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## Psychoanalytic Perspectives on The COVID-19 Pandemic in Sarah Hall's *Burntcoat* and Sarah Moss's *The Fell*

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### Abstract

Globally, pandemics and epidemics have been largely argued in literature. The calamity of COVID-19 has largely paralyzed individuals and societies. The research deals with fictional responses of individuals who are infected by coronavirus and the impact of the virus on the way of coping with each other and with the surrounding. The research deals with two English novels; *Burntcoat* (2021) by Sarah Hall and *The Fell* (2021) by Sarah Moss. These novels are chosen for the critical analysis due to the variety of themes. The texts chosen depict experiences of the victim characters during quarantine. The objectives of the research are to identify the characters that experienced the pandemic, analyzing their unconscious behavior. This will be done according to the Freudian psychoanalytic theory. Also, to examine the responses of the infected characters to the calamity based on Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. And to show the impact of coronavirus on the selected characters in coping with others relaying on Judith Herman's PTSD. The aim is to explore themes of

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isolation, dislocation, unconsciousness, and hysteria. This will be discussed within the limits of the main concepts of the psychoanalytic theory.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalytic, epidemic, pandemics, quarantine, unconsciousness, PTSD.

## التحليل السايكولوجي لكوفيد-19 في رواية "الثوب المحترق" لسارة هال و"السقوط"

لسارة موسى

ايمان سعود ذنون

جامعة تكريت

### المستخلص

لقد كان للجائحات والابوئة موضع نقاش وجدل في الادب على المستوى الدولي. ان معضلة كوفيد-19 كانت قد اصابت الافراد والمجتمعات كافة. يعالج البحث استجابات لشخصيات روائية كانت قد اصيبت بكورونا فايروس ومدى تأثير الفايروس في علاقات الافراد مع بعضهم ومع المحيط. يتحدث البحث عن روايتين كانت قد ألفت في 2021 للكاتبين الانكليزيين سارة موسى وسارة هول لما تحويه هاتين الروايتين من تنوع في الأفكار مستندة الى تجارب الشخصيات وابطال الروايات خلال فترة الحجر وحظر التجوال. يهدف البحث الى انتقاء الشخوص التي عانت تجربة "مع الجائحة وتحليل سلوكها اللاشعوري كعامل نفسي بناء" على النظرية الفرويدية في التحليل النفسي، وتفحص ردود افعال الاشخاص المصابين بالاعتماد على نظرية الصدمة النفسية لكاثي كاروث، اضافة الى بيان طريقة التعامل مع الاخرين من خلال تحليل السلوك وفق نظرية الاضطراب ما بعد الصدمة النفسية لجودت هيرمان. الهدف هو اكتشاف افكار متعددة منها: العزلة والانفصال، التشويش، اللاوعي، والهستيريا من خلال سلوك الضحايا المصابين. كل ما سبق سيتم عرضه وتحليله ضمن اطار الاسس و المفاهيم الرئيسية لنظرية التحليل النفسي.

**الكلمات الدالة:** التحليل النفسي، وبائي؛ جائحات؛ حجر صحي؛ اللاوعي؛ اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة

### 1. Introduction

Everyone can keep track of global events, understand the impacts on individuals and communities, and become inspired to take meaningful actions. Axiomatically, pandemic fiction emerged as an outcome of the wide spread of epidemic contagions such as plague, malaria, cholera, and smallpox, in the Middle Ages. Therefore, novel, as a literary genre, varied from being historical to scientific. Accordingly, writers set their works against the backdrop of the Black Death in America and Africa, especially. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the flow of life all over the world. This

pandemic which disrupted the lives of all people and confined them to their houses has also affected literature. Fiction, considerably, helps us cope with reality, think of our way through scenarios, confront our worst fears, and reclaim our humanity in facing danger. Fiction, also, makes us explore how we have imagined global pandemics in years gone by. Two centuries of science fiction have tracked social and cultural responses to ideas of illness on a global scale, whether addressing pandemics directly or using the virus threats metaphorically. Thus, the genre of novel is a rich repository of ideas against which we can weigh our COVID-19 experiences.

