EXPLORING PALIMPSESTIC INSCRIPTIONS ON MEMORY IN MOSS AND PICOULT'S SELECTED COVID-19 FICTION

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Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Exploring Palimpsestic Inscriptions on Memory in Moss and Picoult's Selected COVID-19 Fiction** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Exploring Palimpsestic Inscriptions on Memory in Moss and Picoult's Selected COVID-19 Fiction

This study employs textual analysis to investigate the representation of COVID-19 in the fiction of Moss and Picoult. By utilizing De Quincey's concept of the palimpsest and Manning's Palimpsest of Memory model, this research explores how the pandemic inscribes metaphorical layers on the human brain. The primary focus is on the impact of the pandemic's temporal and environmental contexts on these inscriptions. Through a detailed analysis of Moss's *The Fell* and Picoult's *Wish You Were H*ere, the study examines how characters experience this metaphorical layering amidst the pandemic. By selecting fiction set in different countries, the research addresses both local and global ramifications of the pandemic. The nuanced character portrayals enable a comprehensive examination of the mental layers formed during this period. Additionally, the study investigates how contemporary printed texts function as metaphorical palimpsests, reflecting societal experiences, anxieties, and resilience during the pandemic. This exploration of surroundings and their influence on mental inscriptions opens potential avenues for future research. Furthermore, it delves into how literature serves as a medium for understanding the emotional and experiential complexities induced by global crises. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of textual representations of the palimpsest, emphasizing its relationship to temporal and environmental contexts. It seeks to illustrate how fiction can mirror and elucidate the human condition during unprecedented times, laying the groundwork for future inquiries into the intersection of literature, human consciousness, and societal impacts of global events. By doing so, it not only enhances comprehension of the pandemic's narrative representations but also underscores the broader implications for literary studies and research on human experiences.

Keywords: *Palimpsest, Palimpsestic, Inscriptions, Time, COVID-19, Pandemic*

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WYWH   *Wish You Were Here*

TF   *The Fell*

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Nuzhat Jabeen, the woman who inculcated love of language in me. Your warmth and kindness have shaped the very fabric of my being Mama.

In the quiet moments and the stormy days, I feel your presence, and it gives me strength. Your memory is a beacon of light, illuminating my path through the challenges and triumphs of life. As I navigate this journey, I carry your love in my heart, and your legacy lives on in the lessons you taught me.

This one is for you.

Love,

Amber.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With literature directly reflecting what befalls and surrounds humans, stories of the pandemic of 2019 became of particular focus. They highlighted "resilience, creativity, and meaning making amid confinement, isolation, and suffering", just like any other tragedy in human history (Yang 662). The havoc that befell humans and their modern, globalised lifestyle, in the form of COVID-19, brought the world to a standstill in every walk of life. Writers all over the world took to writing to express how the pandemic shook the world to its core, delineating the plight of humanity. In the fiction selected for this study, we see how the "virus has reached many countries and has paralysed the lives of many people who have been forced to stay at home in confinement" (Cachón-Zagalaz et al. 1). Where the direct ramifications of the pandemic were noted in the global economic recession and political instability, humans as individuals suffered such that their lives seemed to reach an impasse. Haleem et al. theorised that "COVID-19 has rapidly affected our day-to-day life, businesses, disrupted the world trade and movements" (2). This is depicted time and again in the fiction selected for the purpose of this research. Moreover, the isolated lives entrusted upon humanity served as a palimpsest on memory, where the new way of living was written over the old yet traces of the old keep surfacing. Owing to this new over-old phenomenon, i.e., "allowing new information to over-write the old", this study focuses on the factors that lead to the formation of a new layer on memory such that it can be known as a metaphoric palimpsest of the human brain in the time of the pandemic of 2019 (Sandberg et al. 987). In this study, I have emphasized upon the fictional representations of the process of palimpsestic inscriptions done on the human brain bringing into discussion the erasures and layering and the factors that contribute to these imprints. Using selected pandemic fiction as a reference to the globally synonymous panic created, I have analysed the relationship between the time that surrounds humans and how it impacts their way of living. Where palimpsestic inscriptions bring along the connotations of erasures and resurfacing with the past evoked, in the fictional works chosen for this study, it can be seen how in a particular situation, COVID-19, in this case, layers on memory are inscribed, forcing erasure of what was known.

To further explore this notion, I have implemented Thomas De Quincey's concept of *The Palimpsest* and Jodi Russell Manning's model, The Palimpsest of Memory, based upon De Quincey's metaphor of the brain. Josephine McDonagh's and Sarah Dillon's arguments have also been deployed, which delve deeper into De Quincey's concept of the palimpsest to help it set itself apart from other psychological theories and models. De Quincey ascribes how every single human brain is inherently a palimpsest due to the "everlasting layers of ideas, images, and feelings" that the brain records while further elucidating how every new layer of memory seems to make us believe that all is forgotten, but "in reality, not one has been extinguished" (144). Thus, connoting how memory is layered much like the older parchments, where the old never dies, and the new is foregrounded. To divulge this layering and foregrounding, I have analysed *The Fell* by Sarah Moss and *Wish You Were Here* by Jodi Picoult. Using these literary works as objects of investigation, my objective is to contribute to the academic studies of palimpsestic layering on the mind by highlighting how old and new can be set apart through time zones, even though the brain seems to layer by merging ideas.

What sets my study apart is that it focuses on the times we thrive in when layering on the memory is done. My work is distinguished by its emphasis on successful memory consolidation through a comprehensive textual analysis. Having lived in the era of COVID-19, I have had first-hand experience of how the time when coronavirus was around, impacted the lives of people everywhere in the world. As Nicomedes and Avila noted that COVID-19 might not have been as lethal as its ubiquity sounded, yet it "paralysed" not only the society but the "psychological well-being" of people around the globe (15). Choosing two novels for the study helps highlight this paralysis from a broader perspective. Both fictions belong to authors of different nationalities who have dealt with the pandemic subjectively. However, similarities cannot go unnoticed under the broad term of Pandemic Fiction. *TF* is written by Sarah Moss, a UK-based author who has set her novel in an unnamed town in the UK. *WYWH* has been written by an American author, Jodi Picoult. Picoult set her characters in diverse situations, one within the US in New York and one in Galapagos, Ecuador. Choosing novels set in diverse situations and varying societal setups and professions, helped me foreground the fact that the layering on the mind

has more to do with the prevalent time and environment in which the characters thrive rather than the geographical place.

After WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic in March 2020, the "corona crisis" seeped from media and politics to fiction and was "subsumed under the term Corona Fictions" which, like other pandemic fictions "are based on reactivated consistent structures creating constants over space and time" (*Pandemic Fictions* 2-3). However, unlike other studies, my research does not focus on parallels across time. It aims to delineate the direct ramifications on palimpsestic layering due to prevailing circumstances. The purpose behind choosing pandemic fiction is only to provide a specific time frame within which the nature of layering can be textually analysed.

My research revolves around the idea that any tumultuous time experienced by masses and the wounds it etches on their minds, COVID-19, in this case, leaves the memory inscribed such that it transports one back to the era in which it was layered. While discussing De Quincey's palimpsest, Mc Donagh illustrates how the palimpsest, though used to evoke the past, "is always, in fact, functioning on the surface" (5). She goes on to elucidate how "all texts are joined together on the surface of the palimpsest," and it is "their temporal distance slipping away in an eternal present that is somehow completed in the presence of the original ancient text" (5). This becomes of particular importance to my research. Having a present, defined by the past, helps me delineate a different time zone, distinguishing between what was before COVID-19 and what is during COVID-19. The selected novels depict how the pandemic layered upon the brains of the characters, which seemed "to bury all that went before" yet nothing had been "extinguished" and kept resurfacing to set apart the new normal of COVID-19 (De Quincey 144). For instance, in her novel *TF*, Moss portrays the plight of a working woman forced to remain in isolation, unable to live the social life she was used to living in the pre-COVID-19 era. Similarly, Picoult, in *WYWH,* brings into the limelight the isolation, disconnection and helplessness due to the pandemic that surrounds her characters.

While traditional palimpsestic readings refer to erasures and resurfacing to help delve into the past, I contend to re-channel this traditional method of reading. Instead of focusing on De Quincey's idea of layers not extinguishing and delving into the past, I focus on the formation of these layers and how it is that new ideas and new images set themselves as the foregrounded memory. To further explicate this notion,

Manning's Palimpsest of the Memory model becomes of particular importance. Manning explains how memory is layered with "experience, perception and views" of individuals (237). Yet, individuals hold on to "foregrounded dominant memories" only and all those memories become "blurred and distant" which fail to conform to what is on the surface (238). The selected fiction is replete with instances where characters hold onto the foregrounded COVID-19 memories. The novels exhibit how the new way of living is inscribing its place as a dominant memory. For example, Moss in *TF* pins the dilemma of COVID-19 on isolation, where characters lament upon being "in a sealed box" and dying "without touching another human" (10,14). In a similar vein, Picoult depicts how avoiding contact and washing away germs was all that was inscribed on the minds of the characters living amid COVID-19, "wash your hands and don't touch your face" (11).

While bringing into discussion new layers and current inscriptions and the dominant memories of these layers, I contend to explore the relationship between the nature of layering and the circumstances in which one thrives. With the selected pandemic fiction as a ground for my research, my study is significant in that it aims to delineate the effect of surroundings on the layers formed by conceptualising the term, *Palimpsest of Time* such that other researchers can use it in the future.

1.2 Thesis Statement

Moss's *The Fell* and Picoult's *Wish You Were Here* encapsulated the troubled time of the pandemic of 2019. Unlike traditional palimpsestic readings done in the light of De Quincey's palimpsest of the human brain, which transport the reader to the past, the selected novels suggest that COVID-19 imbues a fresh layer on the minds of the characters with a new way of living. Thus, making it pertinent to explore the relationship between the nature of layering and the temporal setup in which the fiction prevails.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives that govern this study are as follows:

1. To investigate the effect of the time that surrounds on memory.

2. To trace specific instances of inscriptions in the selected COVID-19 fiction.

3. To explore avenues of viewing palimpsestic parchments in an innovative manner.

1.4 Research Questions

Given the above parameter, the questions that govern this study are as follows:

1. In what manner does the temporal set-up impact the inscriptions on memory in the fictional texts, *The Fell* and *Wish You Were Here*?

2. How do the selected novels portray palimpsestic inscriptions on the brain?

3. In what ways can innovative interpretations of palimpsestic parchments be employed on the selected COVID-19 fiction?

1.5 Rationale of The Study

The palimpsest as a concept has been part of literature since the earliest of times. Its incorporation as a metaphor with De Quincey's use of the article "the" opened avenues for the literati to expand the concept and make it an inherent part of academia "from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day" (Dillon 243). The palimpsest of the brain is one such example. Not only does the palimpsest of the brain talk about layering, but it also helps writers delve into the mysteries of the functioning of the human brain itself in which, there is "no such thing as forgetting possible to the mind" (De Quincey 69). COVID-19 brought to the world a new way of living. All that was known to humanity was questioned. The social setup was utterly disrupted. Due to the evident layering of the mind brought into play in times of COVID-19, fiction about the pandemic has been selected for the study. The selected novels belong to different authors and have been set up in different scenarios. This helps the study to delineate how the time of COVID-19 pandemic has layered upon the mind of different people. The novels chosen entail fictional characters who exhibit imminent layering upon memory. Apparently, the texts deal with the dilemma of COVID-19, yet the characters of the selected fiction exhibit how the new times are being layered over the old. Thus, making them suitable for the study under the conceptual framework developed for analysis.

1.6 Significance of The Study

There is no scarcity of literature dealing with the palimpsest of the brain referring to the layers of memories. This research aligns with the scholarly discourse around the palimpsest of the brain, offering a fresh vantage point for understanding its stratification. In contexts where the intellectual elite perceive the brain as a palimpsest that has already undergone layering and analysis to elicit memories, the present study focuses on the concept of layering as an independent phenomenon. This study examines the temporal aspects that encompass individuals, regardless of their geographical location, in order to elucidate the mechanism by which memories are encoded. This work has significance not just in terms of memory retrieval, but also in its exploration of the underlying processes involved in memory formation. The fact that layering on the mind has not been explored in this manner further underlines the need for this study. This approach not only enables the researcher to gain a fresh perspective on the palimpsest of the human brain, but also supports further investigations within the same conceptual framework.

This study will also examine the impact of the environment on the process of inscribing inscriptions, and afterwards conceptualize it as an intrinsic theoretical element. As a result, this research will not only contribute to existing theory but also facilitate future investigations in this area. Moreover, this research endeavour aims to investigate the manner in which writings from a particular era in contemporary society, namely the age of printing, might be interpreted as palimpsests. Despite the absence of erasure and rewriting in these texts, this analysis will investigate the potential for classifying them as metaphorical palimpsests.

1.6 Delimitation

This study is delimited to the selected fiction of the pandemic, COVID-19, by Moss and Picoult, both printed in 2021. Owing to the limited time, only two texts have been selected. This study also delimits itself to discuss the layering upon the memory in the chosen characters of the selected fiction. The study will not entail any other aspect of COVID-19, including economic and political recessions. Instead, the focus of the study will be the personal ways of living practised by the selected fictional characters in the selected time frame. Moreover, the study is limited to the

time when the pandemic was in full bloom and does not entail any discussion of the post-COVID-19 era.

Theoretically, this study delimits itself to the concept of the palimpsest of the brain as propounded by De Quincey, with Manning as a supporting theorist. It will draw upon the discussions by Dillon and McDonagh, also based on De Quincey's Palimpsest of the human brain. The study will not entail the archaeological heritage sites as a reference for time. It will also not discuss the cityscape or landscape as a palimpsest. This study will also leave out intertextuality and pastiche as a palimpsestic concept in literature.

1.7 Organization of The Study

This study will be divided into six chapters. The first chapter deals with the Introduction, the Definition of Key Terms governing the Study, the Thesis Statement, the Research Objectives and Questions, the Rationale and Significance of the Study, and the Delimitation. The second chapter deals with the Literature Reviewed for the research and highlights the Research Gap setting up the ground for the research plan. The third chapter delineates the Research Methodology, Research Methods, and the Theoretical Framework adopted to conduct the research. The fourth and the fifth chapter entail the Analysis and Discussion of the selected texts. These chapters have been further divided with respect to the variables identified in the Research Questions, i.e., memory, time, and texts. The sixth chapter contains the conclusion while also listing the findings of the research along with recommendations for future research in the same lines suggested.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This portion of my study helps me situate my research and delineate the gaps in existing scholarship. Palimpsest as a metaphoric concept exists in literary debates since the 1900s and the scholarship on palimpsest in fiction is vast. Not only has the palimpsest been discussed and evolved as a theoretical concept, but the role it plays in Urban Literature has been a point of discussion in many studies conducted. With Spatial Studies incorporated as a theoretical lens to view texts by the mid-twentieth century and the concepts it explored as a separate field of study, contemporary literary studies took a new turn, a "spatial turn" (Torre 1127). The postmodern world in literature moved towards a more "interdisciplinary thinking" as far as analysing texts was concerned, blurring not only boundaries but also distinct disciplines and genres, connoting the fluidity of existence and evolved representations. While there is no dearth of material available related to topographical locations that are being cognitively mapped for a more comprehensive understanding of the changing space, representing palimpsestic layers of land and architecture, studies on the palimpsest of mind lag. In one article, the author elaborates how "memory is an active cultural creation and landscape inscriptions construct memories by locating place-based historical narratives", which is a direct reference to how even the palimpsestic memory is dependent on tangible spaces such as memorials and museums (Ambrosino 127). Therefore, it can be noted through the work done on memory as a palimpsest, that it directly relates to archaeology and architecture and that memorials and museums invoke memories.

The following literature review has been divided into three main portions where the first portion discusses the fiction chosen for my study. To help understand the choices of text made, I discuss pandemic fiction and delineate how the COVID-19 works chosen for my study are used as a time reference only. The second portion of this reviewed literature delves into the palimpsest as a theoretical concept and how this theory and metaphor have evolved over time. Tracing the evolution of the palimpsest metaphor, this part of my study brings into discussion more contemporary takes of the concept at large. The third portion of this chapter sheds light on the existing scholarly debates of the palimpsest as an inherent part of fictional works.

Various studies have been discussed under further subdivisions of palimpsestic memory evoked through space and time separately. The chapter concludes by bringing into limelight the gaps identified while reviewing the literature and the need to conduct the current study.

2.1 COVID-19 Works

The fictional works chosen for this study fall under the category of pandemic fiction. COVID-19 is a pandemic whose fiction drew parallels among other tragedies that took place in the world. The era produced another round of pandemic narratives. The anguish, the agony, the inability to live their lives according to their standards, the dead, the vaccines, and the terror that people all around the world felt inspired writers to put their experiences on paper. Different ethnicities wrote about the different ways in which people in their region coped with the pandemic, but what was universal was the isolation, lack of physical contact, lack of resources, as well as man's return to the primal times while simultaneously growing technologically. All of this was encapsulated by the fiction that told tales of death and horror. As this study has incorporated pandemic fiction only to bring in a reference to a specific period, the discussion on existing literati will not be included to discuss the pandemic fictions in general. The discussion entailed will help elicit how a particular reaction is activated in response to the time that surrounds humans. The study limits itself to discussing the time ramifications in studies related to pandemic 2019. To help discuss that, this portion of the chapter has been divided into three subsections. The first one deals with the literature produced in COVID-19 time in general. This will help me contextualise the direct ramifications of time that surrounded the authors and the fictional characters. The second and the third subsections will discuss the works chosen for this study.

2.1.1 Secondary Literature: A Critical Discussion

The web article *From Pandemic to Corona Fictions: Narratives in Times of Crisis* by the Research Group *Pandemic Fictions*[1] is pertinent to this research as it helps me contextualise the behaviour evoked in pandemic times in general especially,

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[1] The Research Group *Pandemic Fictions* consists of the following authors: Yvonne Volkl, Albert Goschl. Elisabeth Hobisch and Julia Obermayr, University of Graz, Austria

COVID-19. Tracing the history of crisis and bringing into limelight parallel structures that can be drawn between the pandemics of different eras and coronavirus, the article discusses a range of genres of pandemic narratives. It reveals the set of behavioural patterns exhibited by humanity in various times of the pandemic and how each pandemic elicits a collection of recurring patterns of practices. This aspect holds significant relevance to my research, as it seeks to examine the influence of specific temporal dimensions on the human psyche and the resulting cognitive responses that arise from the temporal layering of the mind during those periods.

