

THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED: EXPLORING THE UNCANNY IN *VIOLETA*



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I hereby declare that this project titled “The Return of the Repressed: Exploring the Uncanny in *Violeta*” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Jeena Ann Joseph, Assistant Professor, Department of English.



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CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled “The Return of the Repressed: Exploring the Uncanny in *Violeta*” by Aima Jude is a record of bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.



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The project, titled “The Return of the Repressed: Exploring the Uncanny in *Violeta*,” uncovers a comprehensive understanding of the traumatic existence in the midst of a pandemic and emphasizes the concepts of the uncanny, trauma, and the feeling of dread within oneself as a result of the pandemic. Pandemic literature can help connect people across different historical periods and time zones who have experienced similar tragedies. The novel *Violeta* explores the emotional journey of its protagonist, who overcomes the hardships and trauma brought by the Spanish flu and COVID-19 pandemics. This project examines the characteristics of pandemic literature and asserts that *Violeta* is a poignant example of this genre, highlighting the unforeseen and unsettling nature of pandemics, which can lead to trauma and a pervasive sense of unease in society. The project is divided into four chapters, including the Introduction and Conclusion. The first chapter deals with trauma and describes the effects of pandemics on individuals and society at large, as well as their consequences, types and causes. The second chapter explores the concept of the uncanny and dread instilled in individuals after a pandemic, and how this concept is portrayed in the novel. The project thus confirms *Violeta* as a representative novel of Pandemic Literature.

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Introduction

A pandemic is defined as a disease that spreads over a whole country or the whole world (“Pandemic”). An outbreak that is rapidly spreading throughout a localized community or region that is not stopping down is called an epidemic. An epidemic that has spread internationally is called a pandemic. Once confined to an area alone, the disease now spreads to other countries and continents, often infecting a significant number of individuals in a very short period of time. The global impact of a pandemic often results in significant economic and social consequences. A disease can become endemic to an area if it persists as an epidemic or pandemic for long periods of time. Endemic describes a disease that remains present at a steady rate in a particular area, with generally predictable patterns of infection and transmission. As a result, endemic diseases are easier to control and prevent from causing future outbreaks. A pandemic thus refers to the widespread presence of an infectious disease that has spread across a whole country or the world at a particular time. It is an epidemic of an infectious disease that has spread across a large region, affecting a substantial number of individuals.

The English term “pandemic” comes from the ancient Greek adjective *pandemos*, which means “of” or “belonging to” the whole people, “public” (*pan*, “all,” and *demos*, “people”). When the term “pandemic” was revived in early modern science, it was often used as a synonym for epidemic, but with a sense closer to the current meaning of the word endemic, as a disease that is permanently established in a population, rather than one that suddenly falls upon a population. The term was coined to describe a widespread epidemic that affects a large geographic area, possibly even worldwide, and involves a significant proportion of the population. The term has gained prominence, particularly during times of major global health crises.

Historical accounts of epidemics are often vague or contradictory in describing how victims were affected. A rash accompanied by a fever might be smallpox, measles, scarlet fever, or varicella, and it is possible that epidemics overlapped, with multiple infections striking the same population at once. It is often impossible to know the exact causes of mortality, although ancient DNA studies can sometimes detect residues of certain pathogens. It is assumed that, prior to the neolithic revolution around 10,000 BC, disease outbreaks were limited to a single family or clan and did not spread widely before dying out. The domestication of animals increased human-animal contact, increasing the possibility of zoonotic infections. The advent of agriculture and trade between settled groups, made it possible for pathogens to spread widely. As population increased, contact between groups became more frequent. A history of epidemics maintained by the Chinese Empire from 243 B.C. to 1911 A.C. shows an approximate correlation between the frequency of epidemics and the growth of the population.

There have been 249 Pandemics throughout recorded history from 1200 BC, up to the Covid- 19 virus today. Throughout history, as humans spread across the world, infectious diseases have been a constant companion. Even in this modern era, outbreaks are nearly constant. The most fatal pandemic in recorded history was the Black Death, also known as The Plague which killed an estimated 75-200 million people in the 14th century. The most recent pandemics include the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the 2009 H1N1 pandemic and the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost all these diseases still circulate among humans though their impact now is far less.