## **2. Background of the Study**

It is striking that the whole history is full of pandemics. In the past, those pandemics used to topple empires and lead to change social systems, but human memory forgets this. Relatively, it is historically remarked that the contemporary age is known as the age of upheavals. From the violence of wars, genocides, dramatic revolutions, painful legacies, mega changes in economics, politics, and societies disruption, migration, all the way to the COVID-19 pandemic which caused many personal and communal crises to people all over the world. Within this context, one should know what is a crisis? The word ‘crisis’ in ancient Greek means a mid-moment between life and death within oneself resulted from a pandemic event (Tebben 460). The term is originally medical; however, it is employed in literature as metaphorically describes socio-cultural and socio-political elements since the nineteenth century. The term is seen by Marx and Engels, from a Marxist view as a description to economic crises which is due to the crises made by capitalism. They metaphorically attributed the concept to pandemics “In den Krisen bricht eine gesellschaftliche pandemic aus, welche allen fruheren Epochen als Widersinn erschienen ware-eine Epidemie der Uberproduktion” (7). The discourse of corona crisis is a metaphor to all deadly pandemics happened in history. The epidemics may refer to natural or man-made disasters, accidents, events, earth quakes, and other disaster. COVID-19 in fact afflicts all people; children and adults; white and black. In America, racism is quiet clear at this period that the black suffer most. As Almaarroof, Ansam ans Alnajar Husamuldeen stated in their research that “The pandemic has disrupted the normal flow of events existing

quo in a variety of destructive ways without denying the fact that the status quo is bad” (Pandemic Drama 5).

From the psychological viewpoint, lockdown is seen as a period of waiting. But in fiction it is like wartime. COVID-19 really brought a strange new blitz spirit to all societies. In the hospital, there has been something like a wartime atmosphere of disaster and digital devices have replaced face to face contact. The challenge for writers is to create narratives out of people staying at home. In psychology, conflict, hesitation, displacement, flashbacks, confusion, nightmares, conscious and unconscious, have been discussed in the works of psychologists as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Although, the notion of PTSD is not modern, it is dated back to the nineteenth century when a real event of the murder of train passengers happened and engaged doctors and clinicians at that time. As Elaine Showalter, in his book (1990), argued that the PTSD is widely discussed and studied by researchers of current studies. The findings of their research lies in the fact that victims responses are strange and women especially are characterized by hysteria (130). PTSD may be interpreted through a large number of symptoms, the most distinctive of which are flashbacks, hysteria, and conflicts which are the main concern to the current research. Axiomatically, the closest theory which deals with the behavior of those who faced a horrible or stressful event is the psychoanalytic theory. The psychoanalytic theory, according to psychology, is “a therapeutic method for treating mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the patient’s mind”. The theory is led by Sigmund Freud (1956), the founder. According to Freud, “human behavior is the result of the interactions among three component parts of the mind: the id, ego, and superego” (24). Theorists believe that human behavior is driven by certain forces and instinctual biological drives. Thus, they do not believe in free will (Friedman 2011). The main concept of psychoanalytic theory is trauma. The theory of trauma was found by Cathy Caruth, a leading figure in the field of psychology. Caruth regards “traumatic experience is not possessed by individuals or group ... It is, paradoxically, literature’s very indirectness-its figurative language, gaps in speech and linguistic particularities-that transmits the force of a traumatic history” (36).

The Freudian idea about a traumatic event or a shock, as it is mentioned in his Book, *Studies of Hysteria*, is that when a person experiences such an event this means that there is something related to “mind’s response” (17). The connotation was also discussed by Cathy Caruth, in her book *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) in which she observed that traumatic event is “an injury inflicted on a body” (4). It is bluntly put that trauma may inflict and damage mind and body as well due to the claims of Freud and Caruth. On the other hand, Judith Herman, the founder of PTSD, outlines traumatic disasters in her book *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) as “an infliction of powerlessness” (19). She concludes that the victim suffers from “the conflict between the will to deny ... and the will to proclaim aloud” (33). This can be interpreted as follows: The event as a real shock hinders people from reporting it especially at the time when the calamity occurs. It needs some time span to be interpreted in mind then be reported. In the past, PTSD was known as “shell Shock” during the period of WWI, and “combat fatigue” after WWII, but it does not happen to combat veterans. PTSD, possibly, can be occurred in all people of any ethnicity, culture, and age, and at any time.