Pandemic Fictions has brought into discussion how the fiction produced during the time of the coronavirus pandemic not only draws from the literary and cultural productions of the COVID-19 time but pertains to earlier pandemic fictions (1). Even though the paper aims to discuss the parallel structures between contemporary and older pandemic fictions and classical drama, it is important for this study because it helps me contextualise the time in which the fiction is produced. The article highlights how the concept of crisis had seeped into works of literature since early times. It goes on to state how crisis keeps changing from economic to political to medical where "one crisis succeeds after another" (1). It is because of this template that the people garbed that COVID-19 was soon subsumed under the term "corona crisis" (2). *Pandemic Fictions* go on to explicate the use of metaphors widely used in discussions of this crisis, such as the crime analogies of lockdown, that make it an entire discourse. According to them the "corona crisis discourse" has not been limited to politics and media and made its way into fiction, "constituting a new corpus, which can be subsumed under the term *Corona Fictions*" (2). This they argue, reactivates the consistent structures of the pandemic narrative yet differs because the audience of this fiction is a learned one. Encapsulated within the narratives is the fact that "news now goes viral" and social media platforms make information spread like the pandemic itself, "crossing language barriers, cultural and national borders alike" (3). It scrutinizes the literary depictions of pandemics, contending that these works of fiction possess the potential to influence the public's perception and reactions towards actual pandemics. According to the authors, the utilization of fictional narratives pertaining to pandemics provides an avenue for contemplating, predicting, and pondering pandemics (13).

The article proceeds to explore several literary works centred on pandemics, such as Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*, and Richard Preston's *The Hot Zone*. As per the authors' analysis, a recurrent motif in these literary works revolves around the fragility of human society and the potential for pandemics to induce chaos and destruction. They go on to relate how the pandemic portrayed in the literary works functions as a symbolic manifestation of the susceptibility of our societal, financial, and governmental frameworks, which possess the capacity to disintegrate when confronted with a biological threat. (16).

The fact that the article stresses upon how all pandemic narratives, since classical times have followed a structure of phases i.e.

    i.   the emergence of a novel and alarming disease,

    ii.   escalating instances of infections with unclear etiology,

    iii. the imperative to implement authoritative interventions, such as containment strategies,

    iv. the aspiration for expeditious resolution of the pandemic,

    v.   and the optimism for a promising future…"

opens room for this study (7). When the article discusses the structure of the story and how, in modern pandemic fictions such as the corona fictions, the pattern is not rigidly adhered to and stories begin amid chaos, it assists in highlighting the gap in this study. *Pandemic Fictions* has examined in detail the recurring patterns of pandemic narratives yet, for this study, these recurring patterns are not limited to the structure of the pandemic writings only. This study aims to highlight how just like a set pattern of writing is activated on the mention of a pandemic, the recurrence goes beyond the structure of the writing. Using the notion of the palimpsest of the human brain, this study aims to delineate a relationship between the palimpsestic nature of behaviour elicited as a response to the time that surrounds humans, coronavirus, in the case of this research.

A critical reading of the opening section of the book *Literary Representations of Pandemics, Epidemics and Pestilence* written by Nishi Pulugurtha, serves to emphasize the theoretical underpinning of this research. The introductory section commences by expounding upon the historical context of pandemics and their

portrayal in literary works. The author observes that pandemics have been a recurrent motif in literature across various historical periods, that "reveal to us life in times of crises" and various facets of social behaviour elicited (1). This in turn serves as a vehicle to examine themes such as mortality, trepidation, and the vulnerability of human existence.

Subsequently, Pulugurtha delves into an analysis of the various manners in which pandemics have been portrayed in literary works. The author observes that certain literary works centre on the physiological effects of pandemics, whereas others centre on the psychological and societal ramifications. The author further notes that some writings utilize pandemics as a symbolic manifestation of diverse societal or political issues and are not always discussing the plague itself. These narratives encompass "tales of love, sadness, life, politics and fun" unveiling a collective consciousness (). This becomes of particular importance to the current research. Even though my study is not centred on pandemic fiction itself, yet pandemic narratives and the collective consciousness they unveil, provide reference to a time frame pertinent to this research. The book culminates with the author's assertion that the examination of literary depictions of pandemics can facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the manners in which these occurrences affect our existence. This study aims at comprehending one of these manners and seeks to establish a connection between the palimpsestic characteristics of human behaviour and the temporal context in which individuals respond to situation that surrounds them which is the COVID-19 pandemic is this case.

2.1.2 Existing Scholarship on the Selected Fiction

2.1.2.1 *Wish You Were Here*

Nihal A. Adel Zaki Muhammad has analysed *Wish You Were Here* through a Darwinian perspective, employing evocriticism to highlight the conflict enunciated in the novel between humans and COVID-19 (25). Muhammad's analysis gives a succinct summary of the Darwinian theory and demonstrates how the novel's usage of Darwinian symbols and motifs supports its themes of evolution. Muhammad's research aims to examine the concept of evolution and adaptation with a particular focus on the analogies employed by the author where "the most essential analogy is the setting of the first part of the narrative, Galápagos" (27). What distinguishes my

study is that it examines the influence of temporal fluctuations on individual characters' cognitive processes, resulting in the adoption of innovative lifestyles. My research focuses how the newer ways of living are actively layered upon the characters' minds, rendering their palimpsestic brain to adapt to their surrounding situations.

2.1.2.2 *The Fell*

Employing Gross and Thoreau's scholarship, Kucala contends in her article that Moss's characters Kate and Rob are an archetype of a "walkers errant" (42). This is because the walk taken by the protagonists is for the love of nature. The ongoing pandemic had resulted in several alterations in individuals' lifestyles, such as heightened seclusion and restriction of movement. Consequently, there had been an increased fascination towards natural environments and recreational pursuits that take place in outdoor settings. Thus, the walk taken by Kate has no meaning other than love for nature and reclaiming her freedom and the walk taken by Rob to rescue Kate gives him the chance to communicate with nature and exercise freedom from the lockdown. Kucala further exemplifies this notion of hers by reinstating how the ubiquitous COVID-19 pandemic is "not the sole cause of their current predicament" and in fact is just an added "trigger" to the existing challenges posited to humanity for survival (38). According to Gross, the act of walking serves as a means of both discovering the world and gaining insight into one's own being (43). Conversely, Thoreau posits that the act of walking serves as a means of establishing a bond with the environment and the innate world (39). Thus, for Kucala, the lockdown was the last straw that forced Moss's characters to break free and get in touch with nature. This perspective of analysing the fiction helps underline the need of my study. Contrary to Kucala's views of not discussing the pandemic in the wider context, the current study uses the backdrop of the virus as a time reference. My research focusses on the impact that the surrounding has on individuals and how its layers on their memory. The surrounding in this case being that of a lockdown amid COVID-19.

2.2 The Theoretical Debate

The concept of the palimpsest theory has been employed within the realm of literary criticism and theory as a metaphorical framework to elucidate the way texts are imbued with several layers of significance. The theoretical discourse around the

human mind's palimpsest is disposed upon two fundamental inquiries. The first one measures the degree at which memories are retained in a tangible manner inside the neural structures of the brain while the second one is concerned with the impact of novel events and memories on pre-existing memories stored inside the brain. Keeping this in mind, the palimpsest theory has been employed in the examination of a diverse range of literary notions, encompassing history, subjectivity, temporality, and metaphor.

2.2.1 Dillon

Where numerous canonical and contemporary examples and texts can be incorporated to help broaden the horizons of palimpsest in the study, Dillon is one name that cannot be left out. Propounding upon De Quincey's seminal essay, *The Palimpsest* (1845), she theorised in her ground-breaking thesis, that the palimpsest is "an involuted phenomenon where otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other" (245). Dillon expounds upon the various manners in which the palimpsest analogy has been employed by other scholars and intellectuals, such as Freud and Derrida. According to Dillon, the analogy can be employed as a means of conceptualizing the perpetual process of textual revision and reinterpretation where the present condition of the palimpsest is characterized only by the presence of writings originating from the "past", while simultaneously being open to the possibility of "inscriptions" by future texts (249). Discussing Dillon's approach is important for this study because it helps highlight the point of departure. Taking Dillon's definition as a base, researchers have delved deep into texts considering palimpsest as a multifaceted corpus that helps highlight how the layers of memory of the old go hand in hand with the physical layers of the new. Where for Dillon all palimpsestic studies are rooted in the past and layers of memories are peeled to expose the palimpsest, this study focusses on the process of these layers being inscribed. Furthermore, this study aims at highlighting the role of the surrounding environment that leaves a mark on memory.

2.2.2 Manning

Manning, in his article, employs the palimpsest metaphor to investigate the dispute of the recollection of Auschwitz after the camp underwent a transformation into a museum and commemorative location. To set ground for his theoretical debate,

Manning classified the palimpsest of memory into two categories where the first deals with a "complete erasure" of the memory and the second introduces a unique memory pattern that is layered over the existing one, resulting in a changed memory structure that combines elements of both, the old and the new (235). Expounding upon De Quincey's palimpsest, Manning explains that because memories never cease to exist, they eventually exert control or create ambiguity through "subjective distancing" (236). Thus, the recollection of Auschwitz can be likened to a palimpsest, wherein multiple strata of memory intersect and contend with one another. The clash between the lived in memories and the cite of the museum compel Manning to highlight how the city and its trauma lack in representation and the "Holocaust memorialisation" in effect ignores "experiences and processes that shape perceptions" for public (229). Manning's theoretical discussion and Palimpsest of Memory model help this research in identifying the need to discuss layering without physical references especially those which alter ground realities. In my study, Manning's model has been used as a reference to discuss the foregrounded memories in relation to the surrounding environment.

2.3 Palimpsest in Fiction

The palimpsest as a metaphor has been employed in fiction to delve into a diverse range of issues, encompassing:

  i.   the inherent characteristics of memory including retrieval and erasure.

  ii. the interplay between the past and the present.

  iii. the potential existence of several realities.

  iv. the inquiry into the essence of identity and its relation to memory.

Thus, the palimpsest as a concept has been part of fiction rendering itself as a valuable tool for the examining a diverse array of subjects and concepts. This review of literature has studied the palimpsest in fiction in two broad categories. The first one deals with palimpsestic memory being evoked through tangible spaces like architecture, landscapes, museums and memorials. The second one deals with palimpsestic memory being evoked through past experiences, embedded in past time.

2.3.1 Palimpsest of Memory Evoked Through Space

Huyssen analyses the concept of urban palimpsests and the politics of memory in Berlin. He contends that the city's complicated history is not just layered, but also includes absences or gaps that challenge our concept of memory and history. In his essay, Huyssen talks about how Berlin's text has been "written, erased and re-written", a palimpsest in essence, yet it is the "visible markers of built space" that evoke repressed memories of trauma (52-53). The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is one of the most prominent examples of the vacuum in Berlin's urban landscape cited by Huyssen. He explains that the void in the centre of the memorial is symbolic of "the dead, of their physical absence, of their annihilation, and of the ruptures of modernity." (52). This void, according to Huyssen, contradicts conventional notions of memory as a linear and continuous process and emphasises the significance of acknowledging the gaps and omissions in our understanding of history. Huyssen also investigates other absences in Berlin's urban landscape, such as the voids left by World War II-era buildings and the Berlin Wall. He contends that these voids, which are frequently ignored or overlooked, are crucial to comprehending the city's complicated history and memory politics. For him, the ability to conceive, project, recall, and forget is what keeps memories alive in these "areas of absence" (53). He elaborates on how the visuals in the text, which depict a palpable environment, probe into the palimpsestic layers of memory to recollect the city's demise (54).

Huyssen's essay and discussion revolve around memory. Yet one major concern is that memory has been discussed as a parallel to space and "visible markers" (52). This opens room for my study which focusses on the layers of memory alone. Unlike Huyssen's discussion, my study is concerned with the fact that for memory to be evoked, a physical reference is not always required. Huyssen alludes to the palimpsest through references of a building, some ruins and the layers on memory have been made dependent upon tangible spaces. Furthermore, Huyssen's study deals with the palimpsestic inscriptions in a traditional manner of peeling away layers to peek into the past. My research focuses on the present and does not examine the past by looking back. For this purpose, fictional texts set and written during COVID-19 time have been chosen. I bid to examine the effect of what surrounds humans and how it layers upon our memory. Here, yet again I am at a point of difference with Huyssen.

He explicates how the same "architectural space" can "nurture memory" and have a completely different meaning to different groups, evoking personalized memories (69). My point of debate revolves around how the layers etched on memory in time of trauma can be globally unanimous.

Farhani et al., in their article, theorised how in Chahar Bagh, Iran, a heritage site is contextualised as a palimpsest since many projects exist adjacent to one another and that the "site as a heritage is still an active part of the city's life" (218). The case study investigates Derrida's definition and reads the heritage as a palimpsest "in the collective memory of the city dwellers" (219). It investigates the correlation between urban heritage sites and the collective memory. According to the authors, urban heritage sites are characterized as palimpsests of collective memory, which implies that they are imbued with numerous historical and cultural accounts that influence our comprehension of both the past and present. The authors illustrate the concept that urban heritage sites serve as palimpsests of collective memory. Farhani et al. render that Chahar Bagh represents a tangible embodiment of the intricate interrelationships among power, religion, culture, and society in Shiraz, which have influenced its character throughout history (220).

The article concludes by emphasizing the significance of collective memory in shaping our comprehension of the past and present, thereby making a valuable contribution to the domain of urban heritage preservation. The examination conducted by the authors on Chahar Bagh located in Shiraz exemplifies the notion that urban heritage sites are a complex layering of communal recollections. Nevertheless, the article poses significant inquiries regarding the difficulties of conserving such locations amidst urban expansion, underscoring the necessity for continuous endeavours to safeguard and advance urban heritage sites. The study delineates how "real memory withers away in modern life" underlining how the real layers can be lost with the loss of real memories (218). However, for any inscriptions on mind that have been discussed by Farhani et al., the heritage sites come into play. All this is problematic as far as this study is concerned because the layers of memory have been made directly proportional to heritage sites. My study leaves out such tangible physical references to discuss inscriptions on the human mind and focusses on time instead.

In his thesis, Hristova states that National memory is mainly determined by a nation's ability to develop many "commemorative forms" and that the streets take on the role of a repository of "collective memory" (v). They help in uncovering the "history of specific" locales, bringing to light unique recollections, and recognising their historical significance, thus, serving as a tool to read the palimpsestic layers of the city Sofia, Bulgaria (6). Hristova explores the correlation among architecture, space, and collective memory. His argument being that architecture holds significant importance in the formation of collective memory. This is because of the "symbolic meaning" attached to the commemoratives and the way in which they serve to organize our spatial experiences and establish a tangible structure for our recollections such that the collective memory "can be inscribed" (44). Hristova's study is a perfect example of how a built space is required to read and establish a connection with the palimpsestic layers of memory. According to Hristova, the concept of collective memory refers to a commonly held comprehension of historical events, which is ingrained in the physical and spatial customs of daily existence (2). The author posits that the constructed surroundings serve as a crucial locus for the generation and perpetuation of communal recollection, given that it furnishes a tangible structure for our perceptions of spatial and temporal dimensions. Hristova investigates how the demolition of "built environment" lead to the erasure of memory (85). Even though the thesis deals with memory and the layering upon memory, all of it is evoked through specific historical sites. Built structures have been studied as a necessity to keep memory alive. Furthermore, the study has discussed the involvement of time but, only to evoke the past. This leaves the void that my study has investigated about the relation between time and memory with no physical space and site used as a reference.

2.3.2 Palimpsest of Memory Evoked Through Time

Winter theorises in his essay that "collective" memory is based on "performed" memory i.e., when individuals and groups articulate, represent, evaluate, or reiterate a "script about the past", they "galvanise" group bonds and "deposit additional memory" traces about the past in their own minds (11). According to the essay, memory is not a mere passive recollection of past events, but rather an active process that is subject to the influence of a range of factors, including social and cultural contexts. The argument posits that memory is a performative phenomenon,

whereby it is moulded, fashioned, and altered through diverse channels such as rituals, remembrances, chronicles, and depictions. The acts of remembrance exhibited by individuals not only play a role in shaping their personal identities, but also have a hand in the development of communal identities and the crafting of historical accounts.

He goes on to elaborate how these revitalised and reimagined recollections typically differ from and superimpose on older memories, creating a complicated "palimpsest of the past" memory that each of us possesses. Thus, memory performance serves as both a "mnemonic device" and a means of reliving, reviving, and refashioning memories (Winter 12). The author presents a nuanced comprehension of the dynamic nature of the past, which is not a static construct but rather a flexible and disputed realm. This viewpoint permits a meticulous analysis of how memory and history can be altered for diverse objectives, such as political motives, patriotic chronicles, or communal recuperation. Drawing from the flexible working of memories, the current study focuses on the memory-making process more than the recalling. It explores how the COVID-19 texts written during the pandemic capture the essence of the situation that surrounds the people and can become inscriptions that will layer the mind refashioning the memory such that it cannot be altered for any purpose.

In his article Singer dealt with the concept of palimpsest and the "memories it evokes" in relation to "temporality" (388). He goes on to elaborate how in the novel, after rejecting the inclinations to control "fate", influence "history", or revert to "familiar repetition", the protagonist acknowledges that, in a universe of diverse and changing temporalities, he sees time as a palimpsest (413). This utilization of the palimpsestic time by the *Invisible Man* enables him to evade the deterministic narratives associated with history and identity and realize that historical events do not always follow a linear progression and that temporal progression may manifest as a cyclical phenomenon where numerous coexisting moments can be found. Singer considers this a palimpsest because of the ongoing "juxtaposition of past and present in African American life"; nonetheless, he recognises that he, too, is a synthesis of all "his personal and cultural experiences" (414). Where the study is replete with discussion of time as a palimpsestic concept, the aspect in question for my study is still unanswered. My research lays emphasis upon how the time in which characters

thrive inscribe a palimpsestic layer on their minds and Singer's research helps provide a point of departure.

Walker in her article refers to De Quincey's "attempts to materialise time experience" focusing on De Quincey's bond with childhood and his attempts to freeze time in the child's body (679). Walker elucidates that according to De Quincey youngsters, like opium users, can cross the borders between "then and now, here and not here" and not only become symbolic of "time's passage" but an embodiment of the "collective time of human generation" (680). Walker brings into discussion how, in his autobiographical essay, *The Palimpsest,* De Quincey frequently projects "a mental map onto architectural space" and employs palimpsestic time to investigate the intricate interplay among memory, identity, and the urban environment (681). According to Walker, an interpretation of De Quincey's *Confessions* can be construed as a traversal of the urban landscape, wherein De Quincey's recollections of his formative years are superimposed upon his encounters with the city in his adulthood. Here, once again, even though the article deals in-depth with time in the context of palimpsest but lacks what my research has set out to investigate. The current study deals with how specific times and situations inscribe on the minds, layering it such that new is written, yet the old keeps resurfacing without evoking the past. Furthermore, this study delineates how the surroundings impact the nature of layering that is done on the human mind.