The 1918–1920 flu pandemic, also known as the Great Influenza epidemic or by the common misnomer Spanish flu, was an exceptionally deadly global influenza pandemic caused by the H1N1 influenza A virus. The pandemic broke out near the end of World War I, when wartime censors in the belligerent countries suppressed bad news to maintain morale,

but newspapers freely reported the outbreak in neutral Spain, creating a false impression of Spain as the epicentre and leading to the Spanish flu misnomer.

The COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the coronavirus pandemic, is a global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2. The novel virus was first identified in an outbreak in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019. Attempts to contain it there failed, allowing the virus to spread to other areas of Asia and then worldwide in early 2020. The pandemic caused severe social and economic disruption around the world, including the largest global recession since the Great Depression. Widespread supply shortages, including food shortages, were caused by supply chain disruptions and panic buying. Educational institutions and public areas were partially or fully closed in many jurisdictions, and many events were cancelled or postponed during 2020 and 2021. Many white-collar workers began working from home (Coronavirus).

Comparisons between the influenza pandemic and COVID-19 have been widespread as the economist's scramble for some map of how this outbreak might unfold. Through a medical lens, it could be asked which virus is worse. Some differences between the two outbreaks are already clear: the 1918-19 pandemic killed healthy young adults at astonishing rates, and influenza seemed like a familiar rather than a new threat, despite the unique virulence of the strain, which meant it was even easier to dismiss—at least at first. And the timing mattered: the influenza pandemic came on the heels of the deadliest war the world had yet to see, an overlap that meant the pandemic received far less attention, despite killing so many more people. The second mass-death event in five years, the pandemic arrived when the world was already overrun with corpses and grief.

Pandemics have been a long-standing object of study by economists, though with declining interest, that is until COVID-19 arrived. Economists reviewed current knowledge

on the pandemics' effects on long-term economic development, spanning economic and historical debates. All economic inputs are potentially affected. Pandemics reduce the workforce and human capital, have mixed effects on investment and savings, but potentially positive consequences for innovation and knowledge development, depending on accompanying institutional change. In the absence of an innovative response supporting income redistribution, pandemics tend to increase income inequalities, worsening poverty traps and highlighting the distributional issues built into insurance-based health insurance systems. It is found that the effects of pandemics are asymmetric over time, in space, and among sectors and households.

In spite of having plenty of information about how viruses spread, so far medical science has not succeeded in finding a reliable cure. A sense of vulnerability and exposure is felt by all individuals, especially owing to the fact that the enemy is invisible and could be lurking in any conceivable place. It is a shape shifter; every few days there is talk of mutations. At such times people turn to earlier accounts of epidemics to learn from others experiences. Therefore, literary works that have set their narratives amidst epidemics becomes the new scriptures. People also find relief in scrutinizing this predicament through their own creative works. Yet the literature that arose from the influenza pandemic speaks to our current moment in profound ways, offering connections in precisely the realms where art excels: in emotional landscapes, in the ways a past moment reverberates into the present, in the ineffable conversation between the body's experiences and our perception of the world.

While all the people were confined within the four walls of their homes under lockdown in the wake of Covid-19, literature helped break the barriers, connecting everyone across different historical periods and time zones with others who have experienced similar tragedies. More importantly, literature shows us that we have a lot in common with others who are from distant lands and different times, encouraging the public to appreciate the fact

that they are not the only ones who are dealing with the worldwide devastation wrought by the pandemic.

The pandemic novel, firstly is a fictionalized story about a pandemic and secondly, the term could refer to a novel whose fame has spread like a pandemic. Reading stories that talk about pandemics or big disasters, can help to build a narrative, a sense, in a moment of strong destabilization: the stories, the fiction, have a form, and a resolution, somehow. Much of the literature on pandemics, the plague in particular often describes the neglect, incompetence and selfishness of those in power.

Portrayal of epidemics and pandemics can be witnessed in the literature including books, journals, articles etc. It can be traced back to 15th and 16th century with the publication of *Iliad* (1598) by Homer, *The Decameron* (1620) by Giovanni Boccaccio, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) by Daniel Defoe, *The Masque of the Red Death* (1842) by Edgar Allan Poe, *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) by Jack London, *The Plague* (1973) by Albert Camus, etc. In their works, they related the impact of epidemics and pandemics in the contemporary society. Moreover, their writings were categorised as science fiction in which they gave a detailed information about the diseases for the awareness of the common people (Lou).