From the **literary** point of view, the breakout of COVID-19 which dramatically changes the lives of people, has influenced literature. Studies have shown that pandemic fiction intends to provide illustrations through implicit meanings and conclusions of reality. Since the breakout of the plague to the global coronavirus, people have looked for deeper understanding and some sense of security. Thus, the matter is in a position that needs some reflection. Therefore, literature serves as a means of reflecting reality, a mirror, through which novelists like Emma Donoghue, in her book *The Pull of the Stars* (2018), in which she discussed the status of pregnant women quarantined together in a hospital in Ireland and how they suffered illnesses and needed therapy care. Albert Camus, on the other hand, predicted the calamity many years before it occurred in his fictional work *The Plague* (1947). Camus gave an alarm of the coming years of crises and struggle to meet the peoples’ demands against the destructions caused by mysterious viruses which is too hard to stop. The same as with the American author Lawrence Wright who predicted the failure in containing the pandemic in the novel, *The Looming Tower* (2006) he criticized the political system from the social and cultural perspective. Wright documented tragedy in his book, saying: “this evokes the hopelessness and fear I and many other Americans felt”

(16). Similarly, in *A State of Fear* (2006), the filmmaker and writer, Laura Dodsworth coincided with Wright, she states that it is not “our leaders” inability to resolve chaos but their ability to “weaponize fear” (220). She has realized the size of fear and danger to the individuals and public at one time.

Since the psychological impact of COVID-19 and its reflection in literature is the core study of the paper and the persona who are affected differently by the pandemic suffer, the study tries to accomplish the following main objectives: First, the research attempts to depict the main concepts of Judith Herman’s PTSD theory (hysteria and madness) through the main characters during quarantine in the selected novels; Edith and Halit in *Burntcoat* and Kate in *The Fell*. The second objective is to analyze the experiences of the isolated characters using the concept of trauma in the selected novels. The third objective of the research is to show how the two novelists interpret the reactions of the traumatized characters towards society in the selected novels.

In order to achieve the aims behind the research, the paper tries to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the concepts of the PTSD theory that are reflected in the personality of the main characters in the selected novels?
- 2- How do the isolated characters experience the trauma of COVID-19 in the selected novels?
- 3- How do the novelists portray the reaction of the traumatized characters towards society?

### **3. Pandemic Literature**

Pandemic literature, particularly, fiction, is a significant resource to share human experience through history. Several works from the so far past feature the epidemic of the plagues. For instance, the epic of *The Iliada* by Homer (18<sup>th</sup>) century started with the damage of the plague to the Greek Army Camp. Also, the Biblical book of Exodus contains a wide description of the ten plagues in Egypt. There are some other events that are depicted in literature since years gone by. Ultimately, we can say that the epidemic can be seen as a divine punishment for all at any time. The first science fiction was a novel written by Mary

Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818) carries biographical themes of birth and death from the life of Shelley. The second novel is *The Last Man* (1826), a global pandemic is portrayed caused the collapse of the civilization in Europe. Within the time of publishing these works, Cholera appeared in India and killed millions. Meanwhile, the breakout of Typhus in Ireland killed about 70000 persons too. All these pandemic events are portrayed in literature in one way or another.