A novel qualitative research approach, termed "palimpsest methodology," has been introduced by Okello in his article (1). Okello avers that a palimpsestic, or imperfect erasing, perspective on time and reality suggests that the past remains visible and exerts influence on the present. This results in a reconfiguration of the distinctions between the "here and now" and the "then and there" into a hybrid state of "here and there" and "then and now." (2). His argument posits that conventional approaches to temporal palimpsestic readings tend to exhibit a linear and deterministic nature, thereby limiting the capacity of researchers to comprehensively investigate the intricacies of human experience. Thus, his methodology is more encompassing as it lays emphasis on the interrelatedness of historical events, current circumstances, and future outcomes. Okello goes on to exemplify how memory as a palimpsest generates a way to curate and embody the "memories of the past for a contemporary moment" (3). Reviewing this article, the time concept with palimpsest

can be realised but once again in relation to the past. The study delves in the nonlinear nature of palimpsestic time yet delves in the past to define the present. In contrast, the current study incorporates how in the present, new is being inscribed and how the present is becoming distant without invoking the past.

Ikram maps in her publication the "interrelation between the past and the present" and how the "future is determined" by recalling certain historical events, thus delineating the resemblance between the "palimpsest and human memory" (8). Ikram posits that Anam, the author of her texts, employs the metaphor of the palimpsest as a means of delving into the intricate and frequently paradoxical characteristics of memory. Here it is important to note how Ikram delineates that memory is not a static or immutable entity, but rather a malleable and evolving phenomenon. The process of memory formation is subject to continuous modification because of various factors, including personal experiences, emotional states, and individual belief systems. Building upon this base, my study focusses on how the surrounding has an impact on the memory formation and how the layers inscribed on the mind are influenced by the environment the characters thrive in. Ikram underlines in her article how the novels in her study are "structured in generations/layers" each of which connotes the "significance of its own times" (11). Ikram highlights that Anam's literary works present a multifaceted and intricate perspective on the concept of memory where it renders itself as unreliable. The literary personas frequently encounter difficulties in recollecting their personal histories where at some instances their memory lapses and at others, they recollect event that did not occur at all. This proposition implies that the dependability of memory is not absolute, and that it is susceptible to manipulation and opens room for my study. My research delineates the importance of recording events in present time so that they may be recalled without lapse in future.

2.4 Research Gap

Having delved into works of literature and the treatment of palimpsest in the world of the literati, this review of the literature concludes that even though there is no dearth of works done on palimpsest yet what interests this study clearly lacks. All the reviewed literature at first presented how tangible spaces are used to keep the memory alive. Then when the time was incorporated, the academia focussed on evoking the past and recalling it. According to the knowledge of this study, the fact that studies focussing on the real inscriptions being inscribed are missing. All

reviewed literature deals either with memory in relation to physical heritage sites or recalling what has already been inscribed. Thus, the research gap is apparent. This study sets out to investigate the foregrounded memory, where no physical references are required to read the palimpsest and circumstances surrounding the characters are used as a reference to talk about layers inscribed on the mind. This study explores the actual inscriptions taking place on memory in times of the pandemic in the selected texts of COVID-19. It also explores the relationship between the inscriptions and the surroundings. Furthermore, it explores avenues for a metaphoric representation of a modern-day palimpsestic parchment leaving no room for memory lapses that may occur in future.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   Research Method

This study falls under the qualitative research category, which is concerned with in-depth investigation and comprehension of "how individuals see and experience the world" (Given xxix). As Flick theorised in his book, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research,* social researchers are increasingly confronted with novel social contexts and viewpoints because of "rapid social change" and the resultant variety of life situations that are so novel to them that their "traditional deductive methodologies" fail; compelling research to "employ inductive methodologies" (12). Qualitative research, thus, "primarily employs inductive reasoning" which entails discerning "a pattern," making "a generalisation" and inferring "an explanation or a theory" (Kumar 142). It is deemed to be best suited for the selected fictional novels and studying the palimpsestic layering on the minds of the characters.

As indicated by the title, the primary focus of this work is on the analysis of the inscriptions layered on the human brain in times of COVID-19. This layering on the mind will be analysed using a conceptual framework based on De Quincey's essay, *The Palimpsest.* The current study falls under the Interpretivist Paradigm, which believes that reality is "socially constructed" and thus is multi-layered, multifaceted and complicated such that a single phenomenon can be interpreted in several different ways (Bogdan and Biklen 26). In the book *Research Methods in Education,* Cohen et al. theorise how interpretivism as a methodology aims at understanding social phenomena "through the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher" (17). Owing to the fact that interpretivism is concerned with and values what individuals say, do and feel, as well as how they make sense of the phenomena under investigation, as a researcher in this study, it helped me in making sense of the individual experiences of the characters in the selected fiction of COVID-19. Interpretivism emphasizes the significance that individuals or communities accord their experiences i.e., it deals with understanding subjective "human experiences" (Denzin and Lincoln 47). Thus, patterns, trends, and themes arising from the research process helped comprehend real-world circumstances from the character's perspective in the selected fictional texts of COVID-19.

Where De Quincey's essay has been used as a theoretical base for the present study, his idea of the palimpsest of the human brain has been used to delineate the memory-making process of humans in given circumstances. His notion of the palimpsest of the human brain is important because it helps bring into discussion the process of current layering, not just recalling the old. For De Quincey, "each layer occupies the same material space as all other layers"; therefore, new layering can be studied just like the old (Walker 1). To adequately define the concept of the palimpsest of the human brain, this study will undertake a textual analysis of the selected fiction of COVID-19. Textual analysis, according to McKee in his book *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide*, "is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world" (1). A textual analysis of the characters living through the pandemic of 2019 is an endeavour to determine how coping with the new way of living is made sense of amid the chaos and fear created by the coronavirus. McKee's approach to textual analysis is based on the notion that texts, including literature, develop through language, representation and ideology and that these components play a significant role in determining meaning and interpretation. He further elaborates how textual analysis is a technique, a data collection approach, taken by academics "for judging different cultures' sense-making practices" thus allowing the researcher to make sense of the lives and the places in which subjects thrive (12). Therefore, in the present study, textual analysis has been employed because the selected fictional texts of COVID-19 include stories of people from different parts of the world and involve different cultures. McKee's method entails a close examination of a text's language, imagery, characterization, narrative structure and other literary devices to reveal messages, themes and ideologies that govern it. Thus, not only does textual analysis allow me to delineate how the characters are coping with the pandemic situation that surrounds them and decode the underlying messages of the texts, but it also helps me contribute to the existing knowledge of how people make sense of what surrounds them.

Within his broad definition textual analysis, McKee proposes a method of study called contextual analysis which entails looking at the larger social, cultural and historical setting in which a work exists. It involves analysing the potential impact of outside influences on a text's creation, dissemination and reception. He stresses upon the need for background knowledge to fully grasp a text's meaning and ramifications.

He explains that there is no such thing as text existing in isolation and that they are all produced in "specific contexts, by specific people, for specific audiences, and with specific purposes in mind" (3). For my study, these specifics revolve around coronavirus. McKee claims that it is essential to comprehend the context in which a text was produced to discern its meaning and significance. He stresses that texts are influenced by the social, cultural and historical contexts in which they are produced. He further expounded that context is essential because of the impact it has upon the creation and interpretation. It influences the decisions authors and readers make regarding what constitutes meaning and the way it can be conveyed (4). Since my study focuses on the direct effects of the pandemic of 2019 and uses it as a reference to a specific time, McKee's ideas assist me in elucidating how specific time and space are of utmost importance to humans and the mental layering that occurs.

3.2   Research Sample

This study includes a selection of two fictional novels, both of which are about COVID-19. The first text is titled, *The Fell* by Sarah Moss and was published in 2021. Delving into the dilemma of isolation and confinement brought to humanity in the days of the pandemic, the novel questions the world as a whole and what has become of it since March 2020. This study has focussed on the novel's protagonist, Kate, her teenage son Matt, and her neighbour Alice. The second book is titled *Wish You Were Here* and is written by Jodi Picoult. It was also published in 2021. Based on the events that took place in March 2020 and the outbreak of coronavirus and its impact, the novel revolves around the personal experiences of the predicament faced by the protagonist, Diana and her boyfriend, Finn. This study has laid special focus on Diana and how she coped with the COVID-19 situation analysing the new ways of living that she learnt to survive.

The chosen texts have been selected through purposive sampling for qualitative research to help answer the research questions. The fact that both novels are based on fictional stories about COVID-19 and deal with either the pandemic itself or its direct ramifications on the lives of the characters is particularly important. Secondly, being published in 2021, i.e., during the pandemic, the novels allow this study to explore how COVID-19 is inscribed upon the minds of the selected characters. Since both the fictional novels are written so that the characters live through the pandemic, there is no recollection of how the corona virus affected them.

Rather it entails the current situations and dilemmas that the virus posited when it was around. These texts have also been selected because they are based on characters belonging to different places, giving room to this study to analyse characters of various ethnicities and reach conclusions about the nature of layering done on the brains.

3.3   Theoretical Framework

To conduct my research, I have used a theoretical framework based on one central concept, i.e., palimpsestic inscriptions. The fiction selected for this study is replete with instances that exhibit this layering. Moss in *The Fell* and Picoult in *Wish You Were Here* have brought into play the profound impact of the coronavirus by revealing the paradigm shift in the way individuals began to see and experience life. The fiction explored how the pandemic entrusted the world with a new way of living that layered on human minds. To elucidate this concept, I have incorporated one main theorist, Thomas De Quincey, one supporting theorist, Jodi Russell Manning, and arguments of two other theorists, Sarah Dillon and Josephine McDonagh, that help further elucidate the ideas propounded by my main theorist. Since this study aims at exploring palimpsestic inscriptions on the human brain, it is essential to delve into the concept of the palimpsest and its metaphoric usage in literature. According to the *Encyclopedia of Geography,* Palimpsest was "Originally the term referred to a type of medieval manuscript in which new text was written over previous text that had been partly erased" (Warf 2111). Here the fact that the older text was partly erased highlights how the old text never disappeared and always remained a part of the new text that was layered upon the same parchment. Originating from the Greek word palimpsestos, the word translates to "scraped again" (Merriam-Webster 3351). Over the years, the concept has been adopted in many conceptual models, treating a palimpsest as a metaphor. Thus, exploring the conceptual layering in the field of science, humanities, geography, architecture and much more (Dillon 243). Nevertheless, it has been noticed that what remains common in all models are two things: layering and resurfacing of the old in the new.

3.3.1   *The Palimpsest* and De Quincey

Owing to this layering and resurfacing, as mentioned above, it was De Quincey who first referred to the human brain as the palimpsest in his essay titled *The*

Palimpsest, printed in 1845 in his autobiographical work *Suspiria de Profundis* meaning "sighs from the depths" (McDonagh 208). De Quincey detailed the workings of the human mind moving back and forth to his childhood memories. What is of particular importance, though, is that for De Quincey, the human brain was like a palimpsestic parchment on which newer inscriptions were inscribed all the time. In his essay, *TP*, De Quincey states that:

> What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain? Such a palimpsest is my brain; such a palimpsest, O reader! is yours. Everlasting layers of ideas, images, and feelings have fallen upon your brain softly as light. Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet, in reality, not one has been extinguished (144).
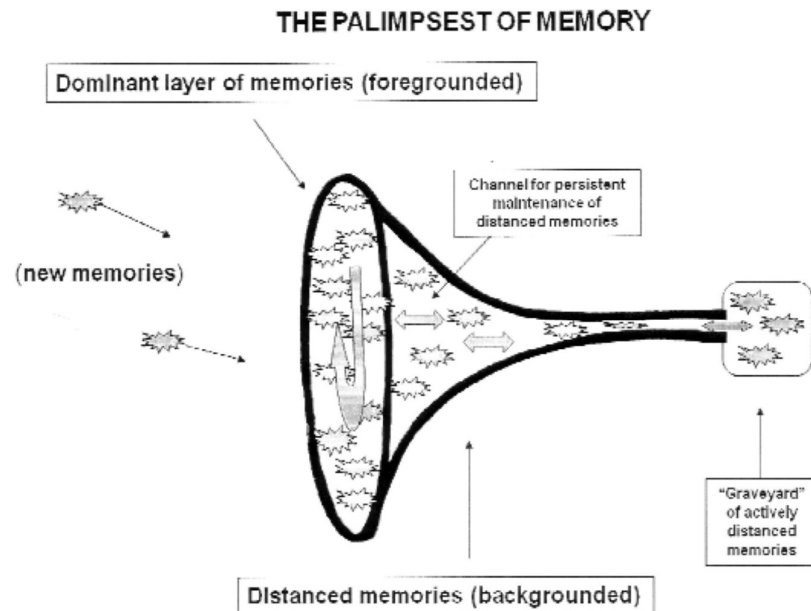
De Quincey compared the mind to a palimpsest, which is a piece of parchment that has been repeatedly erased and rewritten, with each layer of writing leaving a record on the page. Hence, De Quincey proposed that our memories are not fixed, but rather constantly altering as fresh experiences and data erase older ones.

Furthermore, he maintained that the remnants of our past experiences remain ingrained in our minds, influencing our ideas and actions in ways that we may not even recognize. De Quincey's concept of the palimpsest of mind emphasizes the dynamic and multifaceted character of human memory and the ways in which our past experiences continue to impact our current identities "arraying themselves not as a succession, but as parts of coexistence" (145). De Quincey's concept of these layers, ideas, and images falling on the human brain can be seen in the fiction selected for this study, where COVID-19 writes a new way of living on the characters' minds while continuously uses the past to differentiate the present. Moss and Picoult not only delineate the dilemma of the virus that surrounds the characters in their fiction but depict how the characters unlearnt their old ways to learn new ones to survive the pandemic.

3.3.2   Manning's Palimpsest of Memory Model

Where this research project uses De Quincey's essay *The Palimpsest* as the primary theory, Manning has been incorporated as a supporting theorist. In his article, *The Palimpsest of Memory: Auschwitz and Oswiecim*, Manning uses the concept of the palimpsest of memory propounded by De Quincey to build a memory model.

Even though the model represents a marginalised group of people coping continuously with the dead, it delineates a conceptual framework as to how memory works as a palimpsest. Manning explains how the palimpsest of memory encompasses all of an individual's recollections and transcends individual experience; it integrates memory and history, objective and subjective, in a synthesis of perception and meaning-making that is occasionally influenced by collective paradigms. Manning elucidates that "palimpsests reflect this interplay between local and global memory" (237). He further states that even when memories are accepted or understood as 'objective,' they become hazy and distant, especially when they contradict or fail to conform to what (he) referred to as "foregrounded dominant memory" (238). This he exemplified in a figure titled, The Palimpsest of Memory (Figure 1).

THE PALIMPSEST OF MEMORY

Dominant layer of memories (foregrounded)

Channel for persistent maintenance of distanced memories

(new memories)

"Graveyard" of actively distanced memories

Distanced memories (backgrounded)

Figure 1

Memory, according to this idea, is not a static or fixed object, but rather a dynamic and continuously growing process involving the interaction of many forms of information. According to Manning's approach, memories consist of numerous layers that are accumulated through time, with each layer representing a distinct component of the memory. These layers can comprise sensory data such as sights, sounds, and smells, emotional and affective data such as emotions and moods, and cognitive data such as facts and meanings (238). Manning maintains that these layers

of memory are not merely additive but interact in intricate ways, with each layer impacting and changing the others. For instance, emotional and affective information can colour our sensory perceptions and change how we remember events, whereas cognitive information can shape our emotional responses to previous experiences.

Moreover, the Palimpsest of Memory model argues that memories can be reconstructed and transformed over time, as new layers of information are added, and previous ones are modified or overwritten. This can occur through processes including as forgetting, suppression, and retrieval (237). Manning's discussion and model become essential in this study as COVID-19 is a collective paradigm. His Palimpsest of Memory model highlights the dynamic and fluid character of memory, as well as the ways in which our memories are altered by our experiences and the various information layers that comprise them. In the fiction chosen for this study, we see how the pandemic is foregrounded and new memories are being inscribed locally and globally in the form of dominant memories. All that was known to humans in pre-COVID-19 times becomes "blurred and distant" (238). In *TF,* the characters are confined to their homes, isolated, and barred from human touch with characters exhibiting not only longingness of touch but failing to recall what it was to have contact with other humans. In *WYWH,* the protagonist is isolated on an island with no way of return to her home and no hope of a normal life that she was living in the pre COVID-19 days.

3.3.3 Manning's Modern Interpretation in Dialogue with De Quincey's Classical Concept

Manning's Palimpsest of Memory model exemplifies De Quincey's Palimpsest of Mind such that both concepts emphasise the dynamic and intricate structure of memory. De Quincey's metaphor of a palimpsest emphasised how our memories are not fixed, but rather constantly changing and evolving as new experiences and information erase older recollections yet leaving traces of the past beneath the surface. Manning's Palimpsest of Memory model proposes that memories consist of numerous layers that accumulate over time, with each layer representing a different part of the memory. Thus, it is not just traces as De Quincey emphasized but complete layers traceable as Manning elucidated. In addition, both De Quincey and Manning emphasise that memories are not merely passive records of previous events, but rather active structures that are continuously reconstructed and updated. This holds

significant relevance for my research. Due to its inherent definition, I utilize the process of layering as a dynamic mechanism that superimposes layers onto the cognitive faculties. Furthermore, Manning's concept stresses the interaction between multiple sorts of information that comprise a memory, such as sensory, emotional, and cognitive information, whereas De Quincey says that our memories are influenced by the remnants of past experiences that stay in our minds. Overall, De Quincey's Palimpsest of Mind and Manning's Palimpsest of Memory model challenge the notion of memory as a static and objective record of past events, emphasising instead the dynamic and subjective nature of memory and the ways in which our past experiences continue to shape our present selves.

Both De Quincey and Manning suggest that our memories are not just individual and private but are shaped by broader social and cultural forces. Manning's perspective highlights that our memories are formed by cultural narratives and social situations that influence how we interpret and remember past experiences. The two contest the notion of a fixed or stable self, arguing that our concept of self is continuously evolving and changing through time. De Quincey's palimpsest metaphor emphasises the dynamic and multifaceted aspect of subjectivity, whereas Manning's model argues that our memories and experiences are continuously in flux and that our sense of self is always reshaped by our encounters with the outside world. Thus, Manning's Palimpsest of Memory model can be viewed as a modern extension of De Quincey's Palimpsest of Mind notion, demonstrating the continued importance of this metaphor for understanding memory and subjectivity in the present day.