Homer was a Greek poet who is credited as the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, two epic poems that are foundational works of ancient Greek literature. Homer is considered one of the most revered and influential authors in history. Homer's *Iliad* deals with Trojan War and there is a reference of Plague visited to Greek camp to punish Greeks. The *Iliad* presents a narrative framing device of disaster that results from ill-judged behaviour on the part of all of the characters involved.

Giovanni Boccaccio was an Italian writer, poet, correspondent of Petrarch, and an important Renaissance humanist. Born in the town of Certaldo, he became so well known as a writer that he was sometimes simply known as "the Certaldese" and one of the most important figures in the European literary panorama of the fourteenth century. His most notable works are *The Decameron*, a collection of short stories which in the following centuries was a determining element for the Italian literary tradition. *The Decameron* is structured as a frame story containing 100 tales told by a group of seven young women and three young men; they shelter in a secluded villa just outside Florence in order to escape the Black Death, which was afflicting the city.

Daniel Defoe was an English journalist, merchant, pamphleteer and spy. He is most famous for his novel *Robinson Crusoe*, published in 1719, which is claimed to be second only to the Bible in its number of translations. Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* deals with grief, sadness, death, survival, redemption, sin hope and faith. It was first published in March 1722. It recounts a fictionalized first-hand account of the last major epidemic of the bubonic plague that struck London in 1665 and is widely considered today to be a medical classic.

Edgar Allan Poe was an American writer, poet, author, editor, and literary critic who is best known for his poetry and short stories, particularly his tales of mystery and the macabre. He is widely regarded as a central figure of Romanticism and Gothic fiction in the United States, and of American literature. *The Masque of the Red Death* was first published in 1842. The story follows Prince Prospero's attempts to avoid a dangerous plague, known as the Red Death, by hiding in his abbey. He, along with many other wealthy nobles, hosts a masquerade ball in seven rooms of the abbey, each decorated with a different colour. In the midst of their revelry, a mysterious figure disguised as a Red Death victim enters and makes his way

through each of the rooms. Prospero dies after confronting this stranger, whose costume proves to contain nothing tangible inside it; the guests also die in turn.

John Griffith Chaney better known as Jack London was an American novelist, journalist and activist. A pioneer of commercial fiction and American magazines, he was one of the first American authors to become an international celebrity and earn a large fortune from writing. He was also an innovator in the genre that would later become known as science fiction. *The Scarlet Plague* by Jack London is a tale of Plague and it was originally published in London Magazine in 1912. The book was noted in 2020 as having been very similar to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially given London wrote it at a time when the world was not as quickly connected by travel as it is today. However, unlike COVID-19, in this story, victims died within an hour and mortality was practically hundred percentage.

Albert Camus was a French philosopher, author, dramatist, journalist, world federalist, and political activist. He was the recipient of the 1957 Nobel Prize in Literature at the age of 44, the second-youngest recipient in history. His works include *The Stranger*, *The Plague*, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *The Fall*, and *The Rebel*. *The Plague*, Albert Camus's 1947 absurdist novel, narrates the story of an epidemic sweeping through the Algerian port city of Oran from the perspective of an inhabitant living amidst the devastation. Camus based his novel on the cholera epidemic that swept through Oran's population in 1849. Oran and its surroundings were subjected to disease multiple times before Camus's novel was published.

Pandemic literature has existed since there have always been pandemics. The literature of plague, pestilence, and pandemic is marked by an effort to find, if not an explanation, at least some meaning amid the raw emotions of panic, horror, and despair. During the pandemic, the void of meaninglessness prompted a desperate attempt to find purpose through narrative and literature, like applying pressure to stop the bleeding.

Illness sees no social stratification; it comes for bishop and authoritarian theocrat, king and germophobic president alike. The final theme of the literature of pandemic, born from the awareness that this world is not ours alone, is that we can't avert our eyes from the truth, no matter how cankered and ugly it may be in the interim. Something can be both true and senseless. The presence of disease is evidence of that. Illness reminds us that the world isn't ours; literature lets us know that it is sometimes.

Governments react to pandemics by imposing quarantine, isolation, travel restrictions, and other forms of social control, and they take care of public health more than ever during these periods. Pandemics are dangerous not only to human physiological health but also to psychological and mental health. Lives are disappearing, loved ones are gone, and all our strength, including our imagination, is absorbed by the pandemic. Not only the medical world, but also our political, economic and cultural world in general is affected. Therefore, the effects of the pandemic manifest themselves in the world of art and literature: the manifestations in many forms that have the power to give insight to people about what is going on during this kind of crises.

