernism and postmodernism to establish new ways of engaging with meaning and reality in the twenty-first century.

## African American Literature and Medical Racism

Literary scholarship on African American Literature has long attended to the tense history of medical testing on black bodies. Harriet Washington's *Medical Apartheid* (2006) writes eras of mistreatment from the Tuskegee Syphilis Study to forced sterilizations and illustrates how medical power maintained racial hierarchies. In literature, works like Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) employ the historical trauma of oppression, slavery, and its afterlives, including abuses of bodily autonomy.

*Take My Hand* by Perkins-Valdez carries on this practice by portraying the sterilization of two young black girls in Alabama named India and Erica Williams. Many critics have noted that by setting her novel in 1973, Perkins Valdez reveals, even after the Civil Rights Movement, the permanence of racial control over reproduction (Robinson, 2023). This positions the novel in a lineage of African American literature that critiques the methods medicine has been used as

an instrument of oppression and persecution while also exploring the resilience of black people. Another main theme in African American literature is the just position of the witness. As in *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman (1997) notes that narrative can be a place for redressing the violence of the archive while recognizing the dead end of fully apprehending its terrors. *Take My Hand* states this tension through Civil's narrative, which oscillates between expressing remorse and documenting the injustice she participated in. Literary scholarship on evidence (Felman & Laub, 1992) illuminates how Civil's revelation both implicates the reader and bears witness, engaging readers in an ethical connection with the past.

### **Legacies and Limits of Modernism and Postmodernism**

As a literary and cultural movement, modernism is often connected with a belief in human progress through reason, art, and technology. Authors like Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot experimented with form to write subjective experience while upholding faith in art's capability to express universal truths (Bradbury & McFarlane, 1976). In the context of societal development, modernist ideology allied with reformist narratives that placed medicine and science as means of betterment and enlightenment (Williams, 1983). Civil exemplifies this modernist approach in the novel when she structures her work at the clinic as community service:

"We weren't just helping these families. We were doing community work" (Perkins-Valdez, 2022, p. 106).

Nevertheless, as the narrative develops, it exposes the dark side of this ideology: its blindness to structural racism, paternalism, and its disregard for consent.

As a reaction against modernist conventions of universality and progress, postmodernism began in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Specialists like Lyotard (1984) claimed that grand narratives of rationality and progress had collapsed, leaving only localized truths and language games. Postmodern literature often features intertextuality, irony, and pastiche, knocking off the balance of the idea of a singular truth and authentic self (Hutcheon, 1988).

In *Take My Hand*, Civil's understanding that her work initiated harm mirrors postmodern skepticism about objectivity and authority:

"None of us knew. Not even me. Without the ability to vocalize, India was virtually defenseless" (Chapter 17, p. 134).

However, the novel does not end here. It does not resolve the nihilism or cynicism that often portrays postmodern narratives. Instead, it oscillates between doubt and responsibility and critique and care.

### **Metamodernism**

Many scholars have proposed numerous terms to label the cultural condition after postmodernism: performatism (Eshelman, 2008), digimodernism (Kirby, 2009), and metamodernism (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010). Amongst these, metamodernism has gained prominence for expressing a means of oscillation between postmodern irony and modernist sincerity. As Vermeulen and van den Akker write:

"One should be careful not to think of this oscillation as a balance however; rather, it is a pendulum swinging between 2, 3, 5, 10, innumerable poles." (Vermeulen & Akker 2010, p. 6). This oscillation permits writers and artists to remain analytically aware of the failures of limitations of postmodern critique and modernist ideals while still engaging meaningfully with emotional and ethical questions.

Gibbons (2015) recognizes numerous strategies of metamodernism appropriate to literature:

- **Informed Naïveté:** Selecting sincerity although knowing its constructedness.

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- **Constructive Ambiguity:** Accepting complications without falling into relativism.
- **Ethical Engagement:** A renewed commitment to justice, care, and repair.

These strategies are apparent in *Take My Hand*, where Civil carries on to care and bear witness for her patients even as she recognizes the system's violence and her complicity. The novel refuses to decide the tension between care and critique, exemplifying a metamodern sensibility.

## Scholarship on *Take My Hand*

Although scholarly writing precisely on *Take My Hand* is still emerging, given its latest publication, analyses and early reviews highlight its layered analysis of its emotional depth and medical racism. Robinson (2023) argues that the novel "recovers a silenced history while affirming the ethical necessity of remembering." In the same way, Parker (2023) records that the narrative's oscillation between recording historical fact and discovering subjective experience reflects contemporary determinations to write ethically about trauma.

This research builds on these understandings by explicitly framing the novel through a metamodern framework and applying the model of textual analysis given by Mackee's (2003) to understand how the novel's text conveys the tensions between postmodern skepticism, modernist faith, and metamodern commitment.

The literature reviewed here institutes the theoretical, historical, and critical contexts essential for understanding *Take My Hand*. African American literature offers a basis for examining the novel's engagement with testimony and medical racism. The paradigms of modernism and postmodernism offer the cultural background contrary to which the novel describes itself. Lastly, metamodern theory gives the conceptual tools to comprehend how *Take My Hand* navigates between irony and sincerity, and critique and care.

The following section of the study applies this methodology and theoretical framework to an in-depth exploration of the novel, showing how it uses metamodernist strategies to re-evaluate and revise the concepts of modernism and postmodernism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## 4. Analysis and Discussion

The discussion section of the study examines in depth how *Take My Hand* positions metamodernist strategies to revise, critique, and transcend the conceptual boundaries of postmodernism and modernism, founding new ways to engage with reality and meaning. Basing on Vermeulen and van den Akker's (2010) concept of metamodernism as oscillation, and McKee's (2003) model of textual analysis, which centers cultural assumptions, textual strategies, and reader positioning. The section establishes how Dolen Perkins-Valdez's novel progresses a nuanced emotional and ethical register for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### 4.1 Overview of *Take My Hand* by Dolen Perkins-Valdez

Dolen Perkins-Valdez's *Take My Hand* (2022) is an influential work of historical fiction that questions the intersection of gender, race, and medical ethics in the United States, especially through the perspective of the forced sterilizations of black girls and women in the 1970s. Loosely stirred by the real-life 'Relf sisters' case' in Montgomery, Alabama, the novel discovers how institutional racism, personal responsibility, and collective memory come together in making both national history and individual lives. This division offers an in-depth overview of the novel's plot, historical context, characters, thematic concerns, and narrative voice, to position it as a novel that exemplifies the oscillatory responsiveness of metamodernism.