Mostly, writers of pandemic fiction concentrated on significant issues in dealing with political, economic, global, and social impacts of the events separately. For example, Emma Donoghue, as we previously mentioned, focused on the psychic nature of women, in particular. Relatively, Albert Camus focused on society and people protection. While Lawrence Wright whose book was purely political, agreed with Laura Dodsworth in her criticism to the wrong politics during the lockdown. From the psychological point of view, many research (2020) has been done on the pandemic such as a comparison between men and women in reacting to the shocking events. The comparative study found that women are faster than men and easily suffer mental health when experiencing trauma (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 24-30). Another study (2020) has found that one of PTSDs is the fear of social discrimination, in a study done on a group oppressed people (Groarke 227-237). Dworkin & Ullman (2021), in a study of social relations. The study found that significantly higher perceived social stigma and negative coping style among COVID 19 pandemics with PTSD compared to COVID 19 patients without PTSD. It has not been elucidated yet that the psychological treatment of the COVID-19 pandemic is argued in the light of the responses of the characters in *Burntcoat* (2021) by Sarah Hall and *The Fell* (2021) by Sarah Moss. It is also significant to mention that the selected texts have not been analyzed according to the selected concepts of the psychoanalytic theory; unconscious, hysteria, trauma, and PTSD for the current study. We, therefore, attempt to discuss these aspects through the themes of loss, claustrophobia, isolation, madness, and memory. The paper, therefore, focuses on the behavior of the characters who are victimized in the selected texts that no critic or researcher has analyzed the selected works together.

A series of pandemics has been occurred throughout history and has been conveyed to us through fiction. In the past, many people died because of the plague and doctors did

not know how to deal with the disease besides the primitive medical care. The clash involves human beings, political and social institutions, cultural infrastructure, and mainly economics (Rosen 144). The epidemic is described by Boccaccio, as:

In men and women alike it first betrayed  
Itself by the emergence of certain tumours  
In the groin or armpits, some of which  
Grew as large as a common apple, others  
As an egg... From the two said parts of the  
Body this deadly gavocciolo soon began  
To propagate and spread itself in all  
Directions indifferently (Boccaccio 9).

The response to the pandemic is different from one place to another and it is varied according to regions and areas. In the respect of location, it is declared that people who settle in large cities with high density such as China and India witnessed high spread of disease and were hardly hit by the virus. The same as for the cities that have international travel such as London and New York.

Literature played a good part in portraying the pandemics throughout history. Poets and novelists managed to address local situations and have been desired to “identify universal truths about how societies respond to contagious disease” (Jones12). Most novelists, in so far past, mirror the previous pandemics in their works. For example, Geoffrey Chaucer, in his *Canterbury Tales* (1386), presented a full description to the English society during the Black Death era and gave an insight to the society anticipating the danger and risk caused by the plague. In *The Plague* (1947), Albert Camus gave an alarm to people about the deadly disease, lockdown, and the powerlessness that covered everything at that time. Likely, modern movies, also depict the atmosphere of the world during the time of pandemics. *Outbreak & Contagion* are recent movies predict the possibilities of the



outbreaks of the viruses. The main intention of these literary works is to explore the feelings of people towards the horrible challenging disease and to stimulate the awareness to act against the calamity.

When we argue pandemics in narratives, we should take into account two main things: Narratives about narratives and narratives above narratives (Ayres 508). It is significant to state that the research is based on narratives above narratives because we are studying and analyzing one distinctive pandemic; COVID-19 which operates over other previous pandemics for the following reasons: The first is the recent medical and technological achievements which make media go beyond landscapes and language barriers and the second reason is the improvement in the field of medicine and cure. Research in the field of COVID-19 is carried out in many languages. For example, some studies are conducted in English; others in Chinese, French, Spanish, or German languages.

Pandemic fiction teaches us how to look back to our miserable world and inspect new points of view delivered by artists, poets, novelists, and film makers to create most important issues reflected in their works. The irony of the pestilences is not new to us. However, it has been with individuals for years throughout the history of humanity. Plagues, and the other two major epidemics are cycling and are represented in the works of fiction. For example, *Frankenstein* (1818) is listed as the first science novel. Medieval literature, also suggested the fear of pandemics represented in literary works through characters suffer from contagious diseases. For example, *The Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio (1375) and Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1400) focused on the manner humans behave towards calamities of life "the fear of contagion increased vices such as avarice, greed, and corruption, which paradoxically led to infection and thus to both moral and physical death" (Riva 122). Similarly, one of the significant literary works presented human behavior against contagions is *A Journal of the Plague Years* (1664) which is a memorial observation of the most remarkable event occurred in London. The work observed us the role of English authorities in a number of states in resisting the danger of plague and lessen deaths caused by the disease (Pamuk 30-31).