Isabel Angelica Allende Llonca who was born on 2nd August 1942 is a Chilean writer. Allende is known for novels such as *The House of the Spirits* (1982) and *City of the Beasts* (2002), which have been commercially successful. Allende has been called "the world's most widely read Spanish-language author." In 2004, Allende was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and in 2010, she received Chile's National Literature Prize. President Barack Obama awarded her the 2014 Presidential Medal of Freedom. Allende's novels are often based upon her personal experience and historical events and pay homage to the lives of women, while weaving together elements of myth and realism. She has lectured

and toured many U.S. colleges to teach literature. Fluent in English, Allende was granted United States citizenship in 1993, having lived in California since 1989.

Noted author and journalist Isabel Allende is considered the first internationally successful female Latin American author. Her books have been translated into 30 languages and sold more than 51 million copies, extending her influence around the world. Her commitment to social justice and human rights is reflected in her writing and in her Isabel Allende Foundation, dedicated to the memory of her daughter, Paula, who passed away in 1992. The Foundation grants funds to organizations that promote the education, well-being and empowerment of women and children. Her literary career began in 1967 when she worked for Paula Magazine, and the children's magazine Mampato. Her writing style is known for its vivid storytelling, use of emotional words, and the magical realism style of writing.

The 2022 novel *Violeta* by Isabel Allende is a fictional autobiography that chronicles the life of the protagonist Violeta Del Valle as she experiences the tumultuous events of the 20th century. Violeta recounts her life experiences from over hundred years in the book. In the novel, Allende tackles a range of compelling and timely topics including pandemics, natural disaster, sexual assault, grief, poverty, domestic abuse, addiction, homophobia, and political unrest. Violeta's journey through the Spanish flu and coronavirus pandemics is depicted in the novel. The novel primarily focuses on a life spanning a hundred years, with two pandemics marking its beginning and end. Allende's *Violeta* is closely connected to the pandemic narrative and literature, and is therefore chosen for discussion. Plague epidemics are characterized by outbursts of violence, panic, and rebellion, as accounts throughout history reveal. The extreme suffering, constant fear of death, metaphysical dread, and sense of the uncanny felt by plagued populations can fuel their anger and political dissatisfaction.

The project, titled “The Return of the Repressed: Exploring the Uncanny in *Violeta*,” uncovers a comprehensive understanding of the traumatic existence in the midst of a pandemic and emphasizes the concepts of the uncanny, trauma, and the feeling of dread within oneself as a result of the pandemic. The first chapter deals with trauma and briefly explains the theory of trauma as an emotional response to a stressful, frightening, or distressing event. It also discusses the different types, effects, causes, and consequences of trauma. The sense of the uncanny is also explored in this section. The second chapter delves into the novel and explains the different elements of trauma prevailing in it. It focuses on the plot of the novel and how it portrays different aspects of the pandemic and the feeling of dread experienced by the protagonist and other characters. It also highlights the features of pandemic literature and argues that the novel *Violeta* resonates with pandemic literature, confirming that pandemics can cause trauma and a sense of uncanniness among the public.

Chapter 1

Understanding Trauma

Trauma is defined as a severe shock caused by an unpleasant experience, or the experience that causes this feeling (“Trauma”). Trauma stems from experiencing an event or events that are psychologically or emotionally damaging, often severely enough to overwhelm one’s ability to cope. These traumatic experiences, which may result from accidents, abuse, loss, violence, or other distressing situations, can profoundly impact mental health and emotional well-being. The after effects of trauma may include flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, and changes in one’s perception of self or reality. To heal from trauma, professional support like therapy or counselling is often needed to process the experience and regain a sense of safety and stability.

Trauma can be categorized into various types, broadly classified as:

- i) Physical Trauma: Injuries or harm to the body resulting from accidents, falls, or violence.
- ii) Emotional or Psychological Trauma: Caused by distressing events like abuse, loss, or witnessing violence, leading to emotional distress and potential long-term psychological effects.
- iii) Sexual Trauma: Involves unwanted or non-consensual sexual experiences that can have severe psychological repercussions.
- iv) Developmental Trauma: Occurs during critical stages of emotional and cognitive development, influencing one's overall well-being.
- v) Medical Trauma: Related to severe illness, medical procedures, or chronic health conditions, causing emotional distress.
- vi) Complex Trauma: Involves exposure to multiple traumatic events, often over an extended period, leading to cumulative psychological impact.
- vii) Cultural or Historical Trauma: Collective trauma experienced by a group due to historical events, discrimination, or societal injustices.