3.3.4 Palimpsest and Other Psychological Methods

Since *The Palimpsest* and Palimpsest of Memory model deal with memory, mind, and the workings of the human brain, it is essential to set it apart from other psychological models. To do this, arguments by Dillon and McDonagh have been incorporated.

3.3.4.1 Dillon and *The Palimpsest*

Dillon contends in her ground-breaking research, that De Quincey's Palimpsest of mind is similar to the "crypt" Derrida related to those dead living on in memories. Thus, for De Quincey, it was his sister living on in his mind that brought forth *The Palimpsest* as theory knows it today (Dillon 250). Dillon goes on to

elaborate how De Quincey's palimpsest is different from the *Unconscious* defined by Freud in his psychoanalytic theory such that "the impressions made on the (palimpsest of the mind) live on as cryptic incorporations on its surface" (251). These are no repressed thoughts that need to be invoked. The fiction selected for the study shows how the old and new inscriptions lie together on the surface of the human brain.

Furthermore, Dillon contends that De Quincey's metaphor of the palimpsest is an effective method to consider how our memories are formed by our experiences and how they impact our sense of self. Dillon argues that the palimpsest metaphor represents the notion that our memories are dynamic and complicated creations that are continually being updated by new experiences. She also highlights that, although being overwritten by fresh layers of memory, traces of prior experiences stay ingrained in our minds. According to Dillon, De Quincey's notion of the palimpsest of mind has significant consequences for comprehending subjectivity, or the sense of self that each of us possesses. By highlighting the ways in which our memories are formed by our experiences, De Quincey undermines the notion of a permanent or essential self and instead suggests that our sense of self is continually evolving and changing over time. Subsequently, Dillon's reading of De Quincey's Palimpsest of Mind stresses how our memories and experiences impact our sense of self, questioning the notion of a permanent or stable identity and underlining the dynamic and multifaceted character of subjectivity. This study is not just helped by Dillon's arguments in distinguishing the palimpsest from other psychological models, but in understanding the subjectivity, owing to new experiences, that defines the predicament of the characters in the fiction selected.

3.3.4.2 McDonagh and *The Palimpsest*

McDonagh explored De Quincey's palimpsest of mind as a model in *Writings on the Mind: Thomas De Quincey and the Importance of Palimpsest in Nineteenth-Century Thought*. Situating the palimpsest in "a wider tradition of psychological models" McDonagh discusses the similarities between "The Empiricist's *tabula rasa* and Freud's Mystic Writing-Pad" while highlighting the one difference that concerns any study discussing the palimpsest of mind i.e., recollection and how it is only the palimpsest that allows both, "erasure" and "resurfacing" (209). McDonagh explains the significance of the palimpsest metaphor in De Quincey's literature and nineteenth century thought in general. She argues that De Quincey's palimpsest metaphor offers a

method to consider how individual experiences and cultural and historical contexts shape memory. In the fiction selected for this study, it is the cultural and historical context that becomes of special importance where the new memory is being shaped in the historical context of pre COVID-19 time.

McDonagh argues that the palimpsest metaphor emphasises the notion that our memories are impacted by larger social and cultural factors and are not merely individual and private. For this study, the larger social and cultural factors are those shaped by the pandemic of 2019. McDonagh observes that in De Quincey's literature, the palimpsest metaphor is frequently employed to describe the process of reading and interpreting texts, implying that our view of the past is always filtered by the present. McDonagh also analyses how other nineteenth-century writers and intellectuals, such as Charles Dickens and John Ruskin, adopted the palimpsest metaphor as a method to consider how the past continues to impact the present. She contends that the palimpsest metaphor was part of a larger cultural preoccupation with memory and the past in the nineteenth century, when writers and philosophers were grappling with fast social and technical change. Ultimately, McDonagh's study highlights the cultural and historical significance of the palimpsest metaphor in nineteenth-century philosophy, showing that it was a way to consider memory and the past in relation to larger social and cultural forces. The novels in this study depict erasures of pre-COVID-19 time, inscriptions of the COVID-19 era and resurfacing of the pre-COVID-19 time again and again.

3.3.5 Summing Up

Considering the preceding theoretical debate, this study combines De Quincey's palimpsest of mind as the core theory and Manning's ideas as the supporting theory. It also garners ideas from the works of Dillon and McDonagh that dwell upon De Quincey's palimpsest of the human brain and help set it apart from other psychological models. While incorporating the traditional approach of a palimpsest which evokes the past, this study re-channels the concept. Instead of delving into the past, I contend to discuss the process of these inscriptions. This process of inscriptions will be discussed with the help of Dillon's subjectivity and McDonagh's broader cultural and historical context. As this study focuses on the inscriptions that were created during a particular period, the COVID-19 pandemic, in

this case, I contend to conceptualise the term *Palimpsest of Time* under which I propose the study of the layers etched on the human brain.

Thus, using the theoretical base elucidated, this study works towards proving the term being conceptualized. The theoretical framework frequently refers to circumstances that will help delineate the term under conceptualization and focuses more on the current writing on the mind rather than only recalling older memories. This has been done in the light of De Quincey and Manning's arguments, as discussed above, that our memories are impacted by larger social and cultural processes and are individual and private. The larger social and cultural processes discussed in the fiction selected for this study are that which were brought about by the coronavirus. As the layering on the mind being discussed has happened in a specific time period, i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic, the conceptual framework deals with the effect of surroundings and the nature of layering done on the minds of the selected fictional characters.

CHAPTER 4

LEARNING LAYERS: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF *WISH YOU WERE HERE*

In this portion of my study, using De Quincey's Palimpsest of the Mind coupled with Manning's Palimpsest of Memory model, I have examined Picoult's *Wish You Were Here* to investigate how COVID-19 appears to inscribe memory with a new way of living, akin to the layers delineated by De Quincey's palimpsest of the human brain concept. In their seminal works De Quincey and Manning endorse how layers on the human brain are "everlasting" and "do not die" even if they are made distant (144, 236). The characters in the novel exhibit evident layering on the mind during the turbulent time of COVID-19, the emergence of which had profound global implications, introducing an unsettling reality that evoked feelings of surrealism and dystopia. They suffer isolation, detention, entrapment along with psychological deterioration and mental breakdowns. They witness the world around falling apart, technology failing and mankind returning to primal times where only the fittest could survive. The writer has encapsulated the essence of these troubled times by highlighting the coping mechanisms of the characters. She delineates how the changing time etches on the human mind such that the old exists but new is "foregrounded" (Manning 238).

Jodi Picoult is a prolific American author who has authored literary works in both genres of literature, fiction and non-fiction. Born in Nesconset, New York, in the year 1966, she spent her formative years in Long Island. After completing her studies in English at Princeton University, she pursued a career in law prior to transitioning into a profession as a full-time writer. Picoult has authored 28 literary works, including *My Sister's Keeper* (2004) and *Small Great Things* (2016). Picoult's literary oeuvre is characterized by its profound intellectual complexity, astute emotional acuity, and scrupulous attention to detail. What sets her apart from many authors is her curiosity in the cognitive mechanisms that underpin human perception of the surrounding milieu. According to Hamilton and Jones, it is Picoult's "keen aptitude for exposing the complexities of individual existence" and "her interest in and passion for contemporary issues" that has made her one of the best authors of *New York Times* (316-17).

The literary work *Wish You Were Here* is an effort on the same strain. It narrates the story of Diana O'Toole, a youthful lady who embarks on a voyage to the Galapagos Islands not as planned. The excursion is curtailed because of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, compelling Diana to travel unaccompanied by her partner, Finn and undergo a quarantine period lasting several weeks in the Galapagos. Whilst in quarantine, Diana engages in introspection and contemplates her life and interpersonal connections delving into an understanding of both her own identity and the surrounding environment. The fictional story exhibits a high level of craftsmanship and captivates the reader's attention, while also offering a genuine and stimulating portrayal of the COVID-19 outbreak. Picoult adeptly portrays the emotions of apprehension, ambiguity, and seclusion that were prevalent among numerous individuals amidst the pandemic. With isolation, reconnection and hope being the major themes, the author examines the potential for the pandemic to foster a sense of community and gratitude towards previously overlooked aspects of life, "… we all have a much clearer sense of what matters" (279). This becomes of utmost importance to the current study. The fact that the characters question their own way of living in contrast to their current situation helps me contextualize how temporal settings layer newer ways of thriving upon the characters' minds.

Discussing various works by Picoult in her article, Jarman brings into limelight the literary brilliance. She relates how,

> Picoult introduces important ruptures and openings to mainstream discussions of disability, and actively carves out space in her novels to challenge stigmatizing attitudes, stereotypical assumptions, and one-dimensional representations of illness and disability (Jarman 211).

Here, even though the discussion by Jarman is directed towards physical disabilities, Picoult's writing skills allow this study to contend on Jarman's thoughts in a broader perspective. In *WYWH* the introduced ruptures in mainstream discussions with the disability being showed as COVID-19 delirium. The parallel world that had come into existence for Diana was confounding for all those who surrounded her. Thus, a space was created by Picoult not only to capture the trauma being suffered by such individuals, but to address and combat stigmatising attitudes, stereotyped assumptions, and oversimplified portrayals of disease and disability, COVID-19 delirium in this case. Furthermore, the interplay of nature and the pandemic woven

together inextricably in the fictional text is a relief for the reader gauging the trauma that the pandemic brought. While this interplay is presented as an urgency, something amiss, in Moss's *The Fell,* where the need to reach out to the nature was felt and compelled the heroine to break lockdown rules, in Picoult's setting connection with the nature kept Diana from going insane. It can be noted that for Diana, even though lockdown was tough, being isolated on an island, combatting misery in the unknown territory, it was nature that surrounded her that kept her alive. Animals, beaches, volcanoes, long walks and hikes that kept her moving. And even though all this was her delirium on the ventilator, need of contact of nature was what was of utmost priority to all those in lockdown.

Employing a conceptual, interpretative and exploratory approach, the analysis has been divided into sections. This division has been done based on the specific research objectives and corresponding questions delineated earlier, each of which have been addressed sequentially through textual analysis as delineated by McKee. McKee's method entails a close examination of a text's language, imagery, characterization, narrative structure and other literary devices to reveal messages, themes and ideologies that govern it. With this approach, I have examined the dynamic relationship between fiction and reality, memory and trauma, and the physical and social contexts within which these narratives unfold. In the following pages I have analysed *WYWH* under the following subheadings:

    i.   Peeling Parchments

    ii.   Memories Made or Marred

    iii.   Turbulent Times

4.1 Peeling Parchments

COVID-19 was not just a virus that engulfed the world. It was a situation that shook humanity and the world order to its core. "The pandemic necessitated a sweeping transformation" in all walks of life leaving humanity struggling to cope with the new ways of living being adopted worldwide (Herath and Herath 278). This transformation layered upon the minds akin to De Quincey's palimpsest of the human brain. De Quincey's palimpsest of the mind is fashioned upon the ancient palimpsest, a vellum, upon which writings were inscribed, erased, and fresh writings were written. Right from the onset of the novel, Picoult's *WYWH* is set upon a similar vein.

Realizing palimpsestic features in the novel is not a hard job as Picoult has made a conscious effort to embed the palimpsestic nature. Long before COVID-19 and its ramifications come into play, the author hints at how the layers can be peeled to reveal what lies beneath. The story begins with Diana, the protagonist, reminiscing about a time spent with her father. Not only is she recalling older memories but talking about physical layers, their peeling, and restoration through "cleaning solutions, erasing decades of pollutants" (Picoult 10). This is no different than what De Quincey discussed in his essay, *The Palimpsest,* about the chemicals used upon the vellums in ancient times "effacing all above which they had superscribed, restoring all below which they had effaced" (27). In fact, Picoult's deliberate inclusion of such a beginning can be attributed to how she wanted to delve into peeling and revealing, foreshadowing the palimpsestic nature of the text. When she relates how the restoration "uncovered history", she is relating how history was not only being revealed but being conserved such that even "reinforcing the error" was important to preserve the essence of the time in which it originated (10). By including the method of the restoration, she brings into discussion not just the history being sought but the current inscription being layered. This process of layering on top to help efface history in its truest form is, in itself, the formation of a palimpsest. Inscribing on top, covering up what is blurred, reinforcing what is essential.

Preservation of history is important but more important to Picoult because it helps her in building the context of her narrative. While the inclusion of physical layers is part of the text time and again, the references to art and painting are another careful construct on Picoult's part that allows her to discuss layering. The novel's palimpsestic approach is made evident when Diana and her work partner Rodney are in the auction house at Sotheby. The fact that it is "repainted constantly" and that it can have "a foot of paint" on its walls refers to the layers of paint that are added one on top of the other foregrounding only what is on the top, covering all that lies beneath the top surface (Picoult 17). This foregrounding has been discussed by Manning in his model as the "foregrounded dominant memory" which is the only relevant memory for the participants to "make sense of the world" around them (Manning 238; McKee 1). Even when there are layers and layers of paint beneath, what is important is the top surface which is set apart from all that goes below. Whatever lies beneath is, according to Manning, "blurred" and "distant" and does

not function at the top even when it contributes towards creating the layered palimpsest. Later in the novel, when COVID-19 becomes an active participant of the lives of the characters, it is the same working model that is focused upon. All that was known in pre-COVID-19 times starts to become and feel distant with only the pandemic as the foregrounded memory. There may be numerous layers of ways and living known to humanity before, but during the pandemic, it was the pandemic and its coping mechanisms only that functioned at the top.

Art is not just part of *WWYH* to show physical layers but also, to transport back in time, which serves as another palimpsestic characteristic. Buchanan explained this transportation back in time in his thesis by relating that one can participate in historical events showcased in paintings from where we stand. He stated that through art, he can "imagine the moments are still happening" and that "time travel is easy to achieve through our minds" (34-36) Picoult highlighted a similar notion in her fiction. She underlined in the text how art made the viewer feel teleported to the time when the painting was done. Through paintings and the depth posited by them, Diana felt that she "was *there,* in a way that art can make you time travel" (81). Even though there were no physical layers that needed to be erased in the paintings, their palimpsestic nature surfaced with what was *foregrounded* by the painter, uncovering time. Picoult discussed the painting style of the painter in *WYWH*, Toulouse-Lautrec, and how he was an active part of his paintings so that he could bring to the world, for future generations to see, the era that he witnessed first-hand. This has been explained by Buchanan who states that when the creation of the painting is imagined, "we are, in a way, time travelling" (36). To bring into his paintings unfiltered reality, Toulouse lived in the brothels for a whole week and brought to the world the truth of the lives of these sex workers. "… from boredom to health checks to the relationships they had that were not commercial transactions" were painted for the world who never ventured in brothels to see and witness their life as he himself did (Picoult 81). The essence captured by the painter also highlighted pertinent questions of life being foreshadowed in Picoult's story. By discussing "the space between the showman and the self" and being more captivated by "individuals" than their "surroundings" in the painter's work, the author works her way to build a narrative of how "What you see… is not what you're really getting" (82-83). These lines run in the backdrop of the entire story. Whatever

Diana had presumed about life and goal, and assumed about her mother and her negligence fell in the definition of what the reality was and what she had fantasized to be true. What the painting encapsulates might have been forgotten over the centuries but because the art has captured the essence of that time, it is the same palimpsest that De Quincey defines as "secrets of ages remote" that "have been exorcised" and become known to all (28).

These secrets of the present era, the COVID-19 era, have been captured by Picoult in her novel. Her inclusion of an artist helping viewer transport back to time is a deliberate attempt to help establish her fiction such that it transports readers to the time defined by her. Intricate details of the suffering, the isolation, the pain, the combat, the endangered lives, the trauma, the helplessness, the unmutated realities have been made part of the text as emails, voice calls, postcards and conversations. Friedman in his analysis, highlighted that the potential impact of the virus extended beyond mortality, since the "fear of death" was inducing a worldwide instability (2). This instability engulfed people in all walks of life. Losing sanity Finn, Diana's boyfriend resorted to pouring his heart out on emails when he knew Diana was unreachable. He, being a medic, related details of how these patients were being treated, how the medics were responding, how their suffering was mutual with patients arriving and not stopping and medics on duty unable to leave, how COVID-19 was the "only illness" that was seen, how he had "no idea" of what he was "doing" and neither did "anyone else" (45). He defines the virus in terms of those dealing with it at the frontline, "a storm that just won't ease up" and how he is "not listening to the news anymore because" he is "living it" (64-65). Reading his emails, his descriptions of what surrounded him, transports the reader to his surroundings. The vivid details make one feel as if you're living through COVID-19.

As the narrative commences, characters indulge in discussions of the permanency of art. For Beatriz, the thirteen-year-old on Galapagos, the idea of art not always being permanent is "the stupidest thing" ever for she believes it is something that one leaves behind so that "everyone would remember" them (Picoult 85-86). Diana brings in philosophical perspectives relating that it is not permanence and eternal life only that keeps art and its messages alive. Here, it can be noted that by using the metaphor of art, the author is hinting at life in general. With the

pandemic surrounding the characters, they knew that nothing lasted forever. All that humanity took for granted was ephemeral physically. Yet it remained alive in memories because people learn to "thrive in the face of adversity", even if all that thrives is memory (Gupta et.al. 2). Art was similar. The sand sculpture might have been washed away with the beach waves, but its memory was alive in Beatriz's and Diana's mind. The newer layer of it been diminished was only what was the "foregrounded dominant memory" (Manning 238). In a similar vein, the pre-pandemic ways of living might have become non-existent, but their memory was alive and cherished by all the characters. Coupled with this discussion, the mention of a conservationist and old art, metaphorically refer to peeling away layers of time and how newer time keeps layering on the old in places it is destroyed, faded, "crumbling to pieces" and not in its real shape anymore (Picoult 86). COVID-19 did something similar. Older ways were fading and as Manning puts it, were failing "to conform" to the dominant memory and thus were becoming "distant" (238). Monaco highlights in his article how Serpell uses his text to create a structure that "reflects a mutli-layered… palimpsestic memory" (13). In *WYWH* Picoult intertwines with the pandemic a narrative framework, similar to the one created by Serpell to showcase the palimpsestic nature of memory with one difference. Serpell focused on the past and the recalling of memories whereas Picoult focused on the present, the process of layering and the making of memories. All that was known and practiced in pre-COVID-19 times did not fit the new times that surrounded the characters and thus, layers of newer ways of living were continuously inscribed. This inscription draws parallels to Beatrize learning newer truths about life.