*Take My Hand* reveals in two intertwined timelines: the current narrative of Civil Townsend, an African American lady describing the past years of her occupation as a nurse, and the

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endeavors of her early twenties in 1973 Montgomery, Alabama, when she became intricate in the lives of two young black girls named Erica and India Williams who were put in danger to involuntary sterilization. In 1973, Civil was an ambitious and young nurse just out of nursing school, enthusiastic to transform her community. She takes a job at the Montgomery Family Planning Clinic, having deep faith in the mission of giving reproductive healthcare to poor black women. Brought up in a middle class family on Centennial Hill, Civil carries to her work a sense of moral purpose and privilege, persuaded that she can ease the burdens of unplanned pregnancy and poverty among the city's poorest black residents. On one of her initial assignments, Civil is tasked with overseeing birth control injections to India and Erica Williams, two black skinned sisters living in awful poverty with their father in a rustic shack. India is only ten, and Erica is twelve, both well below the age of consent, and Civil soon understands that no one has even confirmed whether the girls have reached menarche or not. Worried by the clinic's lack of concern for the black girls' autonomy and rights, Civil starts to question the ethics of her work. Matters got worse when she learned that the girls had been sterilized permanently without their adequate explanation or informed consent under the pretense of providing medical care. This surprise shatters Civil's confidence in the healthcare system and forces her to challenge the pervasive sexism and racism embedded within it. The novel alternates between Civil's remembrance of these proceedings and her present-day efforts to reckon with the regret, guilt, and sense of obligation that have preoccupied her ever since. She structures her story as a witness to her daughter, highlighting the need to bear witness and remember so that such biases are not repeated. The novel's narrator and protagonist, Civil, is a complex character who represents the aspirations and contradictions of black professional women in the 1970s. Idealistic yet naïve, she moves into the profession of family planning with a missionary enthusiasm, only to be challenged by the unintentional consequences of her actions. As a narrator, her voice oscillates between vulnerability and confidence, blending the emotive immediacy of her youthful experiences with the thoughtful wisdom of her older self. India and Erica Williams are the two young black sisters at the heart of the novel's emotional and ethical stakes. Erica, at twelve, is ferociously protective of her younger sister and tries to protect her from maltreatment despite her limited understanding of what is happening. India, at ten, is even more vulnerable, rendered virtually voiceless by her lack of agency and young age. Their ill-treatment summarizes the dehumanizing effects of medical paternalism and institutionalized racism. Other main characters include Civil's parents particularly her father, a valued black physician who serves as a symbol of Black professional achievement; Mrs. Seager, Civil's superior at the clinic who exemplifies the institutionalized prejudices of the system; and Ty, a fellow activist who contests Civil to question her assumptions and offers her emotional support during her crisis of conscience.

## 4.2 Historical Context

The incidents in *Take My Hand* are deeply rooted in the factual story of the Relf sisters, Minnie Lee and Mary Alice, who in 1973 were forcibly sterilized by a federally financed clinic in Montgomery, Alabama. The case led to legal action and sparked national outrage that exposed the extensive practice of coerced sterilization, mostly targeting poor women of black color, the incarcerated, and the disabled. Between the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the 1970s, tens of thousands of individuals, predominantly Black and Indigenous women, were sterilized in America under eugenics-inspired programs, often without their knowledge or consent. By positioning her fictional narrative contained by this historical truth, Perkins-Valdez highlights the lasting legacies of misogyny, racism, and medical exploitation. The novel also expresses wider conversations about bodily autonomy, reproductive justice, and healthcare discrimination that

continue to resonate today.

*Take My Hand* by Perkins Valdez is written in the first person from Civil's viewpoint, producing a confessional and intimate tone that invites readers into her internal domain. Such a narrative choice lets Perkins Valdez explore the difficulties of complicity and resistance, as Civil both participates in and criticizes the systems that maintain injustice. The structure of the novel oscillating between present and past mirrors the oscillatory movement that is fundamental to the metamodernist sensibility. Civil is both a participant and witness to history in it; her narrative is a form of evidence that bonds collective memory and individual experience. The usage of direct address to her daughter positions the text of the novel as an emotional inheritance and moral and, highlighting the intergenerational communication of responsibility and knowledge. At its essence, *Take My Hand* cross-examines the moral letdowns of the medical establishment, mainly its mistreatment of marginalized communities. The text criticizes the authoritarian attitudes of healthcare professionals who believe to know what is best for their patients while ignoring their humanity and autonomy.

The novel focuses on the intersections of class, race, and gender in determining access to healthcare and exposure to exploitation. Civil's middle-class prestige and education set her apart from the poor families she attended, emphasizing the inner stratifications within the Black community. Her narration is a practice of testimony, an effort to honor the memory of India and Erica and to avert their story from being overlooked. This focus on memory lines up with metamodernism's affective engagement with history and its rejection of postmodernist cynicism and detachment. The novel demonstrates the metamodern oscillatory dynamic, the oscillation between irony and sincerity, critique and care, despair and hope. Civil's journey is noticeable by instances of complicity and resistance, doubt and conviction, exemplifying the impossibility of fully unravelling oneself from systemic inequalities while determined nevertheless to do what is true. *Take My Hand* is a thoughtful study of ethical responsibility, historical trauma, and the opportunities of care in the face of prejudice. Through its historical grounding, nuanced characterization, and oscillatory narrative structure, the text of the novel exemplifies the metamodernist sensibility, revising and re-evaluating the paradigms of modernism and postmodernism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Perkins Valdez calls the readers to engage ethically and emotionally with the story of the novel, transcending both the paralysis of postmodern cynicism and the naivety of modernist idealism. The text of the novel thus functions not only as a historical narrative but also as a call to reflection and action, prompting readers of the enduring relevance of accountability, empathy, and collective memory.

### **4.3 Cultural Assumptions**

#### **Strategies of metamodernism in *Take My Hand* (2022) by Dolen Perkins-Valdez**

This research's section aims to examine how *Take My Hand* (2022) by Dolen Perkins-Valdez employs strategies of metamodernism to re-evaluate and revise the ideas of modernism and postmodernism for the twenty-first century. Based upon Allan McKee's (2003) model of textual analysis and Vermeulen and Van den Akker's (2010) theory of metamodernism, this research examines how the novel oscillates between modernist sincerity and postmodern skepticism to suggest an emotionally resonant, an ethically engaged way of knowing and being. Through the analysis of main passages, the research contends that the narrative generates new methods of subjectivity and meaning-making that move beyond postmodern cynicism and irony, emotional association, confirming the possibility of ethical responsibility, and collective memory. This study shows that *Take My Hand* reflects that metamodernism strategies such as oscillation, relationality, ambivalence, and sincerity tempered by irony offer productive ways of re-engaging with meaning and reality beyond the impasses of postmodern nihilism and modernist

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certainty. It is also indicative that the combination of irony and earnestness, criticism and compassion, *Take My Hand* does not only survive by being an eyewitness to history but challenges readers to act and imagine the more rightful future. These oscillating interactions support the assertion according to which meaning, despite being challenged and tentative, is a necessary and a viable thing. This study also seeks to map and formulate sensations of the society on social change and transformation. Additionally, this is significant as the departure of postmodernism is an important shift in the way society is progressing and how it can be further built up and comprehended. It is a huge contribution to the sphere of social knowledge and philosophy.

Within the continuing evolution of criticism of other cultures and literary theory, writers increasingly have doubted the appropriateness of modernist and postmodernism paradigms to provide a complete explanation of contemporary literary production and how it interacts with meaning, reality, and morality. Focusing on faith in progress, the artistic transcendence and human reason, modernism was aimed at creating meaning on a universal level, and disclosing truths with the help of formal experimentation and self-analysis (Hutcheon, 2002). Postmodernism in its turn notoriously denied these convictions, anticipating against modernist norms irony, skepticism, deconstruction, and the infeasibility of stable meaning, and often satirizing both modernist norms and the institutions that maintained them (Hutcheon, 2002). Nevertheless, the exploration presented by cultural theorists like Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) has led to a feeling that postmodernism itself has come to seem not as satisfactory as it should be in terms of redressing the injustices, crises, and the affective needs of the current time. To this, they claim that a new sensibility whose name is metamodernism have appeared that is alternating between the optimism of modernism and the cynical vision of the postmodernism without endeavoring to cross the fences of one or the other.