The effects of trauma can manifest in various ways, impacting an individual's mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Common effects include:

- i) **Psychological Impact:** Trauma can lead to conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorders, depression, and other mood disorders.
- ii) **Emotional Distress:** Individuals may experience heightened emotional reactions, including intense fear, sadness, anger, or emotional numbness.
- iii) **Flashbacks and Intrusive Thoughts:** Recurrent and distressing memories of the traumatic event may intrude into daily life, causing emotional distress and physical reactions.
- iv) **Dissociation:** A coping mechanism where individuals may feel disconnected from their thoughts, emotions, or surroundings as a way to manage overwhelming experiences.
- v) **Changes in Relationships:** Trauma can strain relationships, affecting one's ability to trust and connect with others. Social withdrawal or difficulty forming close bonds may result.
- vi) **Physical Symptoms:** Trauma can contribute to physical health issues, including sleep disturbances, headaches, gastrointestinal problems, and a compromised immune system.
- vii) **Cognitive Effects:** Difficulty concentrating, memory lapses, and altered perceptions of oneself and the world can occur as a result of trauma.
- viii) **Hypervigilance:** A heightened state of alertness and sensitivity to potential threats, making it challenging to relax or feel safe (Figley 208).

Trauma can be caused by a wide range of distressing events and experiences. Some common causes include:

- i) **Accidents and Injuries:** Serious accidents, physical injuries, or life-threatening situations can lead to traumatic experiences.
- ii) **Abuse:** Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, whether experienced in childhood or adulthood, can cause profound trauma.
- iii) **Violence:** Exposure to violence, such as assault, domestic violence, or witnessing violent acts, can have lasting traumatic effects.
- iv) **Loss and Grief:** The death of a loved one, separation, or significant loss can trigger emotional trauma.
- v) **Natural Disasters and Pandemics:** Events like earthquakes, floods, or hurricanes can result in traumatic experiences.

due to the sudden and overwhelming nature of the disaster. vi) Medical Trauma: Severe illnesses, medical procedures, or chronic health conditions can lead to physical and emotional trauma. vii) War and Conflict: Military combat, exposure to war zones, and other conflict-related experiences can cause trauma. viii) Acculturation Stress: Immigrants or refugees may experience trauma related to the challenges of adapting to a new culture, discrimination, or displacement. ix) Bullying: Persistent bullying, whether in school, the workplace, or online, can result in psychological trauma. x) Developmental Trauma: Adverse experiences during critical stages of development, especially in childhood, can impact emotional and cognitive well-being.

The consequences of trauma can have profound and wide-ranging impacts on an individual's life. Some common consequences include: i) Psychological Disorders: Trauma can contribute to the development of various mental health disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders. ii) Emotional Dysregulation: Individuals may struggle to manage and regulate their emotions, experiencing heightened reactivity, mood swings, or emotional numbness. iii) Impaired Relationships: Trauma can strain relationships, leading to difficulties in forming and maintaining connections due to trust issues, communication challenges, or emotional distancing. iv) Physical Health Issues: Chronic stress from trauma may contribute to physical health problems such as sleep disturbances, headaches, cardiovascular issues, and compromised immune function. v) Substance Abuse: Some individuals may turn to substance abuse as a coping mechanism to numb or escape from the emotional pain associated with trauma. vi) Self-Harming Behaviours: Trauma can sometimes lead to self-destructive behaviours, including self-harm or engaging in risky activities as a way to cope. vii) Cognitive Impairments: Difficulties with concentration, memory, and decision-making may arise as cognitive functions are affected by the emotional toll of trauma. viii) Isolation and

Withdrawal: Trauma survivors may withdraw from social activities and isolate themselves, impacting their overall quality of life. ix) Hypervigilance: A heightened state of alertness and constant scanning for potential threats can contribute to chronic stress and anxiety. x) Impact on Identity: Trauma can alter one's sense of self and worldview, leading to a re-evaluation of personal beliefs, values, and identity.