Soon after establishing the phenomena of non-permanence, Picoult returns to permanence such that "stones are etched with symbols, letters, dates, patterns, hatch marks" etc. to keep track of time (88). Christianson and Barton talk about how when people are posited with confusing circumstances, they delve into sensemaking which helps them cope with the circumstances that surround them. They go on to explain that COVID-19 "created an environment that was dynamically uncertain" and thus, all sensemaking practices failed (572). This can be seen evidently in *WYWH* where the pandemic surrounds the characters. Moreover, the inclusion of slaves and their traumatic time spent on the island can be read as another hallmark of Picoult's literary genius that helps draw parallels. Diana was trapped on the

island with no sense of time, completely cut off from the outside world. So were the prisoners. Diana had no purpose staying on an island that was under lockdown due to the pandemic and was suffering with seclusion. So were the prisoners. Aimlessly they built a wall as a punishment and the trauma faced by them was etched on the wall. Rudderless Diana treaded the island and the agony she experienced was galvanized by isolation, a major ramification of the coronavirus. Diana delves into inner thoughts describing the wall as the definition of art that is made by hands and is left to stay so that it "makes us remember" the makers "long after they are gone" reinforcing Beatriz's thoughts (Picoult 88). Diana further points out the fact that even though it is not finished, its distinction is manifested which reinforced what she explained to Beatriz about unfinished works of art. Thus, we see Picoult standing her ground on the amalgam permanent and incomplete, both of which etch on our minds. These reflections make her question life later in the novel. Even if she tried to run away from her childhood and its trauma, it was something that she could not bury or let go of. Even if her goals in life were unfinished and not achieved, her life and her existence was no less noticeable. The peels of time were peels that carved their existence such that they remained permanent.

Amid discussion of layers of paint, brush strokes and marks of stones, permanent and non-permanent markings, Diana brings attention to the "endless ways" in which one can leave their "mark on the world" (Picoult 90). Philosophical debates of perspective and being too far or too close are included. For Diana, to become part of the wider palimpsest of the world, it is important to leave marks of self which "require payment in the form of a piece of yourself___ your flesh, your strength, your soul" (90). These once again hint at the dark time that surrounded the character. COVID-19 was definitely keeping pieces of flesh, of strength and of soul. It was making people leave marks of themselves in this world with stories of survival and resilience while leaving its own marks on their bodies and minds and souls such that their permanence could not be challenged in this generation. Here the author has made it evident that it's not always physical markers that are important to recall from memory. It can be pieces of you and your composition.

Perception, Diana learns, is not limited to how far or how close we are to people. It is also about having preconceived notions that makes us demarcate things, categorize them and put them into stencils that we recognize as their markers.

Manning discusses "the inevitable sway that outside perceptions … have upon the construction of memory" elucidating that "reliance on dominant generalisations" presents a considerable dilemma (236). Even though Manning was talking in the backdrop of memory construction for a city, his idea holds true for people and relations as well. This can be seen when Diana's mother, Hannah said "Nobody's all good or all bad. They just get painted that way", Diana's world was shaken (Picoult 243). Her mom being away at work was generalised to be absent and Diana never tried to question this perception. All her life she had believed that her mother wanted to be away deliberately. Not once did she try to talk to her, to connect with her. She had a picture of her mom painted in her mind as "bad" and there was no going beyond it. And now, suddenly, her perception lay shattered. Such was the case with life in general too. In pre-COVID-19 days, Diana, and humanity at large had painted a picture of permanence, of goals to be sought, of battles to be fought. Everyone forgot that "You can't plan your life" (Picoult 271). The pandemic shattered all pictures of permanence, all notions of reality and conformity.

When Diana discusses the night sky with Gabriel, she posits to the reader questions about life, about reality, about future amid chaos that surrounded her. The hissing of the fire can be the metaphor of the pandemic which was not only spreading like fire but eating lives and engulfing people in its wretched flames. The dialogue among the characters is pertinent as far as the palimpsestic aspect is concerned. Bailey explicates in his article how palimpsests can help answer "questions about the time dimension of human experience, and the relationship between different types of processes" (198). Diana and Gabriel, in the shadow of stars and light years, ravage through the palimpsest of history to determine the future. By underlining how the past shapes the future such that "you learn what people wanted future generations to remember" stresses upon how the author wants the future generations to know and recall the pandemic as (Picoult 134). Picoult, in her literary oeuvre puts forth big questions about life in subtle ways. Do we want the future generations to remember us as those who lost to the pandemic or as those who fought with resilience and lived to tell tales of survival. When Diana talks about how the Southern Cross disorients her such that it feels "the whole planet has shimmied off course" and begins to contemplate if "just to see it a whole different way" she had to travel to this "half of the world", she is in fact talking about a whole new perspective brought in life (135).

Whatever way she viewed her life in pre-COVID-19 times was different from how she viewed it during the pandemic. She learnt that there is more than one way of looking at the same thing; the Southern Cross, her life and her goals.

The delusional questions about how a generation wants to be recalled, have been answered by Picoult herself since the beginning of the text. She emphasizes the fact that the "only way you can tell how far you've come is to know where you started" (11). This speaks volumes of how the palimpsestic nature is embedded in the text, in life, in our entire existence. To set ourselves apart from the old, is to recognize the old. The present is situated in the past and can be differentiated only because of the existence of a past. Thus, the "temporal awareness of past peoples, their sense of past and future, how that influenced their behavior, and how it has varied or developed during the course of human history" helps in creating the divide of what was and what is (Bailey 199). Dillon elucidated upon a similar idea to help understand how the "present of the palimpsest" exists because of the "presence of texts from the past" while still remaining open to "further inscription by the texts of the future" (249). It is because of this fact that "the whole story" is kept alive in memories (Picoult 12). Manning explained how the palimpsest of memory "reflects all the memories it contains" which means that even though newer inscriptions are being layered on top, the old, though "distant", "are not dead" (Manning 239; TDQ 29). Picoult uses this as a base and talks about the importance of keeping memories alive to help make "safeguards" so that we do not repeat the same mistakes again (Picoult 274). In light of the above discussion, the pandemic being documented with scrupulous details in her novel serves a similar purpose.

Throughout *WYWH* inscriptions of newer ways, of contemporary time are being inscribed upon the characters' minds. The COVID-19 "stricken world has called for a new normal" and the characters in the novels exhibit this "new normal" on various instances (Agarwala 57). From relearning ways of barter "to combat their limited supply", to selling talent for buying basic life necessities, from witnessing what counted as a blessing earlier turn into a hassle. to everyday colloquial jokes such as "I think I'm in heaven" acquiring literal meaning where people were "Happy you didn't end up there", *WYWH* is replete with tales to tell of layers being layered and new ways being witnessed (Picoult 101, 202). What sets Picoult's craft apart is the fact that coupled with the new ways of living, and their learning, she includes the

process of Diana relearning how to live from scratch her post-COVID-19 attack life. The virus had not only been detrimental for her mental state but her physical being too. Unable to sit, stand, walk, eat, shower, Diana was a toddler who needed continuous monitoring and assistance. She couldn't "leave rehab" if she was unable to do a simple chore of getting to the "bathroom" (191).

As Manning puts it, "palimpsests reflect…interplay between local and global memory" and because the palimpsest of memory is "affected by collective paradigms of understanding and discourse", Picoult showcases how COVID-19 presented the interplay of the local and the global (237). Diana, who was locked up on a tourist destination, called it a "home" due to the global uncertainty prevailing. This uncertainty was common to Finn, miles away, and humanity in general. Finn reveals how there weren't "rules anymore" to wondering if him being a surgeon will ever "do an appendectomy again" (Picoult 117, 134). Distance brought no difference to their collective understanding of what the virus had entrusted upon them. The only known discourse was the discourse of the coronavirus.

4.2 Memories Made or Marred

McDonagh delineated the significance of De Quincey's palimpsest of the human mind such that it provided a cohesive connection "between the individual and a wider notion of the social and the psychological" (208). Textually analyzing *WYWH* to delve into the characters' lives and learn how they "make sense of the world", the social and psychological connection elucidated by McDonagh can be noted (McKee 1). Throughout the text the social and psychological contexts are intermingled such that they exemplify each other. The coping mechanisms of the characters highlight how they made sense of the pandemic that surrounded them. Thus, coronavirus is not only significant in the backdrop of the selected fiction but is an active participant of the plot development. Making memories such that newer ways of living were being learnt by the characters to cope with their current circumstances. "Wash your hands and don't touch your face…it's going to be fine" were reassurances that were given to each other to keep ourselves from deterring and panicking and exercising care (Picoult 11). Marring memories such that older ways were deliberately being forgotten, over-written with something new. COVID-19 inscribed on the brains such that all that was known seemed outdated, leaving

one in awkward situations, "put my hand out to take hers and then remember that is not a thing we are doing anymore" (Picoult 13).

"A vivid portrayal…of layered temporalities of COVID-19 pandemic" has been encapsulated by Picoult and memories being made and marred are depicted through ways learnt and situations handled and mishandled (Howell 211). With the uncertainty and fear associated with the pandemic, Finn found himself mishandling a situation in the early days of the pandemic. He was supposed to attend to the patient, but fear taught him otherwise and being scared, his long-learnt practices of being available for patients were overridden, leaving him distraught.

"She was coughing," he murmurs.

"I thought she was there for her gallbladder."

"She was. But she was coughing. Everyone could hear it. And I …" He looks up at me, ashamed. "I was scared."

I squeeze Finn's hand. "You thought she had Covid?"

"Yeah." He shakes his head. "So instead of going into her room, I checked on two other patients first. And I guess she got sick of waiting … and walked off." He grimaces. "She has a smoker's cough, and a gallbladder that needs to be removed, and instead of thinking of her health I was thinking of mine."

"You can't blame yourself for that."

"Can't I? I took an oath. It's like being a fireman and saying it's too hot to go into a burning building" (Picoult 22).

Amid this memory making and marring, there was yearning "for normality" (Shamsie 4). Diana, isolated on Isabela believed that the coronavirus was a "fog that's rolled in from nowhere and nothing looks quite the way it used to" and how her life pre-COVID-19 was "hazier" (78). This can be understood in the light of Manning's Palimpsest of the Memory model where any memory that failed to conform with the current situation, became "blurred and distant" (238). It only took a few weeks for Diana, who believed her relationship with Finn was "rock-solid", "to feel disconnected" and to "forget to miss him" (132). Even communication had returned to primal times when Diana resolved to write postcards to Finn, which was

the only way she could reply from her end. There was no cellular coverage, no Wi-Fi and communication was limited to writing emails hoping they will get delivered and no assurance of whether they got through. Finn wrote to Diana religiously, relating scrupulous details of the situation in the city where "God forbid you cough, even if you have common cold. You'll be looked at like you're a terrorist", which to her was "unreal, dystopian" (Picoult 64, 47). Yet, because he was not around her, and she was in another part of the world, what lay dominant on her mind, was what surrounded her. Yes, the pandemic existed and affected their lives, but being trapped in a completely different environment, Diana contemplated that Finn was "not in the forefront" of her mind (118). Surrounded by nature, Diana got the necessary relief required for her to grapple with reality. She got accustomed to swimming with seals, creatures who made her run for her life. Acceptance layered upon her mind.

Another facet of layering incorporated by Picoult is that of re-learning ways of living for those who suffered near-death experiences with COVID-19. Navigating selves had become next to impossible with the "functional impairment" and initial "reduced quality of life" that the pandemic had caused (Carenzo et al. 7). Picoult's fiction is nuanced with subtleties that acute patients suffered with. What is interesting is the fact that numerous literary devices have been incorporated to help highlight the ramifications of the coronavirus. When Gabriel tells the story of the turtles and relates how "not all" of the babies make it through but "the strongest ones do", it can be interpreted as an allegory of Diana's situation (Picoult 161). She suffered in similar circumstances. She was in danger, was put on a vent, survived a near death experience but pulled through because she was strong. She identified with herself as a "survivor" and "Survivors adapt" (202). This adaptation was hinted as a foreword to the novel when Picoult quoted Megginson, "the species that survives is the one that is able best to adapt and adjust" (8). The allegory of the turtles can be further extended to Diana's traumatic childhood. Like the mother turtle, Diana's mother never returned to her. Like the baby turtles, little Diana learnt to manoeuvre through life. Thus, confronting situations was something that was layered upon her mind since her early days.

What leaves Diana baffled is simple things. Being on the vent for five days had rendered her completely immobile. She became dependent on caretakes and medical workers who helped her re-learn simple things such as chewing after having

"forgotten how to eat", "taking off and putting on clothes" where she realizes that "socks are the work of a devil", learning how to work muscles and "squeeze toothpaste" before being allowed to use the washroom and shower (188, 193, 199). Dwelling upon *The Palimpsest,* McDonagh illustrates in her research how for new inscriptions, it is necessary to periodically erase the existing writing on the palimpsest. She explains then that "The cleansing function of the palimpsest therefore implies a present that is always new" (213). Living in COVID-19, Diana's memory had been layered with isolation, seclusion, lockdown and social distancing. Seeing people together was not only "shocking" for her but another re-learning for which the surface of her mind had to be effaced (200). And it is between this learning and re-learning of ways that Diana progresses enough in her recovery to "begin to feel human again" (201).

De Quincey's palimpsest, as exemplified by McDonagh, "disrupts a sense of temporality" such that even though the palimpsest "enables restoration" of the past events, it can "violate a natural chronology" (214). This becomes of particular importance as the story develops and the events unfold. Picoult leaves the readers aghast by incorporating COVID-19 delirium in her fiction. As if the medical dumps, the city stories and situation, the isolation, the lockdowns, the ramifications for patients, were not enough to leave an impact on the reader. The inclusion of COVID-19 delirium feels as if the essence, the trauma, the shock had yet to be captured. Unable to navigate the entire first half of the novel being revealed as a dream in the second half, the reader is as confused as Diana herself. This uncertain unveiling of the plot plunges the reader deeper into the uncertainty that prevailed with the pandemic. Diana had spent two months on the Galapagos. Major life events had passed which included her mother passing away, her feeling disconnected with Finn, her making bonds with Gabriel and his daughter, her birthday being celebrated and her drowning in the sea, gasping for air, choking on water. All of which never actually happened and according to Finn, is normal for COVID-19 patients as they "experience delirium when they're taken off the vent" (170).

Having tested positive for COVID-19, Diana spent five days on the vent. Torn between "the memories" she has of the past two months which she is sure is not "delirium", and finding herself unable to convince anyone, she contends her brain has been damaged even when she is assured time and again that "Covid fog is a real

thing" (174). Already in a helpless situation in the COVID-19 ICU, stuck to the bed unable to even breathe steadily, let alone move, Diana felt hopeless. Not because she nearly died, but because she felt trapped where she did not want to be. Her memory had been made or marred otherwise. Her delirium had affected her "sense of temporality" such that every time she closed her eyes, she "expected to return" to her parallel reality (McDonagh 214; Picoult 175). This parallel reality was not just a vivid wild dream, but as De Quincey delineated in his palimpsest of mind, an outcome of the use of drugs which "pours a celestial vision upon the brain" such that the "consciousness becomes omnipresent at one moment to every feature in infinite review" and the otherwise "irrelated and incongruous" events of life, "fuse into harmony" with "fixed predetermined centres" (145, 144). Diana's parallel reality is in fact, her childhood trauma, her missing on life, her evading her passions. Beatriz, a child with her mom not available for her was deep down the memory lane Diana herself without her mom. Her practicing art was in fact her passion for art which she buried to avoid any analogy with her mother. Her living life freely and mingling with the nature is in fact an outburst for her overly planned life. Her traumas as delineated by De Quincey had been "revived in strength" with the use of drugs, illness and near-death experience and all her memories, her aspirations, her longingness, her "deep, deep tragedies of infancy" came to the forefront and became her "foregrounded dominate memory" (De Quincey 145; Manning 238). This is exemplified in the text when Picoult narrates:

> … was your brain doing the damnedest to make sense of a very stressful situation for which you had no reference. Plus, you were on medications that mess with consciousness. You created a world that you could understand, from the building blocks that were lying around your mind (231).

Delving in Picoult's fiction with McKee's contextual analysis and analysing the "specific contexts, by specific people, for specific audiences, and with specific purposes in mind", it can be noted that the inclusion of a character with dementia is another careful construct to discuss the memory making and marring process (McKee 3). Through Diana's mother, Diana's change of perception, allowing memories to be renewed, overridden, and made sense of has been show cased. They both inhabited a world that was not "real" to them (Picoult 228). Their minds had been etched with parallel realities. Where in pre-pandemic times, Diana would never have noticed any

of this, she realized now how parallel worlds that seem more real than the present exist. Especially, when the present world is nothing more than a dystopia. Every new day brought newer ways of living just like it brought newer treatments for coronavirus. COVID-19 had layered newer ways of living but even those newer ways were being re-layered. Washable masks, reduced usage of cleaning agents, relaxed lockdowns, walks in the park, streets becoming busier, though different from what used to be as "everyone is masked", reveals re-layering upon layers. Clear demarcations of "past life" and present represent evident layering manifested upon the mind (Picoult 232).

4.3. Turbulent Times

"Imagine being the last of anything in the whole world" (Picoult 20).

COVID-19 brought to the world a time that engulfed the entire humanity with fear, disease, death, uncertainty, lockdowns, isolation and no hope for the future. Venkatesan and Joshi discuss how the pandemic has not only divided our understanding of time into a distinct pre-pandemic and post-pandemic period, but it has also added complexity to our comprehension of it. They go on to express how the "pandemic narratives on time draw attention to stagnation, repetition, acceleration, loss of referentiality and the queerness (strangeness) of pandemic time" (15). Picoult captures this harrowing insight of time and the way it sculpted the human psyche and societal transformations during the pandemic adeptly. In fact, even before she brings into discussion the virus itself, through careful constructs of life in pre-COVID-19 times, Picoult hints at the disaster that it is approaching. The mention of the tornado and how it wipes off even insects leaving nothing behind anticipates the disaster awaiting humanity. "There was no sound—no humans, no cars, and oddly not a single bird or insect. It was like we stood beneath a bell jar. *Is it over*? I asked. *Yes*, she said. And *no*" (Picoult 24). This yes and no situation chronicles COVID-19 catastrophe completely. The uncertainty was paramount. Amid situations that foreshadowed the troublesome future time, Picoult's genius lay in her craft of characters who became metaphors for the panic in the pandemic. When Diana compare's her mother's "motion" changed to "stillness", it can be interpreted as an analogy of the world in "motion" in pre-COVID-19 times to the "stillness" that surrounded during the pandemic (18). What makes this metaphor more appalling is the fact that in the very next paragraph, her mother's "confinement" is mentioned at the "memory care

facility" where confinement once again draws parallels to the isolation entrusted upon the world because of the coronavirus (19).