PTSD symptoms are very vivid in pandemic fiction. The selected novels present the protagonist(s) as traumatized as well as the other characters due to coronavirus but the

difference is in the way they respond to the event, behave, talk, and act. The inability to take a decision, hesitation, fragmentations, anxiety, phobia, loss, fear, ... etc. are disorders occur after a period of a traumatic event, and the period may be a long time.

There are different scholarly researches written in the field of pandemic literature and the impact of pandemics on individuals and society. Most important is to refer to the studies done in the field of psychology and trauma studies because they are fit to the selected works though these works are very recent, therefore, the critical comments are limited.

Studies that are connected to the analysis of *Burntcoat* (2021) by Sarah Hall and *The Fell* (2021) by Sarah Moss are as follows:

Emily Lawford, in her article analyzed Sarah Hall's *Burntcoat* from the sensual point of view concentrating on the relationship between the protagonist couple; Edith and her lover, Halit. Lawford described this relation as corruption spoils the life of the couple and led them to die. In a similar study, Kevin Canfield also argued the collapse of the life of the two lovers attributed it to the illegal sexual relationship, which violates the taboo, and religiously abandoned, during the period of coronavirus.

Lauren Elkin studied Sarah Moss's *The Fell* according to the ecological theory that the geographical places, according to her, may affect the life of ill people, and home is not always a shelter. The study was conducted in the light of the protagonist woman, Kate. Kate is portrayed as a weak ill creature in a natural landscape.

Considerably, the focus of past studies on pandemics was on different aspects of life; psychological, religious, political, geographic, and cultural aspects. For example, the concentration of Albert Camus in *The Plague* is how to put the virus under control and protect people from the contagious disease. While Almaarroof, Ansam and Linda Najim, in their research "Asian-Americans between Racism and COVID-19", conclude that "Racism in America is an incurable disease ... and powerfully rooted within the fabric of white society". They added that "Racism has returned to its first starting point, which was characterized by open ... aggression against the Chinese after the spread of COVID-19" (12). Laura Dedsworth, on the other hand, in *A State of Fear* elucidated the failure of

authorities in containing the virus. She referred to the unfair policy during the pandemic and the bad effect of this on people. However, literary texts of trauma and psychoanalytic conditions of victims did not merit the same attention and focus in studies for they are regarded less important than other aspects of study such as politics, religion, community, economics, and pedagogies. Moreover, three psychological studies conducted in China during the COVID19 pandemic (Gonzalez Sanguino, et al. 2020, Qi et al 2020, Liu et al 2020), found that psychological supports from families to the infected individuals is associated in decreasing the risk of mental health and anxiety during pandemics. Another study (2020) has found that one of PTSD is the fear of social discrimination (Groarke 227-237). Furthermore, Dworkin & Ullman (2021), in a study of social relations found that significantly higher perceived social stigma and negative coping style among COVID-19 pandemics.

#### **4. Methodology:**

**Literary Analysis:** The analysis employs a literary approach to dissect the novels *Burntcoat* by Sarah Hall and *The Fell* by Sarah Moss. It delves into the characters, plot, themes, and narrative techniques used by the authors to convey their messages.

**Comparative Study:** The analysis involves a comparative study of the two novels, focusing on how the characters in each book respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically in terms of trauma, isolation, and psychological impact.

**Historical Contextualization:** The analysis contextualizes the events in the novels within the broader historical context of pandemics, epidemics, and global crises. This helps provide a backdrop for understanding the characters' experiences.

**Interdisciplinary Approach:** The analysis combines elements of psychology (particularly trauma studies and PTSD), literature, and sociocultural studies to explore the psychological effects of the pandemic on the characters.