Trauma studies, also known as trauma research or trauma psychology, is a multidisciplinary field that examines the impact of trauma on individuals and communities. It was first developed in 1990 and explores the psychological, rhetorical, and cultural significance of trauma in literature and society. This field provides valuable insights for mental health practices, policy development, and community well-being by shedding light on the complex impact of trauma on individuals and societies. The history of trauma psychology dates back to about 1900 BC, when ancient medical writings first described symptoms that are now considered traumatic stress reactions. The term “trauma” has been used in medicine since at least the late 17th century to describe physical injuries from an external source (Gold et al.).

Freud’s place in the history of trauma is an important and crucial one. Freud’s early trauma theory is clearly depicted in his paper *The Aetiology of Hysteria* (1896). In this paper he talks about the sexual abuse of children below the age of puberty and its possible causation of mental illness in adults. It is in this paper where Freud first outlined his seduction theory. According to the theory, a repressed memory of an early childhood sexual abuse or molestation experience was the essential precondition for hysterical or obsessional symptoms, with the addition of an active sexual experience up to the age of eight for the latter. In the cases of hysteria with which he worked, Freud stated that going back and excavating the earliest experiences in childhood would reveal memories of sexual content. This was the basis for Freud’s trauma or seduction theory. Freud, however, did not find the

sexual abuse in childhood directly causative of the hysterical or trauma reactions later in life. For Freud the, the sexual abuse was not traumatic. Instead, he proposed that the initial sexual violation in childhood occurred too early for it to be remembered and integrated into awareness and the memory was unconsciously repressed.

The topic of the “uncanny” falls into this category. Uncanny is defined as strange or mysterious, often in a way that is slightly frightening (“Uncanny”). Canny is from the Anglo-Saxon root *ken* meaning knowledge, understanding, or cognizance; mental perception. Thus, the uncanny is something outside one's familiar knowledge or perceptions. The German word “*unheimlich*” is the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, meaning familiar, native, belonging to the home. The uncanny is often frightening because it is unfamiliar and unknown. The concept of the Uncanny was later elaborated on and developed by Sigmund Freud in his 1919 essay *Das Unheimliche* or, *The Uncanny*. His theory was rooted in everyday experiences and the aesthetics of popular culture, related to what is frightening, repulsive and distressing. Freud's essay is written in two parts. The first part explores the etymology of the words *heimlich* and *unheimlich* or homely and unhomely, their uses in the German dictionary and how these words are used in other languages. In the second part, Freud begins to tackle people, things, self-expressions, experiences and situations that best represent the uncanny feeling. Examples of situations that can provoke an uncanny feeling include inanimate objects coming alive, thoughts appearing to have an effect in the real world, seeing your double or the doppelganger effect, representations of death such as ghosts or spirits, and involuntary repetitions. The uncanny arises when childhood beliefs we have grown out of suddenly seem real. Freud called it ‘the return of the repressed’.

In Isabel Allende's novel *Violeta*, the sense of the uncanny is felt throughout the novel by the protagonist Violeta. Sadness and suffering haunts Violeta throughout her life. Her childhood innocence is robbed by a family tragedy, plunging her family into abject poverty.

She is abused in the name of love, and suffers from the death of friends and family. Allende creates a sense of stability in Violeta's life, that feels like the calm before the storm, only to shatter it with grief, breaking the serenity with new chapters of life, making space for new people with their own unique stories. She endures the most heart wrenching experiences. The novel deals with two pandemics namely, the Spanish flu and Coronavirus. The sense of fear and the feeling of difficulty are portrayed by each character in the story. The different ways in which the characters overcome the uncanny are depicted in the novel shedding light on the mental and physical health effects and the coping mechanisms used to bravely face these pandemics.

Chapter 2

Exploring the Uncanny

The feeling of dread that arises during pandemics and natural disasters is significant and should be acknowledged. A sense of unease is prevalent among the public, leading to havoc and panic. During pandemics, people often experience a fear of death and uncertainty about when the crisis will end. Isolation can lead to depression and an increase in suicide rates. Socially active individuals may also experience depression, and extroverts may become more introverted. Productivity may decrease, leading to job loss and increased unemployment and poverty levels. Excessive screen time can hinder communication and socialization, and students may struggle with the transition to online learning, negatively impacting their academic performance (Ruers).

“I was born in 1920, during the influenza pandemic, and I’m going to die in 2020, during the outbreak of coronavirus. What an elegant name for such a terrible scourge” (*Violeta* 313). *Violeta* by Isabel Allende explores themes of authority, righteousness, pandemics, fate, family, love, and revival. The novel celebrates female courage and resilience in overcoming life's obstacles. Violeta’s story of survival during the Spanish flu pandemic is told in the context of the current pandemic. It is also a story of endurance through so much hardship and political unrest and turmoil where government officials and death squads acted with absolute impunity.