Metamodernism defines a both-neither position, where one acknowledges the possibility of meaning yet is aware of its provisionality, existing between hope and despair without falling all the way to the extremes but instead, acts in a sincere manner by using irony (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010). This theory therefore presents a fruitful perspective through which one can analyze the way in which modern storytelling works to traverse the emotional and moral multiculturalism of the current world. Literature is in this view an exceptional site of exploration of the possibility of reconnecting meaning and reality beyond the dead-end of modernist idealism and postmodern irony. In this respect, mostly illuminating is *Take My Hand*, a novel by Dolen Perkins-Valdez, who has been remarkable in posing challenges to the legacy of the endless cycle of reproductive injustice and medical racism in the United States and indicating the prospects of rationality and healing and the prospect of achieving emotional and moral responsibility.

The novel, *Take My Hand* by Dolen Perkins-Valdez, is set in Montgomery, Alabama, in the 1970s and described retrospectively by a young black nurse, Civil Townsend, who gets involved in a family planning program that sterilizes two young black girls named India and Erica, without their consent. The story oscillates between Civil's present as an older woman grappling with the ghosts of her actions and attempting to bear witness to their consequences and her past as a naive nurse complicit in a system of persecution. Her journey focuses on the themes that resist naïve moralization and instead offers an oscillatory engagement representative of metamodernist thoughts such as the tensions between individual morality and institutional authority, personal accountability and collective history, care and complicity.

This research work examines *Take My Hand* by Dolen Perkins-Valdez through a metamodern lens and by using Allan McKee's (2003) model of textual analysis to establish how the novel re-evaluates and revises the ideas of modernism and postmodernism for a twenty-first-century

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context. The analytical framework created by McKee prefigures the ideologically and socially contextualized reality of works of literature, critiques the established positionality of characters, reality creation and the role played by ideology. Such a methodological position is in line with the metamodernist ethical sensibility, an affective aspect, and relationality, thus explains the form of meaning-making that cuts across the paradigms of modernist universality and postmodern relativism.

The current study is relevant to the fledgling theoretical debate around metamodernism because it illustrates how the modern interpretation of fiction can support the imagination and realization of morally common forms of life. In line with that, the paper has argued that the novel, *Take My Hand* by Dolen Perkins-Valdez is not only an aesthetical feeling of metamodernism but it is also a moral necessity to uplift historical sufferings and answer the desires of the times.

Through preempting both the knowledge and the constraints of modernist and post-postmodern paradigms, the example of *Take My Hand* demonstrates what critics have described as affective realism, or the ability of literary text to appeals to the ethical and affective senses of readers, without being unaware of its contingency and instantiatedness. This testimonial structure of the novel, along with its awareness of historical trauma as well as its embrace of the present days optimism and its refusal of easy-out solutions, summarizes the wavering rationality of intellectual core of metamodernism.

Overall, this study maintains that *Take My Hand* is not just a structuring of the modernist or post-modernist knowledge, but a metamodernist reply that redefines the boundaries of its boundary and offers a literary expression of relational, ethical, and affective living in the modern age. Such swiveling back and forth on the poles of analysis, without commitment to any of them wholesale, supports a subtle interaction with reality and meaning and thus outstrips the sway of modernist and post-modern universal and ironical neutrality.

The work written by Dolen Perkins -Valdez, *The Take My Hand* (2022) is an important historical fiction work that challenges the dynamics of gender, race, and medical ethics in the United States, specifically the subject of involuntary sterilization of Black girls and women that happened in the 1970s. It is vaguely based on the true-life story of the so-called Relf sisters in Montgomery, Alabama, and it explains the interaction of institutional racism, individual agency, and the communal memory, which predetermines the national historiography and personal biographical events. This description provides a comprehensive outline of the plot, historical setting, and group of characters, thematic interests, and voice of the novel, thus making it a text that takes on the oscillatory responsiveness that is typical of metamodernism. The novel manifests in the two simultaneous strands of the time (1) the present narrative of one of the leading characters, an African American nurse (Civil Townsend) writing about the last years of her career; and (2) her childhood in the early twenties in 1973 in Montgomery, Alabama, where a young nurse (Civil Townsend) takes two young black girls (Erica and India Williams) as objects of involuntary sterilization. Civil, a newly graduated nurse, finds his calling in 1973 when he tries to find a job in the Montgomery Family Planning Clinic because of a strong urge to provide the vulnerable economically disadvantaged Black women with reproductive healthcare. Brought up in a middle class family on Centennial Hill, Civil carries to her work a sense of moral purpose and privilege, persuaded that she can ease the burdens of unplanned pregnancy and poverty among the city's poorest black residents.

On one of her initial assignments, Civil is tasked with overseeing birth control injections to India and Erica Williams, two black skinned sisters living in awful poverty with their father in a rustic shack. India is only ten, and Erica is twelve, both well below the age of consent, and Civil soon understands that no one has even confirmed whether the girls have reached

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menarche or not. Worried by the clinic's lack of concern for the black girls' autonomy and rights, Civil starts to question the ethics of her work. The situation worsened when it was found out that it had been performed permanently in the first place, without proper explanation or without being informed about the procedure itself, which had allegedly been carried out in the name of the medical care. Such a surprising discovery shook the faith that Civil had in the health care system, as well as forcing her to deal with the high levels of sexism and racism inherent in the healthcare. The novel switches between the memory of the proceedings in these events, as recalled by Civil, and current attempts to deal with the post-factum remorse, guilt and a feeling of duty that had haunted her since. She presents her story as a witness to the daughter and discusses the need to be a witness and remind in order to ensure the avoidance of such biases. The main character and the narrator of the novel, Civil, is not only a complex character but also incorporates the ideals and the contradictory aspects of the black female professionals of the 1970s. Idealistic and naive, she was missionary-minded when sharing the area of family planning, when she suddenly began to face the wrong dimension of what she was doing. Her voice, as a narrator, also switches between that sense of vulnerability and confidence and it is the combination of the empirical immediacy of her young moments with the wisdom of the elder one. The two young and Black women, India and Erica Williams, are the focal point of both the emotional and ethical issues in the novel. At the age of twelve, Erica is strongly protective of her younger sister and tries to prevent her suffering any maltreatment, even though there is a poor understanding of the situation. At ten, and even more, India is the more vulnerable, practically voiceless by her powerlessness and youth. They are ill-treated, a type of dehumanization that medical paternalism and institutionalized racism can bring.