COVID-19 was a global disaster, and it was not until people started facing the consequential difficulties that the gravity of the situation was understood. Conspiracy theories in the air made the situation worse for the general masses who not only believed in misinformation but "engaged in risky behaviour and inadvertently" caused the virus to spread (Pennycook et al. 770). In *WYWH* Finn is shocked when his own father believed that COVID-19 "numbers are inflated, and that the shutdown is a cure that's worse than the disease" which made him hang up on his father. He understands "that not everyone is seeing this virus firsthand" but to "disavow it" was something he could not put up with (135). Diana lives a similar tale. Her vacation, though curtailed in merit because her boyfriend was not accompanying her anymore still held hope for her. She just did not want to get away from the hustle bustle of life, but also the virus and it was not until she was alone that discomfort of isolation dawned upon her. She refused a chance to return, thinking she could brace herself in the face of adversity. Only when she had herself stranded on an island with no means to return did she understand the logic behind her mother's words who, while recalling a tsunami said, "When everything else is running in one direction…it is usually for a reason" (31). Her fearlessness to face the fate consumed her with fear within. With no cellular coverage, no internet connection, no means of maintaining contact with the outside world, Dianna felt "very, very far away from real life" (33). The pandemic was inscribing on minds in ways she hadn't anticipated. Her "bubble of solitude" was far from being the "heaven" she had imagined (34). It was hell. Her isolation was multiples in essence. She wasn't just stranded in an unknown island but, in a place where she had no money, no clothes, nowhere to stay and she didn't even speak their language. Such was the magnanimity of COVID-19 too. Such was the panic that the pandemic created.

When Manning talks about the "foregrounded dominant memory" as the one with which we identify the world around us, he underlines how important the circumstances in which we thrive are (238). He explicates how even though the memories that "contradict the dominant trend" are not erased but "effective distancing will render them distorted or unrecognizable" because all external perspectives of memories are not meaningful "if they do not fit into the held dominant layer" (239).

Ruminating about Manning's emphasis on distancing of memories due to their non-conformity, it can be noted in Picoult's fictional text how everything humanity knew in the pre-pandemic period was no longer relevant. It had been rendered as distorted and unrecognizable. COVID-19 brought in perspectives that held central to all memory making. Financial, emotional, and physical stress of the pandemic had far-reaching implications on the way people live and work. *WYWH* is replete with instances of inscriptions being inscribed on memory such that they helped cope with the pandemic. Washing hands, scrubbing under nails wearing masks, using disinfectants, squeezing sanitizers, keeping windows open for ventilation, stores shut, schools closed, bar and restaurants not open, streets empty, lockdowns enforced, avoiding contact, social distancing, working from home, losing jobs, losing loved ones and the list goes on and on. Phones were locked in a "Ziplock bag" when at the hospital to avoid contamination and people resorted to wash "broccoli with soap and water" (71). Coronavirus layered upon the minds in ways that life before the virus felt utopian and life now, dystopian. Cities became "shells and all the people were in hiding" (Picoult 45).

According to Boserup et al., the virus can appear as a "severe disease" and can affect "healthy individuals of all ages" (1615). Following suit, COVID-19 had spread like a "rumour" crossing all boundaries of age and race (Picoult 16). Be it the southern hemisphere or the northern, in Picoult's fiction we see how the pandemic imprinted upon the minds in a similar manner. If New York City in the north was locked down, so was the Galapagos in the south. If quarantine was enforced in one place, it was enforced across the ocean, 2000 miles away too. The inscriptions on memory and ways of living and coping in the pandemic-stricken world were consistent. Medical dumps in email exchanges have been blatantly harsh in telling the tales of trauma transcribed on the palimpsest of the human brain. No one, not even the doctors knew what they were doing and the "only illness" that the hospitals were "seeing" was the coronavirus where "all elective procedures" had been called off and even the "surgical ICU was filled with Covid patients" (45). The grim details of patients and their struggle to breathe layer upon the minds such that nothing in the world seems important. Finn relates how "no one's just *walking in* anymore" because "they're too scared" of the uncertainty associated with these circumstances. Even the treatment changes every day with one medicine believed to be doing wonders on one

day and the next day its redundant. He goes on to explain how he believes that "it can't stay like this forever" but immediately relents, "Except, it does. And gets worse" because whatever is happening and whatever they are doing is like "throwing shit at a wall to see if anything sticks" (Picoult 64).

The plight of humanity and how it had manifested upon the memory had reduced everyone to a mere statistic.

> I was in my scrubs, and I was masked, of course. I don't go anywhere without a mask. The barista was joking around. She said, I sure hope you don't work with Covid patients. I told her I did. She literally fell back three feet. Just … fell back. If that's how I'm being treated—and I'm not even sick—imagine how it feels to be one of those patients, alone in a room with nothing but stigma to keep you company. You aren't a person anymore. You're a statistic (74).

The worst is that initial notions of the virus affecting only the elderly and the young ones still out there taking their chances were all wrong. There was no barrier. Old young, man woman, slim fat, obese underweight, everyone was being hit hard and jostling between life and death such that the hospital was running out of "vents" and was using "refrigerated trucks" as morgues for the dead bodies (93, 155). Finn pens details about how he lost a woman to COVID-19 who was just "twenty years old" and out of the six patients that he lost on that particular day, "none were over 35" and that anyone who claims that the virus is killing only old people "isn't working in an ICU" (93).

Exemplifying literary prowess, Picoult used correspondence as a tool to be able to bring to her readers the magnitude of the loss and the chronic levels of stress these circumstances left on individuals. Losses, whether real such as death and missed rites of funerals, or symbolic such as cancelled engagements and celebrations, were abound. Being a health care worker, the stress and anxiety Finn was exposed to with an enormity of "worldwide… mortality and morbidity" left him tattered (Marvaldi 252). He kept questioning himself why he is venting it all out to Diana and answered himself by telling her that he "needs to tell *someone*" (Picoult 93). His vulnerability was not only to the disease but to the unsurmountable emotions of patients dying in isolation, "she couldn't see my face… thought I was her son… told me how proud she

was of me… asked if I'd hug her goodbye…I did" (104). His situation made him recall a movie where soldiers converse and one asks the other about not being scared to which the other replies, "You don't have to be afraid of dying when you're already dead" (104). This is exactly how the pandemic had eventually layered upon his mind where it wasn't just the patients on ECMO machines whose "heart is outside his body" but so was his own, "Because so is mine" (93). As the story progresses, his emails shorten in length and his words resonate exhaustion, "I'm too tired to rehash everything that happened at the hospital today. I hope you're okay. One of us needs to be" (159).

Baumbach and Neumann elucidate the "sense of temporal distortion" that the pandemic had created such that it felt as if the entire humanity was "stuck in time, overtaken by it, while simultaneously being obsessed with anticipating the future that suddenly appears to be threatening and unavailable" (13). The time that surrounded humans etched on their minds such that the pandemic became "a portal, a gateway between one world and the next" and the future was promising only if we broke away from the past (Roy). Diana lived this breaking away of the past when she decided to let go of her planned life. Her introspection of relations, of work, of life and of goals during COVID-19 time made her rethink what she was running after. In her race of the planned life that she had built for herself, she was "losing time" itself (Picoult 95). Being attacked by the virus, Diana lost sense of "what's real… and what's not" which is exactly how COVID-19 was doing to the world, blurring all boundaries of real and unreal. The impressions made upon the palimpsest of Diana's mind lived on as "cryptic incorporations on the surface" refusing to become "blurred and distant" even though it was her COVID-19 delirium world and the real one that "made sense" for her (Dillon 251; Manning 238; McKee 1). Her trauma is two-fold because her memory has been engraved with a parallel reality which, as elucidated by Dillon, is like a crypt, where unconscious adoption of ideas and attitudes left one with unexpressed grief (250). Diana explains how she has "lost time… And people. And maybe her mind" because she is unable to grapple with a reality that is being posited to her_ she never having visited the Galapagos and being on vent for five days due to COVID-19 (Picoult 182). The dilemma of time and its loss and etching is further explicated in the absence of clocks in the hospital and lights never turning off completely.

Grim details of personal suffering of a COVID-19 patient have been delineated by Picoult to further capture the pains of the pandemic. Machines indicating life in Diana, her facing humiliation of soiling diapers but at the same time understanding that "sitting in her own mess" was nothing compared "to another patient who's crashing" (178). Earlier in the novel Diana reflected upon isolation being the "worst thing in the world" and later she lives it (74). Not that her previous experience of isolation and its associated pains were any less but this time, the isolation was outside of delirium.

> Ninety-nine percent of the time, I am alone, trapped in a body that will not do what I need it to do. I keep watching through the window, but I am the bug trapped in a jar—peered at occasionally who are mostly just grateful I am no longer sharing their space (173).

This loneliness has gotten Diana harder. She had become the stigma Finn had mentioned to her, "a potential death sentence" and even though she remembered being "alone a lot in the Galapagos," but she "wasn't lonely" like she was being a "quarantined COVID-19 patient" (Picoult 179, 178). The virus and the physical suffering that she had been through along with the metaphoric suffering in her parallel reality, gave Diana sleepless nights. She had panic attacks and when she started to cough, a direct ramification of the coronavirus, she felt like water was filling her lungs as she drowned, her metaphoric pain in her parallel reality (207).

Embedded within these details of how the pandemic layered upon the minds such that then and now could clearly be demarcated, Diana starts deliberating upon bigger questions in life. Stranded alone in an unknown place, she was not just engulfed in the fear of loneliness but had started talking to herself because her "voice has gone rusty with disuse" and with no conversation to build with herself, she recited poetry learnt back in high school, "Had we but world enough. and time; this Coyness, Lady, were no crime" (58). Here it can be noted how Picoult is ruthless in her subtle ways delineating the miseries of the pandemic while incorporating meaningful phrases. The inclusion of the opening lines of the poem, *To His Coy Mistress,* seem to be a deliberate attempt. Where the poet has apparently written a love poem, Picoult has included lines in an ironical manner to foreshadow the loss and lack of time. No one ever has enough time. No one ever knows what's awaiting them. The pandemic, akin to all these fears of uncertainty resonating in the poem, ruined

everything. Diana's thoughts resonate similar discussions of how it is impossible to ascertain what is to come. In her seclusion on the island, knowing that her boyfriend was in the forefront, battling the pandemic, in her part of the world, all she can dwell upon is, "When you're surrounded by desert, it's inconceivable to think there are places that flood" because even though the news of the pandemic surrounded her, patients and death didn't (43).

The struggle to make sense of the "temporal" anomalies that "crises" bring about had a significantly "disruptive" effect on the relationship that humans have with their environment (Baumbach and Neumann 14). COVID-19 was a catastrophe that the humanity at large suffered with. Human minds were layered with a new normal that was being learnt in order to "adapt to the state of crisis" because "species change to adapt to the circumstances" and here the "change" was learning new ways of living to cope with the virus and the "circumstances" entailed a pandemic-stricken world (Baumbach and Neumann 15; Picoult 99). Helplessly situated and stranded on the Galapagos during COVID-19, Diana recalled the death of her father was a trauma which inscribed upon her mind that "the world changes between heartbeats" and that "life is never absolute" (Picoult 66). She was left distraught because she never believed that she will "run out of time" (67). Yet, she did. Her circumstances now, made her ruminate why she hadn't stopped running after goals and made use of time that was slipping out of hands without her realizing. In her parallel reality, she lost her mother too and that grief was something that wounded her more than she had ever anticipated. Post-recovery, it was the insight she gained through reflecting upon her choices that she ventured to build a bond with her mother, making use of time. She recalled how her mother had defined loneliness, "Imagine being the last of anything in the whole world" and even though she was talking about a tortoise, Diana couldn't help but tear up (20). Back then, just the imagining was unimaginable and now, this was what humanity seemed to be reaching. With no end to the virus and no solution to the proliferating problems of the pandemic, COVID-19 was confirming that doom was inevitable, with isolation instilled and loneliness lurking at its centre.

McDonagh elucidated the palimpsest of mind as one that, "draws into harmony the disparate inscriptions on the surface" and "implies (as) a model of constant change, for each new inscription incurs realignment" (218). This realignment

of inscriptions has been discussed above as the temporal disruptions caused by the COVID-19 crisis. In *WYWH* the situation that surrounded Diana made her respond in ways she wouldn't normally. With no escape from the seclusion entrusted upon her in the name of a vacation, she was ready to strip and swim believing, "if I'm the last person in the world, there are worse places to be" (Picoult 53). Ironically, the exhaustion and anxiety build-up of COVID-19 was such that irrational and unexpected behaviour was elicited everywhere. There were nurses who called hallucinations a "blessing" because of the morbid reality that surrounded them in the name of coronavirus (173). Not living it, not knowing it, not witnessing it was far better than letting the end of humanity etch on the minds every day, every hour, every minute.

4.4. Summing Up

As shown in the analysis above, not only is *Wish You Were Here* a palimpsestic novel in ideas and the layers that it consists in the form history, art and lives of the characters but it showcases evident layering during the time of crisis on the minds of the characters. COVID-19 brought with it new ways of living and there was a lot of unlearning, learning and relearning involved which has been shown as palimpsestic layering done on the human brain. Moreover, the analysis shows how capturing the essence of an era, especially a troubled one, can help transport the reader back in time. This is because the surrounding and the environment have a profound effect on the nature of layering done on the human brain.

CHAPTER 5

INSCRIPTIONS DECRYPTED: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF *THE FELL*

In this portion of my study, within the framework developed earlier, I have textually analysed Moss's *The Fell* to analyse how COVID-19 seems to etch upon memory with a new way of life, layering it in a manner similar to the layers that De Quincey's palimpsest of the human brain notion outline. In the foundational works used as the theoretical basis for this research, it is proposed that the layers of the human brain are "everlasting" and "do not die," even when they no longer align with current circumstances. (De Quincey 144; Manning 236). Where for Picoult these undying memories demarcated a boundary between the past and the present, for Moss these memories help characters hanker for a better future. Just like the past didn't exist, the present will end too. Moss's characters are dense and exhibit evident layering on the mind amid the chaos created by COVID-19. For Moss, the virus did not only bring disease to the society but rendered humanity helpless in many aspects of life where many humans were forced to believe in an apocalyptic end. El Maarouf et al. discuss in their article, this apocalyptic nature being catastrophic not merely in the unfolding of events but, fundamentally in how "progress, in a globalized world ceased" leaving individuals unable to live a life they knew in pre-COVID-19 time (78). Moss's characters are individuals who experience numerous negative consequences such as social isolation, confinement, and psychological degradation, which leads to mental breakdowns. The author has been clinical in capturing the chaos of the troubled times that surrounded her characters. She showcases how the trauma that surrounds them has engraved their minds such that the old exists but new is "foregrounded" (Manning 238).

Sarah Moss is a British author who has published works in both the genres of fiction and non-fiction. Born in Glasgow in the year 1975, she grew up in the northern region of England. After completing her education in English at Oxford University, she pursued a career as both a bookseller and a teacher. The author has a total of seven novels including *Ghost Wall* (2018) and *Summerwater* (2020), which were both nominated for literary awards, Women's Prize for Fiction and the Costa Book Award, respectively. Her non-fiction literature includes *Names for the Sea* (2014) and *On*

Looking (2017). *TF* is her eight fictional work. Moss's written work is distinguished by its perceptiveness and its meticulousness. Thematically she explores obsessions and collective behaviour in her works about stifling solitude while stylistically her short, concise, polyphonic tales capture distinct voices in within communities (Walezak 2). Like Picoult, she exhibits a keen interest in the cognitive processes that underlie human perception and interpretation of the environment, which she investigates through her literary works spanning both factual and imaginative genres. This faculty of being able to explore human perception and environment made her a foremost choice for the current study. Moss has garnered acclaim for aesthetic appeal, profound understanding and innovative qualities and has generated a corpus of literature that is both intellectually stimulating and gratifying.

TF, written amid Britain's second lockdown, is an example of how literature interacted with the ongoing pandemic by exploring the "social fractures that the COVID-19 lockdown blatantly exposed" (Walezak 1). The narrative pens the coping mechanism of four different characters namely Kate, Matt, Alice and Rob, all living in the Peak District. Moss describes how each of these individuals has had struggles of their own. The story portrays a series of events through the lens of Kate who has heightened inner turmoil due to her forced seclusion and imprisonment, all of which occur within the chaotic backdrop of the pandemic itself. Taking place over the course of a single evening, the narrative chronicles the main character's decision to defy quarantine measures by embarking on a walk across the hills of the adjacent Peak District. There she meets an accident, and her rescue begins allowing some others to breathe in fresh air, out of their now secluded lives. Silcox, in her review of *TF*, has argued how the fiction is so "attuned to the banalities and anxieties of the lockdown" that is seems to be a work intended for future audiences, "like a literary time capsule" (20). Owing to this discussion, the novel becomes of special importance to my research. The fact that critics already see it as a novel for the future has helped me explore how the text itself can be a metaphoric palimpsestic parchment.

The setting of the novel plays a special part in building the plot and helping underline the ubiquitous pernicious nature of lockdown and disease. Belonging to the poor faction of the society, living in a home built in the eighteenth century, with no proper sanitation facilities and no fresh air to cross ventilate her cottage, nature was Kate's only escape. As Kucala puts it in her article, that the protagonist's desire for a

deep connection with nature serves as a means of "coping with the pressures of the current predicament" (39). Living at the foot of the hills she wasn't allowed to visit in the lock-down, breathing in the stench of the same air day in and day out, left her bereft. It was impossible for her to lock herself in the confines of her home. She needed a sense of freshness of the air on the hills to live on amid her fourteen-day quarantine fearing that she would go "mad" poisoning herself on her "own fumes" (Moss 11). Thus, for Moss too, nature played a pivotal role in the policed lives of people in Peak District during the pandemic.