The story explores her relationships with her son and daughter, her brother a lifelong supporter and ally of Violeta. However central to the story is her passionate and often violent relationship with her husband, as they spent much of their time together in a perpetual cycle of love and hate. More importantly it is a story of personal growth and sacrifice and learning to play the best game with the cards you are dealt (Reads).

Violeta is a captivating story that follows the life of Violeta Del Valle through a century of significant change. The main character, Violeta, is complex and compelling, displaying both strength and vulnerability, defiance and loyalty. The book's character development is evident from the beginning, as Violeta recounts her life story in the form of a letter to her beloved grandson, Camilo. The book is divided into four parts, each corresponding to specific periods of Violeta's life and presented in chronological order.

The first part, titled 'Exile', covers the first two decades of her life, from 1920 to 1940. Violeta is born into the aristocratic Del Valle family during the influenza pandemic. She describes her family members, including her parents, unmarried maternal aunts, oldest brother, Jose Antonio, an orphan named Torito, and her Irish governess, Josephine Taylor. After her father, Arsenio Del Valle, loses everything in the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and dies by suicide, the family is forced to sell most of their belongings and move to the countryside. They are taken in by Josephine's lover Teresa Rivas's parents, who have a farm, Santa Clara, in the southern province of Nahuel. The years Violeta spends there are extremely educational and enriching for her.

The second part, titled 'Passion', covers the next two decades of Violeta's life. Violeta marries Fabian Schmidt-Engler, a German immigrant and veterinarian, but their marriage ends when she begins an affair with Julian Bravo, a pilot. She then moves to fictional Sacramento and helps Jose Antonio with his prefabricated home business. Eventually, Violeta has two children with Julian; a son named Juan Martin and a daughter named Nieves. Despite this, Fabian refuses to grant her an annulment. However, Violeta and Julian start living together as a couple, and their relationship is eventually accepted by society. Julian begins flying private flights in Argentina, Cuba, and Miami; first for secret government operations, then for the mafia and Castro-led rebels plotting to overthrow the Cuban government. Once Fulgencio Batista's Cuban dictatorship falls and the Cuban flights are no longer profitable,

Julián moves his base to Miami. Violeta stays in Sacramento with the business and the children. Julian visits them often, but his relationship with Violeta is volatile and abusive. The Valdivian earthquake of 1960 damages the house in Santa Clara, and Teresa passes away in the aftermath. A grieving Josephine eventually marries Jose Antonio, who has loved her since she first came to live with the Del Valles. Fabian, in need of money to finance a new research lab, finally sells Violeta the annulment.

The third part, 'Absence', covers Violeta's life from 1960 to 1983. She sees a psychiatrist, with whose help she finally breaks off her relationship with Julian. Julian, in turn, appoints another one of his lovers, Zoraida Abreu, to take care of his illegal businesses in Miami. As Julian and Violeta's children grow up, Julian grows more distant from their son while developing an unhealthy, almost obsessive relationship with their daughter. Nieves eventually runs away from home and falls into a life of substance addiction and sex work. Julian hires a private detective named Roy Cooper to keep track of Nieves, occasionally forcibly admitting her to rehab centres. However, she continually runs away from rehab. Nieves eventually becomes pregnant and reaches out to Roy for help. He sets her up in a friend's home in Los Angeles, California, and, having begun a romantic relationship with Violeta, informs her about the situation. Violeta stays with Nieves throughout her pregnancy, repairing her relationship with her daughter. Nieves dies in childbirth, and Violeta brings Nieves's son, Camilo, back to the fictional Sacramento.

The political situation in Violeta's country worsens. A Socialist president is democratically elected, but there is constant disagreement within the coalition parties, and propaganda and pushback from the right-wing parties backed by the United States. Juan Martin, who campaigned for the Socialist president, is ban-listed when a military coup topples the government. Violeta attempts to have him transported across national borders by smuggling him into Santa Clara from Sacramento and having Torito accompany him from

there on foot. Weeks later, she learns that Torito, who hasn't returned, was taken away by military officers, and she has no news of him or Juan Martin for years. She doesn't believe Julián when he claims to have no information either.