Other lead characters are parents of Civil, especially her father who is a respectable Black doctor and thus symbols of a Black professional success; Mrs. Seager, a superior of Civil at the clinic who is symbolic of the institutionalized prejudices of the system and Ty, a fellow activist who questions her and provides emotional support in her crisis of conscience. Relf sisters Minnie Lee and Mary Alice give rise to the incident in *Take My Hand*, which is strongly based on the real history of this group, which were forcefully sterilized at that time (1973) by a federally funded clinic in Montgomery, Alabama. It brought forth court litigation and sparked outrage across the US who called foul on the widespread practice of forced sterilization, and although it continued to favor the poor and the incarcerated and the disabled the most, it caused an awareness among people that eventually ignited national outrage. In the period between the early twentieth century and 1970s tens of thousands of people, mostly Black as well as Indigenous women, were sterilized in America without their knowledge or consent, following the eugenics-based programs. Placing her fictional book into this historical fact, Perkins-Valdez throws light on the long legacies of misogyny, racism and medical exploitation. The novel also touches upon wider discussion of bodily autonomy, reproductive justice, and healthcare discrimination which are still relevant nowadays.

Perkins-Valdez narrates her tale by means of the first person narration, Civil, giving it a confessional, intimate feeling, welcoming the readers to the inner world of her soul. This literary device allows this author to experiment with the nature of complicity and opposition because Civil is both an active participant and critic of the mechanisms of recreating injustices. The pendulum between past and present that the novel undergoes is analogous to pendulum motion that is basic to metamodernist sensibility. Civil is a participant and witness of the past; her story is meant as evidence that connects collectivism and individual experience. Intergenerational communication of responsibility and knowledge can be noted through the use of direct address to her daughter, placing the text in the format of an emotional inheritance. Fundamental to it, the whole practice of the medical establishment and especially how it

marginalizes communities is subject to moral questioning in the case of *Take My Hand*. The author challenges the autocratic stance of medical workers who assume the right to determine what is best in their patients even neglecting their human needs and individuality. In the novel, the relationship between class, race, and gender is highlighted in specifying who has access to healthcare and the subject to suffer exploitation. The middle-class status of Civil and her education level make her alien to the poor families she has to attend to, once again, highlighting the internal divisions within the black community. Her narration is one of the examples of testimony, the attempt to do justice to the memory of India and Erica as well as to avoid forgetting their story. This emphasis on memory is, again, parallel to the affective interest in history that metamodernism has and its aversion to postmodern cynicism and absence of interest. The novel illustrates metamodern oscillatory actions, the swing between irony and sincerity, criticism and care, despair and hope. The way of Civil is followed by the cases of complication and opposition, skepticism and faith, which shows that it is not possible to completely get out of the system of inequalities, but be willing to do what is right. As a thorough discussion of the ethical responsibility, historical experiences, and possibilities of care within prejudice, *Take My Hand* is a wise reflection. The novel engages all the elements of metamodernist sensibility within its historical background, subtle character growth, and its unsettled plotted form, offering a revision and a reassessment of the ideals of modernism and postmodernism to the twenty-first century. Perkins-Valdez encourages the readers to become ethical and emotional a part of the tale becoming neither cynical in postmodern nor naive in modernism. The novel, thus, serves as a historical document as well as a wake-up call to both think and act by ensuring that the readers see the timeless nature of accountability, empathy and collective memory.

The philosophical cogitations of Civil Townsend presented in *Take My Hand* reflect the cultural clash between postmodernism and the ideas of modernistic ideas of professional success. As an example, as she talks of her father having a healthcare career and the systematic form of prejudice that sterilization had, her novel is the criticism of the exclusionary practices in both the timeframes. The fact that she calls on community in terms of more than blood (Perkins-, 2022, p. 383) reinvented the idea of identity, which is less essentialist due to the modernist veneration of the self, and is also not atomized by postmodernism.

This is a rhetoric effect of oscillation with Umikoma back and forth between hope and despair, certainty and doubt, engagements, withdrawal. For example, Civil's acknowledgment that history strengthens, "This knowledge, this triumph, can, if we let it, make all of us stronger. If we let it." (p. 383), summarizes the metamodernist recognition of agency tempered by humility. The novel also uses repetition and direct address to evoke reflexivity and sincerity. *Take My Hand* by Dolen Perkins Valdez calls the readers to take an ethically engaged position. By speaking to her daughter, Civil also expresses to the readers, stitching them into the collective fabric of responsibility and memory. This positioning challenges postmodernist detachment and invites metamodernist affective engagement.

"A year never passes without me thinking of them. India. Erica. Their names are stitched inside every white coat I have ever worn. I tell this story to stitch their names inside your clothes, too. A reminder to never forget. Medicine has taught me, really taught me, to accept the things I cannot change. A difficult-to-swallow serenity prayer. I'm not trying to change the past. I'm telling it in order to lay these ghosts to rest. You paint feverishly, like Mama. Yet you got the steadfastness of Daddy. Your talents surely defy the notion of a gene pool." (p. 1)

This opening of the novel frames history as both a gift and a burden, oscillating between potential and pain. Civil's insistence that history can make us stronger "if we let it" captures metamodern ambivalence, acknowledging trauma while holding space for redemption.

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The weight of professional and gendered expectations is also discussed in the novel as:

“The same thing my professors at Tuskegee had lectured when they discovered my father and grandfather were doctors. Your marks are impressive. Of course, as a woman, you have other issues to consider. Starting a family, for instance. You have wisely chosen the nursing profession, Miss Townsend.” (p. 19)

In the above passage, Civil’s understanding of patronizing praise mirrors both postmodernist awareness of structural inequities and modernist faith in education. The narrative oscillates between feminist critique and professional pride.

Historical injustice and ambivalence are also portrayed by the author in the novel:

“Not just women. Girls. I swallowed. I had tried to forget that I’d given India Williams a shot, hoped that it would just pass quietly through her system until it wore off. Then I’d tried to get them into an apartment to make up for my mistake. But cancer? Ty had to be wrong. Maybe they had altered the medication into a better formula since that study. The clinical studies were on animals, not humans...” (p. 83)

Civil contends with her complicity in discrimination and injustice, recognizing her good intentions along with their dangerous consequences. This uncertainty is owning both responsibility and failure, demonstrating metamodernist ethical reflection.

Forgiveness and faith are represented in the *Take My Hand* by Perkins Valdez as:

“I asked God for something really asked, for the first time in my life. I asked for forgiveness...” (p. 177)

Civil’s prayer oscillates between spiritual longing and secular skepticism, signifying a metamodernism’s openness to faith without dogma.

The author’s remarks regarding intergenerational knowledge seem to be one of the central points of the novel. “On the horizon behind me is my community... This is your lineage, my dear daughter, your history. More powerful than blood... If we let it, make all of us stronger” (p. 383).

The concluding passage positions knowledge as relational and provisional, neither purely from a modernist perspective nor completely deconstructed, but as something to be continually re-inhabited and negotiated.