The analysis has been divided into two sections and employs a conceptual, interpretive, and exploratory approach. This division has been done based on the specific research objectives and corresponding questions delineated earlier, each of which have been addressed sequentially adhering to the textual analysis method delineated by McKee. McKee's method entails a close examination of a text's language, imagery, characterization, narrative structure and other literary devices to reveal messages, themes and ideologies that govern it. Using this approach, I have analysed the intricate interplay between fiction and reality, memory and trauma, as well as the physical and social contexts in which the tale transpires. In the following pages, *TF* has been textually analysed under the listed subheadings.

    i.   Coerced Confinement

    ii. Traversing Trauma

5.1 Coerced Confinement

COVID-19 brought more chaos to the world than just disease and death. It brought along with it "psychological consequences" such as "change in daily lives, feeling of loneliness, job losses, financial difficulty" all of which emerged as everlasting "anxiety and panic" that individuals suffered with (Pietrabissa and Simpson 1). More than the virus itself, prolonged isolation affected individuals in detrimental manners leaving them unable to function with the "foregrounded dominant memory" of the pandemic that had layered upon the minds as delineated by De Quincey (Manning 238). This layering of continued panic and anxiety etched such on the minds of individuals that it rendered them helpless. In tandem with this argument, *TF* has been textually analysed to reveal the palimpsestic features embedded within the text. The continuous shifts between the past, the present and

possible future present to the reader layers upon the minds of the characters. The story begins with the new ways of living ingrained among characters who, because of lockdowns are confined to their homes. Kate, the protagonist, is in a fourteen-day self-quarantine along with her son Matt because of possible contact with an infected person and all of this is making her loose sanity. Locked up she is counting days, hours and minutes left in her forced confinement and wondering if the countdown begins when she was informed and asked the informant "what time does it end…midnight, noon or from when I last saw my colleague" (Moss 7). Her son relates how he was aware of the fact that this isolation will be tough on her because he had never seen her locked up in the confines of her home, not even for illness or birth, and was witnessing her "losing it" where she spent hours "pacing from the front gate through the house to the bottom of the garden and back" (8). The fact that this isolation was "really hard" on her can be understood in light of De Quincey's explanation of the palimpsest of the brain which states that it is in time of sickness, trouble and trauma that all inscriptions on the mind "revive in strength" (Moss 8; De Quincey 146). Kate had always been a nature lover. Long before the lockdown, she was always seeking solace in the nearby hills of the Peak District. Now that COVID-19 was inscribing the pervasive memory of seclusion upon her mind, the trauma was making it hard for her to push back in the "graveyard" of her memories, the time when going out was not against the law (Manning 238).

Manning, while elaborating upon the working of his Palimpsest of the Memory model states:

> Where individuals and collectives introduce or encounter new memories (or new events), a procedure of identification and definition determine the assimilation (foregrounded or distant) into the current palimpsest of the memory. At times. Distant memories are purposefully pulled (just as they are pushed) into the dominant arena. Dominant memories thus experience ongoing change and may be shaped by enfolding distant or blurred memories (239).

This deliberate pulling of distant memories is evident in Kate's tale. Her hankering for freedom, for freshness, for a walk in the nature was all a result of her palimpsestic memory allowing the now distant memory, for the wider world, to assimilate in the

now foregrounded memory for the wider world. She wonders how the authorities could believe that depriving people of their "external stimulus" and keeping them "locked" in the confines of their homes, could be healthy for anyone at all (Moss 17). "Confinement, loss of usual routine and reduced social and physical contact" only brought in more troubles for individuals (Girdhar et al. 32). This was important to her. Residing in a Victorian home Kate deliberates upon how pandemics are not new to the world and that people always "got on with it", bereft that the loved ones died but they did not "wall themselves up" and that even though they did not live long, the "living were allowed to live" as long as they were alive (Moss 16). For her, isolation was the worst remedy. The already precarious situation that surrounded them was worsened with forceful seclusion.

Kate's isolation stands as a metaphor for the masses suffering because of the decisions made at the top. For her, the government's decision to lock people up was a ploy for political motives because the implementation of social distancing "enforced amongst the general population to reduce the transmission of COVID-19" helped to curb the disease, reduce the number of deaths, rise in control statistics, all at the cost of the mental and physical health of the general masses (Hwang et al. 1217). Kate stood as the embodiment of the general population who was laid back, suffered financial distress, couldn't make ends meet and to top it all, were forced to "stay at home" (Flanagan 438). All of this layered upon the mind in the form of stress, panic and anxiety. Kate spent hours deliberating upon what was and what will be amid what is that surrounds her. She was unable to wrap her head around the fact that breathing fresh air was detrimental to health and questions herself repeatedly "how is anyone going to get sick from walking a few miles over the moor and standing on a hillside in the wind" (Moss 18). The fact that Kate wanted fresh air made her open the windows in cold, with no heating system not only because no one could "live in a sealed box" but also because, houses "needed to breathe" (10). The desperation Kate suffered with is showcased by Moss with lines that resonate with the reader long after the story is finished.

Amid all this desperation and anxiety building up, Moss showcases how the time that surrounded Kate and her community had layered differently upon the minds of the characters. With the vulnerability of life in front of the virus, there was fear lurking in the communities. Mertens et al. explicated this in their article by

underlining the varying levels of fear. They explain how an excessive amount of fear can have negative consequences both at the individual level and societal level causing mental health disorders like "phobias, social anxiety, panic buying and/or xenophobia" and how lack of fear can also be harmful to individuals and the society as it manifests itself in "disregarding government measures to slow the spread of coronavirus or implementing reckless policies that ignore the associated risks" (Mertens et al. 1). All these fears have been encapsulated by Moss if *TF*. Kate disregarded the government measures as being reckless for not taking into consideration how the poor will manage with no work, no money and nothing to eat which included herself as she "relied on what came from the cafe", to feed herself and Matt (Moss 24). It wasn't just the isolation that bothered her, she had to make ends meet with no means at hand. On the other hand, it was a different story for her neighbours. There were those who because of fear developed social anxiety and xenophobia against their own community. Scared of catching the virus themselves, they had their neighbours policed. In the text Kate expresses disbelief in how a year ago no one would have imagined that leaving the premises of your home would be "against the law" and that there would be a "police hotline for people to denounce their neighbours for going out" (Moss 18).

This fear further resonates in the fiction where Alice tells her daughter over a video call that Kate and her son, who bring in the groceries for Alice, are supposed to be self-isolating. At first, Susie is just concerned about her mother's exposure to them and worrying if she's "been too close" and if she's been "wiping the groceries" as required, but upon learning that Kate broke the law and went out of her home, all Susie can think of is "calling the police" (32-33). She does not agree with her mother to let go of the act. Her fear speaks volumes when she relates how "someone will be burying bodies…if infected people keep wandering in public" which is why the authorities enforce laws (34). Where Susie's reaction is categorised in the xenophobic category delineated early, it can be understood in light of Manning's explanation of the Palimpsest of Memory model. According to Manning the palimpsest of memory, as a social phenomenon, has several layers of recollections that "go beyond individual experience" and present a "blend of perception and meaning making" which is "affected by collective paradigms of understanding and discourse" (237). The collective paradigm that surrounds the characters is that of COVID-19 and fear of

infection. This is not just about Susie. It is the troublesome time that surrounds them. It is the frailty of the situation in which they thrive. It is the want of remaining safe that they are ready to "shame people" who leave the confines of their homes (Moss 18). The only layering that is "dominant" upon the minds is that of staying home to stay safe (Manning 238). During this hue and cry of safety at home for self and others within a community, people forgot that "unlike hand hygiene and social distancing, self-isolation requires support from others in the community, most obviously in the form of shopping", which was not provided to Kate or her son (Reicher and Drury 38).

Even though Kate broke the law and went for a walk alone when she was supposed to exercise strict quarantine, she isn't rebellious to the laws generally, and certainly not uncaring. In fact, as pointed out by Walezak in his article, that Kate's choice to engage in a solitary walk in the fells, despite her awareness of the associated risks is due to the psychological distress she suffered from being locked down that made her "forgo the usual precautions of informing people that she has gone walking and taking her phone with her" (5). This irrational act has been underlined by Kate herself who regrets leaving Matt alone behind and that "she shouldn't have stayed so long" or rather, she shouldn't be out at the fells "at all" (Moss 34). Matt keeps telling himself too that his mom never left without a note and that she would not be long and kept hoping for her return. Kate on the other hand, having gone too far, justifies her guilt by telling herself that if "walking a few more minutes, another mile or so, over the darkening hill makes it easier to stay alive", there is no harm in it (40). Here, Kate's psychological stress can be understood as one that heightened only due to being confined in her home. Up in the fell, she was alone too but in the open air. Up in the fells there was silence and darkness too but "she feels at home…in the friendly presence of stones and sheep" (40). This comfort of being out was a direct ramification of the stress that had layered upon her mind due to her environment.

Reichur and Dury have also stressed that when people fail to "adhere to the rules because of shared human psychological frailties", it is only because of their "personal failings" (37). As the text proceeds, Moss reveals how each character in the novel is an embodiment of societal damage. Kate, Alice and Rob are three singles living in the confines of their homes during the pandemic. Alice a widow and a patient, who despite being able to afford luxuries, was living a life of seclusion. Kate

and Rob both single parents, struggling to make sure they are available for their children but the pandemic making it more difficult. Kate left home hankering nature and having injured herself, unable to move all she could think about was her son whom she left behind, "Matt, she left Matt" (Moss 47). Rob, who was out there on the fells only to help rescue Kate, could not help thinking about his daughter whom he had to leave behind, upset and angry, for rescuing someone "out" there, leaving behind someone "in" here. Even though Rob craves nature, just like Kate, and "likes it up" on the fells where the "sky and weather, the sense of moor" was comfort for him, he could not help noticing Kate's personal failing that led her to make everyone go through this trouble (75). During his prolonged search, he reflects on how Kate must have wanted to end her life, sick of the confinement, the troubles, the predicaments that surrounded her but could not let go of the thought that even if that was so, she had made a mistake. Not only was Kate going against the law, but all this search was "costing a fortune" and it wasn't just the "heavy fine" which she would be charged with that was the problem but that she was "isolated for a reason" and now the risk of infecting the team was imminent cause all of them would be in "close contact" with her (61).

McDonagh, while expounding upon the palimpsest of the human brain contends that the palimpsest, "as a model of social incorporation, produces a version of society which incorporates each new individual as the disparate inscriptions of its surface, into a fluid and adaptable whole" (218). This whole is seen being part of the society in *TF*. Each individual had distinct inscriptions layered upon their minds but were incorporated seamlessly in the society because the pandemic that surrounded the characters inscribed upon the minds similarly. Moss used her literary genius to build a whole that comprises of different factions within a society. While Kate had to struggle with the lockdown in her low means, Alice too was suffering in coerced confinement. Yet her experience was different. Even though Alice was not struggling to make ends meet and had a decent disposal of finances at her hand, she was a cancer patient. Her health was more compromised in the pandemic than healthy individuals. The mental strain noted in the character of Alice has been underlined by Miaskowski et al. in their research which highlights that an "alarming high rate of stress" effaced in cancer patients due to loneliness (e32). Thus, seclusion had a detrimental effect on Alice's mental health even when she was not worrying about hunger related issues. Through

her dense monologues and internal thoughts, Moss showcases the anxiety building up in Alice who believed that even the phrase, "self-isolating" was "horrible" and that social distancing did not make sense because "distance" was not a verb and one cannot be social and distant at the same time (Moss 13).

According to Steele, COVID-19 instilled a fear, an anxiety among people that they were on an "inexorable path toward annihilation of the self and dying alone" (97). In *TF* the dilemma posited to Alice is similar as she suffers from the lack of human contact. Time and again she reminisces a past where warmth of touch was experienced. Pressing against the "cold and hard" glass window amid the uncertain circumstances that surrounded her, she recalled how no one has "touched her in months" and that perhaps "she'll die without ever touching another human" and perhaps she has already had her "last hug, handshake, air-kiss" (Moss 14). Here it can be noted that even though the pandemic has general similar inscriptions layered upon the mind about disease and death and panic and virus, the individuals had struggles of their own. Kate did not suffer lack of touch as Alice did because she had her son Matt with her. Yet thoughts of dying alone crossed Kate's mind when she injured herself on the fells and was unable to return home. Fear of being policed, of being caught, of having to pay heavy fines, of facing the community's wrath upon her irresponsible attitude, of Matt having to bear the brunt, made her wish death upon herself where she consoles herself that death will have her "spared the consequences" (81). Where Alice feared dying alone, Kate thought it was better for her.

Coerced confinement left Matt, Kate's teenage son, bereft too. Even though initially Moss points out how he thought will be able to pass the fourteen days of self-isolation in a bliss with "two weeks of lie-ins and gaming" but as the events unfold, these two weeks turn into a nightmare for him (7). His mother had broken the law by choosing to step out of the home and anxiety took over him. Keeping the lights on, not being able to eat, not being able to go in search of her, checking the phone frantically, hearing the search helicopters, all took a toll on him. As highlighted by Walezak in her article, Matt's "enforced isolation" meant that he could not even have the company of neighbours or friend amid this traumatic time (5). But because of the time that surrounded humanity, the troubled time of the pandemic, the fear of infection and death, the dominantly manifested memory on the minds had etched its own, even the rescue and support teams could only give verbal consolations to the

child, "we wouldn't leave you on your own, normally" (Moss 56). Just that, nothing was normal now. The pandemic had engulfed anything that they knew as normal and had inscribed upon the palimpsestic memory of the characters, its own ways, its own demands, its own normal. And the normal of the pandemic left Matt helpless:

> He checks his phone again, but it seems even Jake's asleep. The house sits around him, cold and dark.
>
> This isn't going to be all right, is it, it's past the point where this can be all right. This is like the seconds between falling and landing, he thinks, you know how it's going to end and you don't want it to, all you can want now is for time to go more slowly than it does (Moss 96).

5.2 Traversing Trauma

> There are no shadows to warn you of what's coming. (Moss 2)

In their article, Rettie and Daniels laid stress not only upon the negative side effects that the quarantine had on the psychological wellbeing but also on factors such as the "duration of the quarantine, lack of information, financial loss" that served in making experiences of isolation traumatic (428). As a heartrending tale of pain, panic, plight of isolation and persistent internal pandemonium, *TF* encapsulates the pandemic trauma such that the readers plunge into the precarious worlds of the characters. Dense monologues make the reader tread upon the "listlessness and erosive interiority of lockdown" where isolation was not the only problem but staying alive in what the authorities thought would keep them alive was a bigger concern (Silcox 20). Amid want of fresh air, food to eat, heating to keep warm and human touch, the characters reflect upon "how grateful you want to be," and "how helpless you want to feel" (Moss 14). Where Alice is tired of being dependent on others for basic shopping, Kate is going frantic only because she isn't allowed outside. She tells her son how hard not being allowed outside is on which he cannot help but think,

> not as hard as Deepak's dad who was in Intensive Care for three weeks or the grandparents of kids in his class who've died this year or his Maths teacher who's back at work but can't get enough breath for a sentence half the time (Moss 8).

Matt cannot close his eyes to the trauma that surrounds him in the form of "compelling and heartbreaking stories of the challenges and suffering that families are

experiencing" due to the virus attack (Luttik et al. 87). He finds it ironical to grapple with the reality that his mother could not adjust to just staying in while there were people actually suffering and dying of infection.

While deliberating upon De Quincey's palimpsest of the human brain, Dillon expounds upon how the "initial erasure" of memory in a palimpsest is a partial failure because of the "subsequent reappearance of the underlying script" as soon as a newer layer has been formed (Dillon 245). This can be understood in light of the pre-COVID-19 ways that keep surfacing among the new ways learnt by characters and makes them hanker for a better tomorrow, a normal tomorrow, void of the COVID-19 normal that surrounds them. Recalling the pre-pandemic time in which even though she found her occasional coffee gatherings boring, but "they were there, she was there" (Moss 17). Then, immediately goes in distress wondering if any of the fun she had, the life she lived "could ever happen again" (18). The inability to "make sense" of the new world that surrounded her in the form of coronavirus and its lockdowns, her thoughts made her wander the older times, made her complain of the present time and made her reason with herself how she ought to stop all this because she's becoming "a grumpy old woman…even boring herself" (McKee 1; Moss 23). Her continuous slipping into the past while living the present reiterates what Okello and Duran deduced about the palimpsest of memory in their research. They relate how the palimpsestic study focuses on the interplay of emotions and the response to those emotions which are "situated within the historical memories of trauma and resilience" (6). Here, even though Okello and Duran focus on trauma experienced in the past, the current study, as delineated earlier, contends to re-channel this thought and examines the palimpsestic inscriptions in relation to the current time keeping the constant of trauma common. Thus, all emotions that Kate is feeling, and her responses of worrying and reasoning and remembering and hankering are due to the trauma etched on her mind in her current situation as her "foregrounded dominant memory" (Manning 238).

Watkins in her article reflects upon the nature of the palimpsest of the human brain and opines that the palimpsest "balances the idea of absence with presence, erasure with revelation" (248). This can be understood in light of *TF*. The characters in Moss's fiction are facing evident erasure of pre-pandemic time with the presence of harrowing pandemic time leaving them distraught. The characters are thriving in the

absence of what was normal to them with the presence of the "new normal" of the COVID-19 (Agarwala 57). Along with Kate, Alice is an example of such layering upon the mind. Her disconcerting thoughts being in a lockdown and unable to help a neighbour in trouble made her re-evaluate what could actually bring death and what not.

> A person can doubtless live like this indefinitely, the background murmur of dread only a little louder week by week, month by month – well, that's obvious, isn't it, people don't die of dread, nor even imprisonment, or at least they do but not directly from being shut away, from lack of access to healthcare and poor diet and suicide and violence and many of the reasons that put them there in the first place, shame on her for comparing her comfy house, mortgage paid off, with her kind neighbours and her garden, to a prison (Moss 57).

COVID-19 was pervasively catastrophic in the way it layered upon the minds of the characters. The uncertainty resonated in their thoughts and in their words and the way the authored captured this, speaks of the adversity in which they thrived. Moss does not break her sentences and uses "scarce punctuation" to showcase no break in thoughts of her characters which embody distress, trauma and anxiety (Walezak 6).

Amid the chaotic time that prevailed, Alice found it hard to maintain a healthy relation with others. It wasn't just the guilt of not being able to help Kate, who was lost in the fells, or Matt who was scared and alone, waiting for a miracle return of his mom, but the relationship with her own daughter. Through thoughts thought and words spoken or left unspoken, "same old, Alice wants to say…but she says I've done some baking", Moss encapsulates the essence of relations that were falling apart in the troubled times (Moss 31). The individual struggles of the characters to establish meaningful connections and manage the intricacies of their relationships reflect the difficulties of preserving social ties in the face of the pandemic's physical and mental separation protocols. Cassinat et al. explicated a similar dilemma in their research and delineated how "the pandemic can be viewed as a stressor, a nonnormative life event" that had the capacity to alter familial ties (1597). Rob suffered with a similar predicament when it came to his relationship with his daughter Ellie. Knowing Ellie was with him to spend the weekend and that they hardly got any time together, he tries in vain to explain to her how important it was to go with the search party to look

for a woman lost with no contact and that she couldn't be left alone in that situation. But Ellie's retorts were on point and her words pinched him, "you can just leave me" (50). It's not that he wanted to leave his daughter, it was just that his daughter was in a safer environment. Just as the virus was infecting people, distances were infecting relations.

