

## **Digital Imprints: Reconstructing Identity and Memory in Post-Pandemic Fiction-A Critical Study of Selfhood in the Age of Virtual Mediation**

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### **Abstract**

The global pandemic not only disrupted lives but also altered the ways individuals perceive themselves and remember their past. Literature emerging in the post-pandemic era reflects this transformation, particularly through the lens of digital interaction and mediated existence. This paper explores how post-pandemic fiction engages with themes of identity and memory in a world increasingly shaped by digital realities. Through a close reading of selected contemporary works, the study examines how characters navigate personal loss, isolation, and reconnection within virtual spaces. It further analyzes how memory is stored, reshaped, and often fragmented when filtered through screens and social media. Drawing on theories from post humanism, trauma studies, and digital humanities, this research highlights the evolving portrayal of the self in fiction shaped by global crisis and technological dependence. Ultimately, it argues that post-pandemic literature does not merely document digital life, but re imagines what it means to remember, relate, and exist in a hyper connected world.

### **Keywords**

Post-pandemic fiction , Digital identity, Memory reconstruction, Virtual trauma, Contemporary literature, Post human self, Literary responses to COVID-19,Digital humanities, Mediated memory, Technology and selfhood

### **1. Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had wide-ranging effects not only in the spheres of health and economics, but in the emotional and social landscape of human existence. While the world was put under lockdowns, travel restrictions, and physical distancing, individuals were looking to books to understand a rapidly evolving reality. Writers reciprocated by starting to explore the psychological burden of the pandemic in their novels, employing fiction as a medium to explore mourning, memory, identity, and how technology is now positioned in our relationships.

This essay examines how contemporary writing reacts to these alterations. It focuses particularly on how the discourses of identity and memory are reframed in post-2020 fiction. Through a close examination of three recent texts, the research aims to find out how literature records the individual and collective changes brought about by the pandemic, especially in terms of digital existence and affective alienation. As pointed out by Harari (2020), pandemics not only

challenge healthcare systems but also challenge our sense of self, community, and purpose elements that literature is best positioned to examine.

## **2. Literature Review**

Literature has been providing commentary on public health emergencies for a long time. Albert Camus's *The Plague* or Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, for example, described the terror and moral accounting a pandemic can instill. What is distinctive about COVID-19, though, is that it coincided with physical distancing and digital hyper connectivity. Being able to and needing to keep relating and routine ongoing online has changed how humans experience both time and personhood.

Scholarship in the field of trauma studies, particularly that of Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman, has highlighted the ways in which traumatic experiences break the continuity of memory and identity. Trauma, as experienced, is remembered fragmentarily, and this translates into non-chronological narration and broken timelines in literature. Contemporary fiction adds to this through an incorporation of digital experience video calls, social media activity, online obituaries into narratives that convey loss and strength.

Emerging digital humanities research also validates this trend. As Hayles (2008) suggests, digital spaces have revolutionized the way that stories are produced and consumed. Within pandemic fiction, this change finds expression in hybrid modes of storytelling, collapsed boundaries between virtual and actual experience, and characters struggling through a home world both known and altered. Additionally, Kleinman (2021) asserts that pandemic fiction functions as a means of cultural mourning, enabling readers to work through sorrow and shared anxiety.

## **3. Objectives of the Study**

- To comprehend how characters in post-pandemic literature struggle with changed identities.
- To find out how memory and trauma are constructed in narratives based on the COVID-19 crisis.
- To discuss the impact of digital communication on character creation and emotional engagement.

## **4. Methodology**

Close reading and thematic analysis are applied to study three literary works:

1. Companion Piece by Ali Smith (2022)
2. How High We Go in the Dark by Sequoia Nagamatsu (2022)

### 3. A Burning by Megha Majumdar (2020)

These works were chosen for their thematic concern with trauma, identity, and the digital age. The discussion engages with trauma theory, postmodern literary strategies, and aspects of digital humanities to analyze the ways the books represent the emotional and social effect of the pandemic.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

### 5.1 Fragmented Identity in a Shifting World

In *Companion Piece*, Ali Smith presents a narrator caught in the disorienting experience of lockdown. The novel weaves together past and present, reality and dream, as a way of showing how identity becomes fluid during moments of collective uncertainty. The protagonist's conversations occur mostly over phone or video calls, creating a sense of distance even in connection. Through this, the book explores how identity feels less stable when daily routines and social contexts are disrupted.

Similarly, in *A Burning*, Megha Majumdar narrates the story of a Muslim girl child who's accused of committing a crime based on her social media status. The novel doesn't deal with COVID-19 directly, but it captures the increasing unease regarding public speech and online self-definition. The net is both empowering and dangerous. Characters create one version of themselves online but live another in real life, making visible the fragmentation of the self in the virtual world. Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory comes to mind particularly here, as characters enact different personas depending on the context and survival.

### 5.2 Memory, Trauma, and Emotional Dislocation

Sequoia Nagamatsu's *How High We Go in the Dark* is a collection of interlinked stories written in a post-pandemic future. The novel does not adhere to a linear plot; rather, it reflects how traumatic memory works through fragmented memories, recurring motifs, and affective resonances. The characters all bear some kind of loss, whether of a loved one, of a future, or of an idea of themselves. The pandemic in the book is used as a vehicle to examine how individuals remember and what they forget.

Ali Smith also tests the protagonist's concept of memory. The dreamlike, fluidity of her narrative mirrors the disillusion and mental fatigue experienced by so many during prolonged lockdowns. Memory is not linear but layered, frequently untrustworthy, and this accounts for the psychological impact of trauma. As LaCapra (2001) observes, trauma tends to be repeated in narration, and literature offers a secure space for its articulation and subsequent working-through.

### 5.3 The Digital Landscape as Emotional Terrain

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of post-pandemic fiction is the way technology is integrated into characters' emotional lives. Previously, the use of digital communication as a setting or a courtesy; today it becomes the central way in which individuals connect. Smith's characters forge deep, even transcendent, connections through their screens, refuting the idea that virtual relationships are not "real."

In *A Burning*, one social media post alters the course of a character's life. The book takes aim at how online words are evaluated and used as weapons, particularly against marginalized groups. In this story, the virtual space is stage and snare, reframing identity's perception and comprehension. As Turkle (2011) investigates, individuals tend to use the online world to venture into identities and feelings they do not allow themselves to experience in the physical world, which corresponds with the inner conflicts of the characters in these pieces.

## 6. Conclusion

Post-pandemic literature is not just a documentation of a historical time but an arena for emotional, psychological probing. With fractured forms, virtual environments, and motifs of loss and transfiguration, writers are producing fiction that articulates the profound inner changes brought on by the pandemic. Identity is no longer static; it is constantly reformed by crisis, memory, and the virtual. Memory, previously imagined as stable, is revealed to be fragile and stratified. These works challenge readers to look to their own experiences and to see literature as a place where healing and understanding may be initiated.

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