At the center of *Take My Hand* lies the tension between the postmodern suspicions of power structures and the modern belief in progress. Civil’s early thoughts epitomize this tension: “I’d believed in the mission of family planning clinics long before I applied to work in one. I knew that the rate of pregnancy in young unwed mothers in Montgomery was terrible..... The best solution had always been a prophylactic one.” (Ch3, p. 23)

Here, the passage recognizes the modernist scientific intervention to improve social conditions and faith in rational planning. However, the subsequent exposures of maltreatment to Erica and India weaken this narrative of progress. Although Civil has a strong sense of uncertainty, she still believes in something and at the same time doubts herself as a person who does things in life. The novel unveils the idea of how modernist ideals when used without being critically evaluated can become an instrument of perpetuating the discrimination and violence against the marginalised groups, thus, karmatically corresponding to what McKee insists on need to be done to the cultural milieu in which both the interpretation and production of texts are made. The general belief that medical intervention is beneficial in its essence is challenged here, and it results in a more explicit critique of post-modern paralysis, as well as modernist paternalism. Similarly, as the professors of Civil undermine her resolve due to gender-related reasons- Your marks are good. As a woman, you have other things to think about of course, the narration anticipates the gendered aspects of academic evaluation and the unconscious factors that organize the experience of learners (Ch 2, p. 19).

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A different cultural assumption that is indicated in the comments of the professor is that, professional identity and gender collide with each other, and hence they find themselves echoing the constraints of the modernist ideals of universalism that often ignore or disregard intersectionality.

The play of hope and despair, sincerity and irony that is held by the novel is enhanced by the narrative tactics used in the novel. The voice of Civil is shot through with modernist sincerity; she would like to be an academic high-achiever and honour her people and lineages and at the same time also display the postmodern scepticism of questioning her causes and the order she is acting in.

To take one instance, in her account of giving injections to Erica and India: Not just women. Girls. I swallowed. I had attempted to forget that I had given India Williams a shot, and had prayed that it had been swallowed in her system and was expiring out of it nonverbally. Then I would have attempted at getting them an apartment to amend the error I made. But cancer? Ty had to be wrong.” (Ch 10, p. 83) The text contains a sway and a subversion between skepticism and faith, complicity and sympathy. This twin reality of the recognition and the possibility of harm as well as the wish to help is the key aspect of the affective structure of metamodern environment as described by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010).

Additionally, when Civil ponders over her spiritual being, when she tells herself, I asked God something, asked him in earnest, the first time in my life I asked him. I beg that I forgive you. (Ch, p.177) - she is a model of a spiritual desire, in which a cool attitude of criticism exists, but this is continuing over a quest of meaning without a nihilism or dogmatism.

This oscillation proves that McKee is correct in suggesting texts often combine contradictory tensions and ideologies and thus require evaluative and not reductive solutions. One of the novel’s most prominent metamodernism strategies is how it positions readers emotionally. Civil tells her tale to her daughter, but indirectly also to the readers:

"On the horizon behind me is my community-Montgomery, Centennial Hill, my friends and loved ones..... This is your lineage, my dear daughter, your history. More powerful than blood..." (Ch52, p. 383)

By describing collective history as “more powerful than blood,” the text calls readers to pinpoint emotionally and ethically with this shared memory. Contrasting to the postmodernism’s ironic detachment, the text of the novel develops an engaged and affective reader who is both compassionate and critical, which is a very important metamodern subject. The initial scene also stresses stitching together identity and memory:

"A year never passes without me thinking of them. India. Erica. Their names are stitched inside every white coat I have ever worn." (Ch1, p. 1)

This stitching of names into suites is both metaphorical and literal, signifying a readerly concern to take the weight of history while distinguishing its constructed nature.

Civil remembers her pride in her family:

"I'll be honest and tell you there was a time I was uppity... all my life I'd been surrounded by educated people." (Ch2, p. 9)

The pride in question portrays the idea of modernism of progress and education; nevertheless, the validity of this pride is compromised by references to the fact that sexism and racism took actual root. The novel oscillates between critiquing the structures and honoring individual accomplishment that limit its impact.

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Civil's talk with her professors shows how assumptions of modernism about race and gender persist even in apparently progressive places. Her sentiment that compliments "ended up stinging like an insult" (Ch2, p. 19) demonstrates the insufficiency of both postmodern cynicism and modernist universalism pointing toward the necessity for a more nuanced metamodern understanding.

The abortion scene explains the hopelessness of pure resolution:

"I asked for forgiveness..... though I did everything to put out of my mind that painful day... it wasn't so much that I regretted it..... it was that I had been raised to believe that such a thing was a sin." (Ch23, p. 177)

Here, Civil moves beyond modernist certainty, and postmodern relativism embracing instead a metamodernist ambiguity, accepting both its moral weight and her decision's necessity.

In the climactic passage, Civil thinks:

"If we let it. This knowledge, this triumph, can, if we let it, make all of us stronger." (Ch52, p. 383)

This provisional style captures the metamodernist ethos such as agency intertwined with humility and hope tempered by recognition of uncertainty.

One of the salient features of Metamodernism, practiced in terms of creative tension, is the ability to include so-called conflicting dispositions hope and doubt, sincerity and irony. In *Take My Hand*, the given phenomenon is demonstrated through the reflections of Civil on her professional path and the experiences that she had. As she recalls:

"Is this job your dream, Civil?" This was a variation of the question Mama had been asking me since I was able to remember it... In fact, I had always wanted to do it, but I did not inform her. I said no, and she said that she would allow me to miss it. I said, "I do love nursing," slowly. (Ch9, p. 73)

The wavering of self-effacement and ambition exhibited by Civil is not only an illustration of metamodernism subjectivity that McKee (2003) would term as layered: the former layer makes us cognizant of the core longing, and the latter reflects the cultural and familial setting which constructs the subject of longing. This tension is left unsolved in the text, but rather, allowed as a site of consideration. In recognizing her personal desires and at the same time feeling the limitations of her race, gender and class, Civil develops a metamodernist identity that neither claims the modernist autonomy of the subject, nor the postmodernist impotence and construction. Modernism is known to assume that social betterment is possible by rational planning, but postmodernism both doubts this assumption and criticizes it as naive, as complicit in the furtherance of persecution. Perkins-Valdez goes beyond both paradigms in describing a main character that questions the failure of her good-intentioned behaviors without sacrificing the moral necessity to do. This fact is explained when Civil faces the evil she might have done with the help of the contraceptive program: One of them might get sexual, here was where we were stuffing into them what might turn out to be poison. Or raped. There it was. The unthinkable word. My hand began to shake... Ty was right. I had not questioned sufficiently enough, (Ch17, p.134). In the text, one can see a metamodernist swing: on the one hand, Civil firmly believes in the importance of family planning on the other hand, she is deeply shocked by the unintended outcomes of her actions. The symbol of the poison, which is metaphorical and literal in its meaning, is both embodied in the physical damage it does and as the negative charge left by previous instances of institutionalized paternalism and racism. McKee analytical framework invites a cross-examination of ideological assumptions and narrative content of the idea of benevolent intervention that the novel criticizes, showing that most of the novel questions the discourse even of benevolent intervention as the novel represents it. Instead of giving up the ground (postmodernist skepticism) or stepping back in her mission (modernist

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faith), the shaking hand of Civil is an indication of a metamodernist opening to admit the impracticability of certainty without giving up on her mission ethically. The image of her community Civil portrays is due not only to individual identities but also to a common history, which she describes as a source of duty and strength:

Beyond me, there are my community, Montgomery, Centennial Hill, my friends and loved ones and they are all here on this platform where I was brought forth. And your background, my dear girl, your history. More powerful than blood... If we let it.” (Ch52, p. 383). The oscillation between the postmodernism critique of imagined communities and the modernist ideal of collective harmony is resolved at this point to a cosmomodernist relationality, coming to realize that collective history is both notable and a creation. The response of Civil to the connection her daughter has to people she has never even known is a metamodernist belief in intersubjectivity the provisional, open, highly ethical mode of existence. According to McKee, (2003), texts both reproduce and construct cultural meanings in this case; the narrative constructs a meaning of history both inherited and contested but with both empowerment and burden. The tone of *Take My Hand* oscillates between ironic self-awareness and earnest introspection. When Civil notes down societal arrogances toward Black men:

“How Black men dressed mattered to white folks.” (Ch18, p. 139)

The phrase conveys both an ironic critique of the superficiality and acknowledgment of a painful truth and of racial respectability politics. Likewise, her consideration on religious faith after her abortion navigates between critical distance and devout gratitude:

“...though I did everything to put out of my mind that painful day... it wasn't so much that I regretted it... it was that I had been raised to believe that such a thing was a sin.” (Ch23, p. 177)

The coated narrative voice thus endorses metamodernist strategies by oscillating between recognition of their constructed and acceptance of moral frameworks, frequently oppressive nature. Modernist narratives often strive for recognition of their constructed and coherence, while postmodern novels deal in indeterminacy and fragmentation. *Take My Hand* bridges these movements through its structure: the text is fragmented (oscillating between personal and communal, past and present), yet these fragments are linked together by the narrator's voice and by repeated motifs of memory, care, and accountability. McKee's (2003) persistence on analyzing “how meaning is made” aids to illuminate how this coherent yet fragmented structure reflects Civil's internal journey: she does not reach at a singular truth but learns to live with ambiguity and contradiction. Through foregrounding the personal story of Civil, the text puts political issues at the heart of intimate, everyday engagements, like reproductive justice, racism and sexism. The description of the event with spelling-bee when a white male student runs over her shoes (Civil Ch9, p. 73) is a substantial reflection of systematic racism as well as an epicenter of personal trauma.

This movement between the political and the personal is a quintessential metamodernist position, the subject is not absorbed by grand narratives (modernist) or atomized in the subject (postmodernist), but rather is entangled in a web of relationships that locally empower and restrict him.

The testimonial mode of the novel, which is directed to the daughter of Civil, and the readers, indirectly, creates a dialogic mode of reflection:

It does not take a year without me thinking about them. India. Erica. The names are sewed in all my white coats never worn without shame.... I am narrating it so that these ghosts can be put to rest. 1)

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This appeal to ghosts suggests a metamodernist ethics of reminiscence: the past is immutable but it can be incorporated and recognized in the present. The readers are put in the position of spectators because they are urged against neglecting trauma as well as turning it into a fetish. According to McKee (2003), meaning is constructed upon the interaction between the text and the ideological tensions present in the text by the readers.

Civil switches back and forth between critical self-awareness and heartfelt confessions that would fit the description provided by Gibbons (2015) that sound as an informed naivety, a heartfelnness that accepts there is a risk, but cannot be deemed necessary. This oscillation manifests itself in the opening chapter:

I never go a year and I do not think of them. India. Erica. they are Madam in every white coat I have ever had sewed into it... I am narrating it to give these ghosts a burial. 1)

This remark encourages the reader to recognize the gravity of the past at the same time noting the artificially made nature of the past: the names embroidered into clothes imply both symbolic and material aspects of memory. According to McKee (2003), the textual strategy at this point bring into line with metamodernist affect: the text places readers not merely to inhabit Civil's ethical uncertainty but to observe her confession.

The ironic consciousness of the uselessness of "laying ghosts to rest" harmonizes with a sincere belief that expressing the story matters. This is a withdrawal from modernism's confidence in narrative authority and from postmodernism's disbelief of grand narratives. Rather than that, Perkins Valdez describes an oscillation between the two: Civil neither dismisses her experience as meaningless nor claims moral certainty.

The narrator's narrative voice exemplifies what Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) categorize as the defining metamodernism's oscillation: between "enthusiasm and irony, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation" (p. 5). She distinguishes the restrictions of her own good intents but also holds on telling her story anyway. This is obvious in her thinking on professional pride:

"I'll be honest and tell you there was a time I was uppity. I'm not going to lie about that. My daddy raised me with a certain kind of pride... and all my life I'd been surrounded by educated people." (Ch2, p. 9)

The honest acknowledgement "uppity" is both self-affirming and self-critical. It is neither a postmodernist deconstruction of identity into nothingness, nor a modern assertion of absolute self-confidence but a metamodernist acceptance of complexity. Civil neither entirely renounces her ambition nor fully rejoices it; instead, she describes her pride as an imperfect, situated creation of her upbringing and context. According to McKee's (2003) positions, the textual strategy over here offers readers to know the ideological work of morality politics within African American communities while instantaneously accepting the deep emotional investments personalities like Civil made in such ethics.

The most dominant critique in the novel is of Civil's own involvement in a paternalistic medical system. This involvement is dramatized in her managing contraceptives to the young black girls without full informed consensus:

"...here we were inserting what could be poison into them on the off chance that one of them might become sexual. Or raped. There it was. The unthinkable word. My hand began to shake... Ty was right. I hadn't asked enough questions." (Ch17, p. 134)

Here, the text endorses McKee's (2003) demand to question cultural assumptions: Civil thinks that intervention, any kind of intervention, is preferable to inaction, showing modernist faith in science and progress. However, her shaking hand shows a metamodernist ethical turn acknowledging resisting hubris, ambiguity, and holding space for doubt.

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Contrasting to postmodernism, which might decrease Civil's guilt to ideological criticism of medicine as power or knowledge (Foucault, 1976), metamodernism permits her to keep both her commitment and her culpability to care. She does not leave her ethical obligation but redefines it, exemplifying the metamodernist subject who, in Vermeulen & van den Akker's (2010) positions, "oscillates between a postmodern irony and a modern enthusiasm."

The novel's testimonial function also bring into line with engagement of metamodernism with history, admitting the built nature of memory while emphasizing its need for ethical relationality. Civil speaks to her daughter:

"On the horizon behind me is my community... This is your lineage, my dear daughter, your history. More powerful than blood... If we let it." (Ch52, p. 383)

This remark chains modernist ideals of collective identity and continuity with postmodernist skepticism about essentialist ideas of community or family. The phrase "if we let it" shows the agency and contingency which is involved in constructing meaning of the past. As stated by McKee (2003), the text positions readers to identify the ideological work of testimony while still answering emotionally to its sincerity. The usage of second person address positions the daughter (and by addition, the readers) as both inheritor and witness, joining the gap between collective memory and personal.

Civil's description of her own desires discloses her negotiation between collective expectations and personal aspirations. Her mother's constant question, "Is this job your dream, Civil?" (Ch9, p. 73), illustrates the tension between social duty and individual self actualization.

Modernism movement valorizes the independent self-pursuing trustworthy expression, whereas postmodernism evaluates this as an illusion created by discourse. Perkins Valdez reviews both by giving Civil's longing to nurse as sincere but molded by her historical and cultural context. Likewise, Civil reveals her community's anticipations of respectability politics:

"How Black men dressed mattered to white folks." (Ch18, p. 139)

This identification of external surveillance and social performance mirrors a metamodernist positionality acknowledging structural limitations while encouraging the agency and dignity of those who navigate them.