#### **5. *Burntcoat* (2021) by Sarah Hall**

*Burntcoat* (2021), a pandemic novel is written by the British writer Sarah Hall (1974). Hall is a short story writer and poet wrote six novels, her bestseller is *The Electric*

*Michelangelo* (2004). *Burntcoat* is Hall's sixth novel. It is set in a private hospital in Burntcoat, a British city, during the period of lockdown of coronavirus. The novel explores art and relationships through the pandemic. It begins with flashback and ends with flashback, too. Hall presented an image of two unmarried lovers facing a frightening world; Edith and Halit, her Muslim lover, met shortly before the virus brought its own catastrophe. After the symptoms are well known, they were forced to quarantine outside their homes. Although, their love did not stop and they continue using language of passion and affection creating an atmosphere of beauty out of darkness in order to overcome trauma caused by confinement. The unconscious behavior covers their lives. The conflict they live does not forbid their relationship, they feel the changes and the challenge together. "The world doesn't come back as it was before" (Hall 6) said Edith who lives trauma symptoms. The concept of 'conflict' is one entity of PTSD interpreted by Judith Herman. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder was first viewed by Judith Herman. The term refers to a psychiatric disorder which is developed after exposure to a traumatic event. The symptoms are classified into three main acts: to relive the past, nightmares, and day-dreams. According to Allen, another symptoms are numbing, avoidance, and hyperarousal (Herman 29). The term was also defined as "a form of intense interpersonal and/or intrapersonal dissonance tension or antagonism between two or more interdependent parties based on incompatible goals, needs, desires, values, beliefs, or attitudes" (Putnam & Poole 552).

The couple is traumatized now and they begin recalling sorrow events from the past which is an evidence of trauma. This what Caruth referred to when exposing a traumatic event. While their health deteriorated, their minds reel back to remember images from childhood. The traumatized characters found that recalling the past events is a way to overcome trauma. Their memory is limited to the past calamities. Memory, according to the psychologists, Squire Larry and Kandel Eric, is "the faculty of encoding, storing, and retrieving information. Memory includes three important categories: sensory, short term, and long term" (34). The couple found that it is hard to cope with each other or with society that they couldn't find themselves because they only speak about past time.

There is no development, no change, no action. The situation begins to be worse; Edith's life will draw to an end in the coming days. This means that trauma inflicted her body and

mind as well, and the symptoms of hysteria begins to appear. This what is the psychoanalytic theory built upon. Edith lacks remedy and healthcare. Eventually, she died without mental heals. The novel is skillfully built that it links psychological wounds to the physical body and deals with our unending struggle in life to work out how to exist, learn, and live with loss during a very hard time which effects society at last. The protagonists endure bad health because of COVID-19, they lack interaction with each other, they couldn't make decision, and their communication with their families and friends becomes very weak.

#### **6. *The Fell* (2021) by Sarah Moss**

The second novel which is the core study is *The Fell* (2021) by Sarah Moss (1975). Moss is as brilliant as Hall, an English novelist, academic, and fiction writer. *The Fell* is her sixth novel. It is one of the novels of exploring life during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is set in a Peak District Village within the period of curfew. Kate, the protagonist is a single, claustrophobe, and depressed woman because of coronavirus. She is isolated and her isolation forced her to relive the past with its poor decisions.

To identify the characters, Moss used the stream of consciousness which makes the reader recognize victims and sufferers. Through this technique, we can know many things about the characters background and feel sympathy toward them. Because the closeness of the air in Kate's small room, she decided to go out for walking. As she was a singer in public places, now she is humming with herself, suffering hysteria, and still remembering some of her past songs which cannot produce them as before. She only began using fragmentations in her speech that no one could understand her. Kate, moreover, preferred not to attend any public place after recovery that she prefers to be detached from the surrounding and loneliness features her now. She used to go walking alone for long hours a day in order to overcome trauma with an unconscious behavior. Once, when she was walking, she unconsciously climbed the hill. After that she fell and bodily injured. Hence, she was laid in a hospital for a dangerous operation. Her unconsciousness led her to behave as such. Unconsciousness which is also called unawareness, in psychology, or subconscious, means wishes, emotional conflicts, replaced impulses, and memories that

are not directly accessible to awareness but that have dynamic effects on thought and behavior (APA Dictionary 942). The term is highly related to refer to the absence of conscious thinking. Kate becomes suffering from mental disease now that hinders her memory from being returned. The psychological damage which is due to psychological trauma besides her previous disease, cancer, caused out of isolation obliged her to leave to a mysterious place. Psychological trauma, according to Kendall, is interpreted as an emotional response to a terrible event such as an accident, rape, or any other disasters. It is a damage to the psyche after going through an extremely frightening event and may result in challenges in coping normally after the event (kendall 115). Ultimately, the unconscious behavior leads Kate to lose her memory gradually and then to death.