Through her fictional work Moss probes trauma, not just at an individual level, but by encompassing the collective pandemic trauma. Wright et al. delve into the dynamics of this collective trauma in their research. They unravel the myth of being confined to one place for safety during the pandemic which has a duo fold effect on the population because being "emplaced" in one place "displaces" them from other "everyday places that have meaning and meet our material and psychological needs" (Wright et al. 2). *TF* captures a similar dilemma. Matt was no longer attending physical school and locked up in the confines of his home, he was being wasted away online pretending "exams will happen, that you're going to get qualifications and a job" (Moss 10). Alice had been emplaced in her home as well and desperate in her situation, dependent for everyday grocery, she lamented that she was "a whole person" and that she "worked" and "managed a team" and a "budget" and "volunteered" in various activities until the pandemic took over (14). Alice hankers for the freedom she had in her lifestyle. Kate's dilemma is no different. Being emplaced in the confines of her home, she was displaced from what was her second home, the fells. Breaking the law and reaching the fells, ending her displacement, she felt relief in "being out, being alone" (35). The irony enunciated here though is that the fell, which in pre-pandemic time was a source of comfort and escape from Kate's troubled life, had become the embodiment of pain, seclusion and confinement for her due to the injury. Therefore, we can see the fells as metaphors mirroring the wider societal limitations and concerns of the turbulent time that surrounded the characters. Stepping out, was in fact bringing more confinement with risk of infection. The fact that Kate had difficulty breathing and moving while she lay stranded in the fells, is in fact an analogy of what the COVID-19 patients were suffering with. They were stranded, alone, had difficulty breathing, and did not know "what's coming" (6).

Deliberating upon De Quincey's palimpsest of the human brain, McDonagh states that the palimpsest "oscillates between surface and depth" and that the palimpsest provides a "coherent link between the individual and a wider notion of the

social and psychological" (208). Using McKee's approach to judge the "sense making practices" of individual characters to better understand the world the characters thrive in, *TF* presents to the reader, a link between the social surroundings and psychological workings of the mind (McKee 12). Owing to the layering done in the time of the pandemic it can be seen that the time that surrounded the characters was inscribing such on their minds that the social setup of the lockdown and confinement remained "foregrounded" but the "depths" were sought in the form of past memories and guilty consciouses (Manning 238; McDonagh 208). The inclusion of the raven is an effort on this part by Moss. While Kate had defied law and entered the fells and had acquired a fatal injury, the sporadic dialogue with raven is in fact her guilty conscious coaxing her for not being rational enough, thoughtful enough, "if you'd brought your phone you could have called him", "another mistake…shall we make a list", "have you considered the consequences?", "what are you going to do now?", "wake up", "you'll die tonight", "poor Matt" (Moss 64, 66, 79, 81). This dialogue between the raven and Kate helps the reader realize that the only reason Kate was out was not because she was a habitual law breaker, but because locked up in confinement was making her lose sanity.

5.3 Summing Up

As demonstrated by my analysis, *The Fell* showcases a clear and evident layering of the characters' mental processes all throughout the story. Not only are palimpsestic inscriptions part of the text, but the fact that the surrounding environment has an impact on the inscriptions has also been brought to light. It can be seen that chaotic times left an impression on people's brains, to the extent that all that was known before the outbreak of COVID-19, became fuzzy. Even if it was remembered and referred to by the characters several times in the text, it was done solely for the purpose of distinguishing it from what was and what is. Moreover, the analysis showcases the minute details of the dilemma that surrounded the characters and evaluates the dense descriptions provided by the author as those that help the reader visualise the traumatic time vividly.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Summing Up

This study set out of explore the hypothesis that the selected COVID-19 fiction by Jodi Picoult and Sarah Moss showcases palimpsestic layering upon the mind which can vary according to the time that surrounds the characters. It sought to investigate layering done upon the character's minds individually and globally, paying special attention to bring into discussion a variety of backgrounds and professions and discuss the ramifications of their surrounding on their daily jobs, relations and living. Moreover, due to the fact that this research aimed at exploring a different dimension of palimpsestic readings i.e., laying emphasis on current inscriptions being inscribed rather than focussing on evoking previous inscriptions alone, this study has delved into highlighting specific instances of layering on the character's minds. These inscriptions have been instantiated as clear episodes of the formation of palimpsests where the fresh inscriptions inscribed render the human brain as palimpsests under formation. While analysing the novels my research attempted to bring into limelight how texts produced in a particular era can help transport the readers to a specific time through the concept of palimpsests such that erasure is not always important to reveal what lies in the past and that just reading texts and viewing forms of art produced in that time can help readers realise the revelations.

In the process of conducting an analysis on the selected fictional works, I have endeavoured to ascertain solutions to the research questions that initially prompted the commencement of this study. The questions have been instrumental in guiding me conduct my analysis with a methodical approach helping the study remain focussed on its intended scope. Primarily, I have been focussed upon discerning the manner in which the chosen texts elucidate the relation between the time that surrounds the characters, COVID-19 in this case, and the nature of layers inscribed due to this time. Next, I have been intrigued by the myriad of methods in which inscriptions upon the minds of the characters have been manifested as an inherent characteristic within the text. Furthermore, I have endeavoured to explore the emanation of COVID-19 texts and the various palimpsestic readings that can be employed on the fiction produced in

this era. Keeping the research questions as a base, I have analysed the chosen fiction from a palimpsestic perspective.

I have implemented the conceptualization of the human brain put forth by Thomas De Quincey in his essay *The Palimpsest*, as well as Jodi Russell Manning's theoretical model, the Palimpsest of Memory, which draws inspiration from De Quincey's metaphorical depiction of the human mind. Furthermore, the assertions posited by Josephine McDonagh and Sarah Dillon have been employed to delve deeper into De Quincey's concept of the palimpsest, differentiating it from alternative psychological theories and frameworks. I find De Quincey's ideas about the layered nature of the human brain useful to analyse inscriptions done upon the human mind during the turbulent time of COVID-19 because the pandemic fiction provides me a clearly demarcated experience of time between what was and what in within the texts. De Quincey expounds upon the notion that the human brain, in its essence, functions as a palimpsest, ceaselessly inscribing layers of concepts, visual representations, and affective states and that with the addition of each subsequent stratum of recollection, the semblance of oblivion may be perceived, yet in actuality, none are ever authentically expunged. This proposition posits that the construct of memory exhibits a stratified nature, akin to the composition of antiquated parchments, wherein the vestiges of the past persist while the contemporary elements are accentuated. Manning's model has exemplified the fact that none of the layers are extinguished by clearly demarcating memory as foregrounded and/or blurred and distant. Since the concern of my research is to explore these palimpsestic layers in relation to the environment that surrounds the characters, the conceptual framework of the palimpsest of the human brain has been used to analyse the COVID-19 fiction.

Employing the palimpsestic perspective, this study explores the palimpsestic layering done on the human minds in times which are traumatic. COVID-19 marked itself as a time that was harrowing. Using the two fictional novels, *Wish You Were Here* by Picoult and *The Fell* by Moss as grounds for investigation the fact that the pandemic of 2019 etched upon the minds of the characters has been showcased. COVID-19 is distinguished as one that can be set apart as an era that brought along with it panic, uncertainty, death, depression, anxiety and no hope for future. The world seemed to be collapsing around those who lived through this turbulent time. In the fiction textually analysed above, it can be seen that the uncertain time that

surrounded not only left them helpless in the face of fate but that there was a new foregrounded memory that was layered upon their minds. This memory, analysed as the COVID-19 memory was layered on top of whatever was known before COVID-19 and was characterised by the new ways of living and thriving learnt that made sense only amid the chaos that surrounded the characters. Wearing masks, washing hands, using disinfectants, exercising social distancing, locked up in isolation, experiencing COVID-19 fog, going into depression, feeling displaced, mentally and physically were all the new ways of life layered upon the minds of the characters. Within the fiction, the characters learnt what the pandemic was teaching them and grappled with the poignant new reality that surrounded them. This learning of new ways and unlearning of the old ways has been analysed as a fresh layer being inscribed upon the surface of the palimpsest of the brain.

Along with highlighting the direct ramifications of the time that surrounded the characters, specific instances have been pointed throughout the analysis of both fictional texts. The making and marring of memories of the characters have been thoroughly parsed to divulge numerous instances that tell tales of palimpsestic inscriptions. The characters, living in a grim world, with no hope for a better future in sight, have been unveiled as intrinsically intelligent beings who knew what the pandemic had inscribed upon their minds. Where for Picoult this inscription brought adherence to the new laws as the foremost priority, for Moss the laws themselves were a bigger problem. While Picoult illustrated characters suffering with mental fatigue of extra work on the medical front, Moss constructed characters mentally consumed having lost their jobs and struggling to make ends meet. This comes directly in contrast to the characters by Picoult who when furloughed had other matters to deal with than poverty and lack of basic facilities. Having contracted the disease experiencing COVID-19 delirium, parallel happy identities were constructed within the story where hope seemed resounding in the distressing world, they thrived in. Moss brought in a different perspective. Her characters had more to deal with in the face of lockdowns and isolation because of poverty and already troubled lives accentuated due to the pandemic. Their parallel reality was not a dream but freedom to be able to take a walk on the nearby hills without being condemned by their own neighbourhood. Living in the same world but different parts, even though the situations of the characters have been underlined as different but what remains

consistent is the persistence of the pandemic ascribing layers upon layers upon the minds of the characters not only making them learn their new ways but using the tumultuous time that surrounds them as a point of reflection on their existence.

Talking about texts and how they present to the reader a mirage, a time travel machine that help transport the reader to situations, time and environment explicated withing the literary work, Locke's definition of texts proves useful. He states that while a text is a "product", a tangible artefact that is created in a certain time and location, serving as a material object that can be examined and interpreted, it is also a continual "process" of interpreting multiples meanings, where each interpretation forms the context for subsequent choices, as part of an array of alternative meanings (14). As the text is a part of the wider social setup, it functions as a tool for preserving and upholding certain narratives. While analysing the selected works of this study, this inherent characteristic, as defined by Locke was upheld. Analysing through the palimpsestic lens, an array of interpretations was employed rendering the fiction as one which not only presented to the readers, characters caught in chaos, but influenced readers such that perturbing situations felt real.

6.2 Findings

Given the exploratory and interpretative character of this work, I have employed qualitative research methods. Therefore, the results of this study are likely to be nongeneralizable. Keeping the research questions in mind it may be noted that the selected texts display numerous instances of palimpsestic inscriptions on the minds of the characters. Their memories have been layered afresh with what surrounds them and thus, the texts may be read as embodiments of inscriptions being highlighted throughout the novel. Within the text, the palimpsestic nature of the mind has been foregrounded by depicting how the old memories were existing and how new memories were being inscribed upon the minds of the characters.

Even though the study delved into showcasing the palimpsestic inscriptions upon the mind, its primary focus was to be able to define a relation between the nature of inscriptions and the time that surrounded the characters. It may be noted that throughout the analysis, it was delineated how it was the turbulent time that had engraved upon the character's mind. Here, the study suggests that each era inscribes upon the mind, but it is turbulent and traumatic time that etches such that every other

memory is blurred and only trauma and trauma related memory is foregrounded. To help this research bring this into discussion, COVID-19 fiction was a deliberate choice due to its disdainful nature. As noted earlier, COVID-19 was a time that brought along with it pain, anxiety, disease, death, trauma, seclusion, and much more leaving humanity bereft. The pandemic was associated with misery and the fiction produced during the pandemic captured the harrowing nature of the virus. Moreover, there was a completely different way of living that the pandemic entrusted upon humanity. Whatever ways of living were known before the coronavirus seemed to have been nullified and new ways were being learnt while new layers of memories were being inscribed.

6.2.1. Introducing *Palimpsest of Time*: A Paradigm Shift in the Palimpsest Discourse

Owing to the fact the COVID-19 was an era that can be clearly demarcated with boundaries of what was and what is and that as shown in the texts, it inscribed upon the minds such that nothing other than the pandemic itself made sense, this study conceptualises the term *Palimpsest of Time*.

The term *Palimpsest of Time* departs from all preceding theoretical discussions done on the palimpsest metaphor because it does not entail temporal discussion of the past only. It is defined in this study as a term that encompasses layering done on the human mind in any given time such that the time leaves humanity baffled with trauma. Under this umbrella term, the process of mental layering happening at a certain moment is discussed. This moment has been operationally delineated as one that instils trauma, anxiety, and bewilderment among the entirety of the affected community, rendering all individuals as subjects of the phenomena under investigation. As COVID-19 was rendered as a calamity to humanity, it deemed to be a suitable choice for this study to conceptualise the term. Throughout the analysis conducted, it has been highlighted that the time that surrounded the characters was traumatic and it was etching upon the memories such that there was no turning back. Moreover, the fiction of COVID-19 pandemic brings into play a clear demarcation of the layers of new over old. While defining the term and the memory it etches as layers upon the human mind as one directly proportional to the traumatic and turbulent temporal setup surrounding the subjects, it is important to notice De Quincey's elaboration upon the palimpsest of the human brain.

He states that there are "countless writings of grief and joy" that have "inscribed themselves successively upon the palimpsest" of the brain and that it is traumatic, overbearing events such as the "hour of death" and illness such as "fever" that "revive in strength" the inscriptions upon the mind (145). Thus, for De Quincey, it was traumatic time, severe illness or near-death experience that evoked memories. Manning, based on De Quincey's description proposed a model, the Palimpsest of Memory, to help clearly demarcate what lay on the surface, what was blurred and distant and how, some traumatic memories were always in a flow due to their collective value to individuals in a society and remained more or less foregrounded at the forefront of memory due to its "repetitive recollections" (238). Keeping these definitions as base, I proposed the term *Palimpsest of Time* such that to refer to any memory to be discussed under this term, it needs to have memory etched upon the palimpsest of the brain in traumatic, tumultuous, and troubling time. Moreover, the fact that thriving in such a time that has nothing but uncertainty, trauma and morbidity to offer, the layers inscribed are synonymous with all subjects who are affected. To help elucidate this concept, fiction of COVID-19 was used because of the trauma COVID-19 brought and because of how this turbulent time was globally synonymous for the entire humanity.

As I investigate the effect on the layering done due to the environment that surrounds characters, I suggest that it is pertinent that the term *Palimpsest of Time* should be delimited to discussing literature produced only during the turbulent time in which the characters thrive. For this study, the literature was produced amid COVID-19. Post-COVID-19 fiction was not selected to help the study garb the nature of the tumultuous time when uncertainty was at its peak. Furthermore, this study finds that the usage of the term *Palimpsest of Time* may be employed such that when used in theoretical debates, it transports the literati back to the era, the time that is being referred to. Thus, when discussing the *Palimpsest of Time* of COVID-19 era, the academia can intrinsically recall what the pandemic brought to the world.

Another finding of this study further explicates the above conceptualized term such that the entire texts produced in a particular era, become palimpsests. In today's modern globalised world, there are no parchments that need to be erased and reused but the fact that print form can also be a metaphoric parchment has been of particular interest in this study. Literature produced in a particular era, COVID-19 in the case of

this study, is a portal to the happenings of that era. Reading literature produced during the time of coronavirus transports the reader to the grim realities and uncertainties that surrounded that characters. Thus, just like palimpsestic parchments of the ancient times helped us in the modern time delve into the ancient world, literature produced among particular eras transports us to that particular time. Therefore, this study finds that the selected COVID-19 fiction for this study, may be viewed as a modern palimpsestic parchment, that can be retrieved from the archives of print and electronic libraries, to delve into the time showcased by the texts allowing it to resurface.

6.3 Recommendations for Further Work

Having conducted this study, has enabled me to bring into literature a new way of viewing and discussing the palimpsest metaphor as defined by De Quincey. Rather than just entailing discussions on palimpsests through memory, and evoking pasts in the present by peeling layers, active discussion of the formation of such palimpsests needs to be incorporated in theoretical debates. Moreover, while discussing the process of the formation of palimpsestic layers at any given time, the temporal setup should be entailed. In this context, the term conceptualised in the study aligns with the above recommendation. Using the term *Palimpsest of Time* can help further research discern the essential features of the nature of layers formed on palimpsest of the mind and their direct relation the temporal setup under investigation.

Where more research can be conducted on fiction produced within COVID-19 era, such as the anthology *And We Came Outside and Saw the Stars* Again edited by Ilan Stavans published in 2020. Divided into five sections, this anthology includes poems, essays, fiction, reports, letters, allegories, parables, discourses, memoirs, and reporting, as well as photographs and artwork that tell tales of the pandemic of 2019. Fifty-two contributors contributed to it representing 35 countries from around the world. Using it as a ground for investigating the term conceptualised, will render insights into the intricacies and nuanced dimensions of its meaning, shedding light on its contextual relevance and providing a rich tapestry for comprehensive analysis.

In a similar vein, a collection of short stories and poems titled *The Stained-Glass Window- Stories of the Pandemic from Pakistan* edited by Sana Munir and Taha Kehar, published in 2020 can be used for further research. Twenty-six writers of Pakistani origin have contributed to this collection and spans different genres all

centred upon the COVID-19 pandemic and the miseries it brought to humanity. Conducting research on this fictional work will help the researcher to bring in a perspective of the pandemic and its ramification on the Pakistani society through Pakistani fiction. The fact that the collection was printed and published amid the pandemic time makes it a well-suited choice to investigate the term, *Palimpsest of Time.*

This study recommends using the term conceptualised for investigating works of literature produced on events other than COVID1-19 yet harrowing in nature. This could entail fictional works produced in times of war and displacement. In contemporary times, the fiction produced on the Palestine-Israel conflict such as the memoir *Looking for Palestine* by Najla Said could be used to conduct research of how displacement etched upon the mind of the protagonist. In a parallel fashion, war literature produced upon various wars including the Afghan war, Iraq war, Ukraine war and other such times that etch trauma upon the minds of the characters can be used as works for conducting research.

While this study has focused upon conceptualizing the term *Palimpsest of Time* and sets the urge for more research to be done on this line, it also focuses on texts from an era being potential palimpsests such that they transport the reader back to the time being described within the fictional work. Zadie Smith's *Intimations* is one such work that delineates the experience of lockdown and isolation through powerful personal essays. Reading through, and noticing the grim details provided, it can be noted how the text transports the reader to the depressing time of seclusion.

Thus, to conclude, I am hopeful that my contribution to research proves useful for further research. The recommendations for future studies emphasise the need for ongoing investigation and progress in this area. The identified gaps and constraints in the current study offer a promising opportunity for future research, encouraging academics to explore unexplored areas in more depth. Researchers should prioritise improving current procedures, integrating multiple viewpoints, and embracing creative approaches to effectively tackle the changing difficulties within the current theoretical debate.

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