The novel's structure oscillating between present and past, collective history and individual memory mirrors the metamodernism's condition. McKee (2003) contends that textual strategies, such as focalization and temporal fragmentation, create specific ideological effects. The reader, in *Take My Hand*, is not offered with a linear plot but with interlinked fragments that cumulatively makes meaning. Civil's reminiscences of her abortion (Ch23, p. 177) and her outlooks of being discharged at Tuskegee (Ch2, p. 19) are not told as cause and effect but echoed with each other, producing what Gibbons (2015) calls as "a structure of feeling" which is a characteristic of metamodernism. Instead of proclaiming deconstructing all the meaning or a definitive truth, the text offers readers to experience and feel the spaces between to dwell in the oscillation.

Civil's association to spirituality and to her own body demonstrates a metamodernist method to meaning making integrating exemplified experience without yielding to dogma. Civil remembers her religious and spiritual upbringing:

"Though I did everything to put out of my mind that painful day..... it wasn't so much that I regretted it..... it was that I had been raised to believe that such a thing was a sin. And that kind of upbringing was hard to shake." (Ch23, p. 177)

Civil's acknowledgement confirms the emotional truth of her guilt while identifying its socially created origin. This two folded consciousness, of discursive construction and bodily reality represents metamodernism's both/and position. In the same way, her acceptance that "my body and its urges are secondary" (Ch19, p. 148) contrasts postmodern analyses of the body as text and modernist festivity of physical vitality, proposing instead an embodied and nuanced subjectivity. In its true essence, the novel proposes that ethical engagement appears from identifying our relationality with others, with the past, and with the future. Civil tells her daughter:

"This knowledge, this triumph, can, if we let it, make all of us stronger." (Ch52, p. 383)

This mirrors a metamodernist investment in beneficial potential a hopeful engagement but not naive utopianism. As Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) put it, the metamodernist subject desires toward somewhat better while remaining conscious of the temporary nature of meaning. McKee's (2003) textual analysis supports to explain how the text positions readers to live this hopeful yet careful space feeling Civil's journey as both private and political, specific and representative.

What develops from *Take My Hand* is a metamodernist ethics that shuns postmodern cynicism and modernist certainty, instead embracing the ambiguity of responsibility and care. Civil's story does not decide the ambiguities she embodies but honors them as basic and fundamental of ethical being. The alternation of conflicting imperatives in sincerity vs. irony, autonomy vs. community, certainty vs. doubt defines the narration of the Civil as a modality of prejudice sensitive to the multidimensional issues of modernity. The metamodernist entanglement of the ethical ambiguity is manifested through her inner connection with her patients, Erica and India, in particular. She narrates administering contraceptive injections to preadolescent girls without confirming their informed consent:

"...no one had bothered to ask them if they were even menstruating. I believed that both girls were virgins. But here we were inserting what could be poison into them..." (Ch17, p. 134).

This instant signifies a critical disappearance from postmodern skepticism of all institutional power and modernist faith in science as progress. Civil does not skeptically reject the probability of care, nor does she obediently valorize her medical authority. Rather than that, she defies her own complicity in systemic harm while denying to let that fault paralyze her into inaction. This can be categorized as a textually implied oscillation between normative medical authority and its criticism, a broad tension that places the reader to engage critically and emotionally, rather than simply to decode an ideological message. The novel's testimonial proportion highlights metamodernism's promise to meaning despite its constructedness. Civil's demonstration is personal but outlined as collective memory: "On the horizon behind me is my community... This is your lineage... More powerful than blood... If we let it." (Ch52, p. 383). Such a linguistic device is indicative of the traits of metamodernist literature in their capacity to transcend postmodern cynicism without failing to introduce subjectivity into the picture. The direct-addressing of her daughter by Civil is an ethical and intimate requisite to keep in mind. The textual model of analysis by McKee (2003), illustrates how the testimonial moments operate textually, that is, the reader is put in a place where he or she becomes an eyewitness to a historical pathway that is emotionally charged and morally obligatory. Thus, the readers are encouraged to interact with the characters and the historical bias they had to deal with, not only as an observer but as the heirs of the common duty.

In all the book, *Take My Hand*, the individual desires of Civil are outlined in conflict with the social roles. The answer which Civil gives when her mother asks, "Is this job your dream, Civil? (Ch9, p. 73), is subtle. Although she enjoys nursing, she further recognizes that her decision has been influenced by gender norms, respectability politics, and racialized

requirements. Equally, her observation that the dressing of white folks was significant concerning the black men (Ch18, p. 139) is an indication of advanced awareness of how different identities are approved by common stereotypes. Such duality is a trait of metamodernism oscillation; Civil asserts her individualism but at the same time acknowledges her grounding at the communal storyline. It is important to note that these textual strategies do not only focus on ideological analysis, but they also promote the affective identification. So the story generates a rightfully active stand of reading that is in between emotively and cognitively involved. The composition of the text itself is fragmented and cumulative, which is associated with the metamodern state of moving between incompleteness and totality. The information about professional discrimination by Civil (Ch2, p.). The autobiographical accounts of her abortion (19) and memories of it (Ch23, p. 177) seem to be presented as portraits, instead of a causally connected story. This sense of postmodern recognition that selfhood and history are constructed at the same time that it affirms their meaningfulness is present in the text. Such a construction, as McKee (2003) notes, gives the reader the invitation to feel the ideological work of the text, and to feel inspired by the sincerity of the text. This perceived approach fits the definition of metamodernist texts given by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010): the texts do not become fully fragmented (often) nor completely coherent (often) but rather move back and forth between these opposites to construct a new affective register. The thoughts about her abortion expressed by Civil provide the example of how metamodernism recreates the connection between spiritual belief and incarnate knowledge: ... but I tried hard to forget that bad day... I did not regret it so much... it was because I was conditioned to think that doing something like this was a sin (Ch23, p. 177). The story draws a focus on the fact that her physical experience and religious upbringing are both interwoven and in tension with each other. She does not completely agree or completely reject the ethical paradigm that she has inherited, which is quintessentially a metamodernist one. Similarly, when she states that she is more of the gratitude-prayer type (Ch23, p.177), she is demonstrating her skills and so, her ambivalence: she is not engaged in spiritual activity with the view to wholehearted faith (modernism), nor total irony (postmodernism) but rather with a tentative commitment. This positioning of text encourages readers to share a similar zone of ambiguity, accepting the ways spirituality and morality are constructed in society, and at the same time, embracing the reality of their emotive nature. Civil's story eventually confirms the likelihood of ethical engagement and meaning, even in the expression of historical trauma. Her speech to her daughter develops this: "This knowledge, this triumph, can, if we let it, make all of us stronger." (Ch52, p. 383). This speech summarizes the metamodernist ethic: recognizing the contingency of meaning ("if we let it") while still have confidence in its potential to foster solidarity and strength. The narrative thus castoffs postmodern nihilism, and modernist teleology instead suggesting an ethic of hopeful relationality. McKee (2003) argued that such a placing mirrors an ideological critique of both relativist detachment, and individualist progress narratives proposing instead a middle path that honors both care and critique.