### **7. Collective Social Memory**

Collective memory is a term that stands for “recollection of events shared by a group” (Roediger & Abel 359). The group may be of the same country or of multi places. Schuman and Scott defined the term as “a widely shared knowledge of past social events that may have not been personally experienced but are collectively experienced through communicative social function (360). In addition to the calamity of wars and natural disasters, there are many other catastrophes such as the pandemics and epidemics caused by viruses. The globe has witnessed waves of pandemics since the outbreak of the plague in the fourteenth century till the twenty-first century. The most influential and collective one was of the 9/11 event which is described as ‘unprecedented’ (Ahmed 14). Consequently, people varied in their responses and this variation is due to the various impacts and various regions of the world. The collective social memory of the COVID-19 pandemic is as strong as the past events of 9/11 and the other genocides caused by wars.

The collective pandemics in the world caused threats to all people in the globe. Economics, commerce, and even social structure were changed into scientific advancements. The treatment of medical care in the past was able to manage the situation after a period of the infection though it still circulates. However, since the spread of coronavirus, the discourse of local virus is turned to be a part of global pandemic discourses and social media becomes delivering cultural not only political news based on politicians and journalists. The role of media is to encourage people to share transcultural

and transnational conversation in a present situation, and this what is called “participatory Culture” (Jenkins et al 2016). Public responses are rather similar since the Black Death. People in the beginning doubt of the presence of the virus, disregard the proclaims of the state and misinformation, disobey the warnings delivered by social media, conflicting data and false observations. Some families used to practice certain habits such as eating or drinking herbs in order to get rid of the danger of the virus, gargles of saltwater, eating food contains zinc, ... etc. Others respond to the pandemic according to their social beliefs and personal assessment of risk that the collective understanding of coronavirus is shaped by culture. People everywhere used to wear face masks, hand gloves, and reduced mobility. These procedures are widely represented in literature as it appeared in real life.

According to the WHO, societies, in general, may encounter an increased wave and levels of coronavirus, a new collective trauma. Societies will face likelihood of severe social stigma even those who have not been infected yet. It is inevitable to all to fall by COVID-19 ( 2020). Accordingly, trauma will be an inevitable sense and a collective calamity. Population, in the future, and after the process of recovery will be subjected to PTSD as an impact of the coronavirus pestilence. Communal/cultural trauma is interpreted by Demertzis and Eyerman as “a form of crisis, a crisis of identity that affects individuals and collectives. .. A cultural trauma occurs as the taken-for-granted foundations of individuals and collective identity as shattered, setting in motion a discursive process to understand what happened, assign blame, and find pathways to repair an interpreted situation” (65).

In the society of England, the country where the selected novelist live, as in all areas of the world, the response to coronavirus is shared by all people in forms of closing institutes, schools, airports, churches, private premises, ...etc. Learning was stopped for a while, although, it was suddenly changed into digital. The restrictions were partial in the beginning and after that became total according to the number of infections. However, coronavirus has brought new norms, social changes, and a new lifestyle to the world. For instance, people share online marketing and learning, health practices, highlighted social media, limitation in gathering in public places, and new structural changes. Globally, the size of the pestilence of coronavirus is counted as the first pandemic of the current digital

world. However, coronavirus is not the only calamity of the current era, there are many other calamities though they do not share collective societies. For example, natural disasters, floods and earthquakes, the issue of suicide may happen in one country rather than the other. For the calamity of women suicide bombing, in particular, as Amalia Abdullah asserted in her thesis, that in the recent ages the number of bombing women is dramatically increased due to different causes. Opium is the idea of the age.

## **8. Social Distancing and Quarantine**

In the past, quarantine and isolation are measures to be imposed on people during the period of pandemics. Social distancing means to be far from others and stay at home in order to get rid of the danger of the pestilence. It takes the form of physical contact and people should stay at least 6 feet away from others, according to the WHO. The strategy of social distancing encourages many things, among them is the following: Working at home replaces outside work, contact people online, learn through websites and platforms, avoid touching other people for the sake of protection, online learning and marketing.