The interpersonal dialogues of the novel, "Take My Hand", also establish metamodernism's oscillation. For instance, when Ty confesses: "Civil, I would be lying if I said I have been thinking about you for the last forty years... But I have to say seeing you here today is bringing back memories." (Ch19, p. 147). This confession exemplifies both nostalgia and honesty, critique and yearning, a metamodernism's interplay of irony and sincerity. Civil's quiet, polite reception of his arguments highlights her understanding of human complexity. McKee (2003) supports us see that the narrative places readers to raise the value of this complexity, not to judge Civil as passive or Ty as hypocritical, but to sense the despair of unsatisfactory human connection. The professional journey of Civil also analyses and reviews postmodernist and

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modernist notions of gender. When her professor remarks: “as a woman, you have other issues to consider. Starting a family, for instance. You have wisely chosen the nursing profession, Miss Townsend.” (Ch2, p. 19). At this point, modernism’s essentialism (females as natural caregivers) is appraised but not terminated outright. Civil dislikes the decline of her ambitions but also values her effort in nursing, which she understands as both socially necessary and personally fulfilling. This standpoint mirrors the metamodernism’s strategy of revaluing relationality and care without yielding to essentialist stereotypes. McKee’s (2003) model of textual analysis would note how this uncertainty is coded in plot choices, such as juxtaposing Civil’s individual considerations with official discourse thereby creating an affective tension in the reader.

Take My Hand also discovers the societal body through Civil’s considerations on racism and poverty: “Poverty motivated a lot of the city’s crime. Despair. Racism. Lack of opportunity... We were doing community work. Better to step in before things got worse.” (Ch13, p. 106). Civil here contends with her part in systemic inequalities. She neither dismisses nor romanticizes the opportunity of intervention, instead admitting its potential harms and limits. This brings into line with metamodern oscillation between commitment and critique, an ethic of care that is cynical of its own adequacy yet reluctant to abandon the field. McKee (2003) model of textual analysis observes that this ideological placing is made through textual strategies that place readers to identify both the ideological assumptions of societal work and its affective inevitability.

This research work has examined “Take My Hand” (2022) by Dolan Perkins Valdez through a metamodernism’s lens, employing Allan McKee’s (2003) model of textual analysis to comprehend how the novel re-evaluates and revises the concepts of postmodernism and modernism for the 21st century. By an in-depth examination it can be seen that the novel displays the metamodernism sense of oscillation, hope and despair, sincerity and irony, individual and collective, in its treatment of reality and meaning that transcends postmodern skepticism and modernist certitude. The first person narration of Civil Townsend is an example of such oscillation since she acknowledges how she became a part of the systemic discriminations, preserves her sense of duty and nurturing. She is full of emotional honesty and analytical consciousness especially in her ruminations concerning personal regrets and professional losses. This ethical indeterminacy is the reflection of the metamodernist denial of determined epistemological systems and dualistic moral standpoints to the more facilitative, wavering interaction with the world.

The testimonial structure of the novel endows Civil not only as a repository of the memories, but also as the testifier of historical inequalities and injustices to the future generation. Meaning is recaptured in her address to the reader, as well as to her daughter, without excluding its challenge, a gain that Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) refer to as both-neither logic. The novel takes a metamodern position of possibility by questioning all the institutional failures and epistemic boundaries and maintaining the possibility of repair, care, and relationality. The textual analysis model by McKee (2003) demonstrates how these ideological positions were reached with the help of the narrative strategies, such as dialogic encounters, character development, ethical positioning the reader, and narrative fragmentation. Such moments of text as the self-critical but proud self-reflections of Civil concerning her identity, her ambivalent use of contraceptives, and her continuing witnessing are designed to engage the reader both critically and emotionally, thus, establishing what metamodern theorists define as affective realism (Gibbons, 2015).

In an era when sexism, systemic racism and inequity are still a reality, Take My Hand creates a platform upon which literature can be both critical and hopeful, providing the reader with an

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avenue with which to be inhabited in the world on an ethical level and not succumb into complacency and despair. Thus, the work demonstrates that the metamodernist approaches such as oscillation, relationality, ambivalence, and sincerity with irony offer feasible ways out of the cul-de-sacs of postmodern nihilism and modernist certitude. The irony side and sincerity element of the poem make it not only to withstand the test of time as a witness to what never existed, but also to call on the contemporary readers to act and envision a better future. Such a ductal engagement goes back to state that meaning, in spite of being controversial and tentative, is needed and achievable. The study thus maps and developments in knowledge of the societal change and transformation. In addition, the renunciation of postmodernity is a crucial alteration in the paths of society and how society can be further elaborated and perceived, which is a major breakthrough in the fields of social cognition and thought.

## Conclusion

This research work has examined “Take My Hand” (2022) by Dolan Perkins Valdez through a metamodernism’s lens, employing Allan McKee’s (2003) model of textual analysis to comprehend how the novel re-evaluates and revises the concepts of postmodernism and modernism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through thorough analysis, it is obvious that the novel demonstrates the metamodernism’s sensibility of oscillation, between hope and despair, sincerity and irony, individual and collective as it engrosses reality and meaning in ways that transcend both postmodern skepticism and modernist certainty. The narrative voice of Civil Townsend exemplifies this oscillation by expressing her involvement in systemic discriminations while upholding her commitment to accountability and care. She exemplifies both emotional sincerity and critical awareness, mainly in her thoughts on personal regrets and professional failures. This moral ambiguity mirrors metamodernism’s denial of epistemological frameworks and binary moral in favor of a more nuanced, oscillatory engagement with the world.

The testimonial framework of the novel places Civil not only as a custodian of memory but also as a witness to historical inequalities and injustice for future generations. Her address to the reader and her daughter reclaims meaning from trauma without refuting its difficulty, regular with what Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) label as “both-neither” logic. By challenging the failures of institutions and the limits of knowledge while still upholding the possibility of repair, care, and relationality, the novel carves out a metamodernism’s stance of possibility. McKee’s (2003) model of textual analysis highlights how through narrative strategies these ideological positions are achieved: dialogic encounters, character development, ethical positioning of the reader and narrative fragmentation. Textual instants such as Civil’s self-critical yet proud reflections on her identity, her conflicted administration of contraceptives, and her ongoing testimony are made to move the reader critically and emotionally, creating what metamodernism’s theorists call affective realism (Gibbons, 2015). In a world still noticeable by sexism, systemic racism, and inequality, *Take My Hand* establishes that literature can express critique and hope simultaneously, proposing readers a means to inhabit the realm ethically without submitting to complacency or despair. In doing so, *Take My Hand* shows that metamodernism strategies such as oscillation, relationality, ambivalence, and sincerity tempered by irony offer productive ways of re-engaging with meaning and reality beyond the impasses of postmodern nihilism and modernist certainty. By embracing both irony and sincerity, critique and care, the *Take My Hand* not only endures eye witness to the past but also demands readers to enact and imagine a more just future. These oscillatory engagement upholds that meaning, though contested and provisional, remains both necessary and possible. This research also charts and develops understandings of society about

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societal changes and transformation. Moreover this is also important because a breakaway from postmodernism is a great change in how society is moving forward and how society can be further developed and understood. It is a great breakthrough in the domain of social understanding and philosophy.

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