Quarantine, on the other hand, means that when a person is infected by the virus s/he should isolate himself from others for at least two weeks so as not to infect other persons. Self-quarantine or isolation involves many things such as not using other's materials, staying at home, and avoid physical contact. Quarantine can be at a private place; home or hospital.

Social distancing and quarantine is depicted in literature, in the works of novelists and poets. For instance, Emma Donoghue, in her book, *The Pull of the Stars* (1918), portrayed a scene of quarantine in a hospital. The action was in an Irish hospital, about pregnant women who have flu, isolated together, discussing the irony of writing a book about a pandemic without knowing it would be released into a world experiencing another one. The same is with Sarah Hall who portrayed a scene of curfew in *Burntcoat*, the two characters, Edith and Halit lived a period of lockdown in a private hospital. Sarah Moss, on the other hand, presents an image of the protagonist, Kate when she suffered social distancing at home, in her small room, in her novel *The Fell*. All the sufferers presented in



the selected novels are seen in lockdown and social distancing which affects them painfully and negatively. PTSD features the situation of the sufferers in both novels. The most distinctive symptom of the disorder is hysteria. Hysteria afflicted the minds of the victim characters because of the psychological trauma. The term is defined as “A type of mental disorder in which a wide variety of sensory or psychic disturbances may occur. The discourse is derived from the Greek “hystera”, meaning “uterus”, and reflects the ancient notion that hysteria was a specifically female disorder resulting from disturbances in uterine function” (Britanica). Ultimately, curfew and social distancing are procedures imposed by authorities on people for the sake of protection and they are portrayed in literature as such.

### **Conclusion**

The examination of Sarah Hall’s “Burntcoat” and Sarah Moss’s “The Fell” through a psychoanalytic lens offers a profound understanding of the psychological intricacies of characters grappling with the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the amalgamation of literary analysis, psychological theory, and sociocultural interpretation, this study has delved into the depths of trauma, memory, and isolation, echoing the resonating effects of a global crisis. Drawing from Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, the protagonists in both novels exhibit intricate interplays of the id, ego, and superego in their responses to the pandemic. The unconscious forces that drive their actions, coupled with the profound impact of trauma, illuminate the complexities of human behavior under extreme duress. Edith and Halit in “Burntcoat,” and Kate in “The Fell,” emerge as poignant embodiments of psychological dissonance, each navigating their own labyrinth of fears, memories, and inner conflicts. The incorporation of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a central framework provides a nuanced understanding of the characters’ experiences. The symptoms of PTSD, including madness, hysteria, and claustrophobia, emerge as haunting manifestations of their psychological wounds. Through these manifestations, we witness the profound toll of isolation and confinement on the human psyche, as they grapple with the loss of agency and the erosion of their sense of self. Furthermore, the examination of collective social memory elucidates the broader societal impact of the pandemic. It underscores the universal nature of this crisis, akin to

seminal historical events like 9/11, which reverberate through the collective consciousness, leaving an indelible mark on communities worldwide. This shared experience forms a crucible for cultural evolution, prompting collective introspection, reckoning, and the pursuit of healing. In the crucible of social distancing and quarantine, the characters find themselves trapped in a liminal space, grappling with the disintegration of familiar structures and the imposition of new norms. The stark contrast between the before and after underscores the profound disorientation induced by the pandemic, as individuals reconfigure their identities and relationships in response to this seismic shift.

Ultimately, this study unveils the profound resonance of the COVID-19 pandemic within the microcosm of these novels. The characters' struggles become a mirror reflecting the broader human experience during times of crisis. Through the multifaceted interplay of psychoanalytic theory, literary analysis, and sociocultural interpretation, we gain insight into the human capacity for resilience, adaptation, and, ultimately, transformation. As the world grapples with the aftermath of this global crisis, the voices of Edith, Halit, and Kate stand as poignant reminders of the indomitable human spirit, capable of transcending even the darkest chapters of history.

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