Violeta eventually discovers that Juan Martin is working as a journalist in Argentina. He is forced to flee to Norway when a military coup arrives in Argentina but adapts well to life in his new home. Simultaneously, Violeta meets Harald Fiske, a Norwegian diplomat and birdwatching enthusiast who visits Violeta's country every year for the latter. He brings her news of Juan Martin from Norway. Following a long struggle with a weakened heart and dementia, Jose Antonio passes away; Josephine, who battled cancer for a long time, follows him a year later.

The fourth part, titled 'Rebirth', recounts the last decades of Violeta's life, from 1983 to 2020. When human bones are discovered in a sealed-up cave near Nahuel, Violeta finally learns that Torito was among a group of tenant farmers shot dead by military officers. She also discovers that Julian knew about both Torito and Juan Martin; this, in addition to his continued secret work with Colonia Esperanza, leaves Violeta desiring revenge. With Zoraida's help, Violeta sees Julian arrested for illegal work, including fraud and drug trafficking, in the United States. Following his time in prison, Julian moves to a ranch in Patagonia, Chile.

News of Torito's death changes the course of Violeta's life. She begins a new phase of activism and social work, getting involved with women's groups and their work and starting a foundation in Nieves's name dedicated to working for women's issues. Roy passes away of cancer, but just a year later, Harald re-enters her life and eventually becomes her loving husband. As Camilo grows up, the once rebellious and mischievous boy decides to enter the seminary. Violeta continues her work well into her nineties with vigour and enthusiasm when

Harald, 13 years younger than her, passes away on her 95th birthday, however, she comes to terms with her mortality. A few years later, she falls, and her physical health deteriorates, but she is left with time and space to write her life story. The final chapter sees Violeta writing in the last days of her life, isolated at Santa Clara owing to the coronavirus pandemic and bedridden by a haemorrhage. As the book closes, Violeta sees her daughter, Nieves, come to greet her as she dies.

In the final section, 'Rebirth', a priest discovers a cave full of corpses. Torito's body is among the dead. Violeta suspects that Julian tipped off government officials as to Torito's whereabouts; she collaborates with one of Julián's girlfriends to expose his involvement with drug trafficking and tax fraud. Violeta and Roy often take vacations together, but Roy eventually dies of cancer. Violeta grows close with the other women who found remains of their loved ones in the cave. She uses her considerable financial resources to support women's rights in her country, particularly after the collapse of the military regime. Violeta marries Harald Fiske and they visit Norway together. Camilo, meanwhile, proves to be a troublesome and rebellious young man, but later decides to become a priest. On Violeta's ninety-fifth birthday, Harald dies of a heart attack. In the final chapter, Violeta returns to Santa Clara. The coronavirus pandemic begins. She says goodbye to Camilo and prepares to die after one hundred years of life.

"The world is paralyzed, and humanity is in quarantine. It is a strange symmetry that I was born in one pandemic and will die during another" (314). Violeta, as mentioned above was born to a wealthy family, in the aftermath of The Great War and the Spanish flu pandemic. At a young age, she experiences the effects of the Great Depression and the social discontent that followed. So, from her birth itself Violeta has been through a lot of emotional or psychological traumas. She had to face a number of difficulties in the age of her development. She grew in a disturbed atmosphere. She did not have a chance to go to school,

instead her parents appointed Josephine Taylor as her governess. She faced developmental trauma due to the unstable conditions in which she was grown up.

Violeta discovered her father after he had shot himself. He was driven to this desperate act by the collapse of the government, financial ruin, and the threat of eviction. He was also afraid of being arrested for fraud and tax evasion.

...and then I saw my father slumped in the chair behind his desk. I thought he was sleeping, but the stillness of the air and the faint smell of gunpowder alerted me that something was amiss. My father shot himself through the temple with the English revolver he'd bought during the pandemic. The bullet lodged cleanly in his brain, the entry point a black hole the size of a coin, a thin trail of blood trickling from the wound down to the paisley design on his Indian smoking jacket and from there to the carpet, which absorbed the stain. I remained frozen at his side for an eternity, observing him, the coffee mug trembling in my hands, whispering to him, "Dad, Dad." I can still remember with perfect clarity the feeling of emptiness and terrible calm that came over me and would last until long after the funeral. (52)

This was when she was just a little girl but even after so many years, she could still remember the scene of her father dead from a bullet wound. It was as if this scene was etched in her memory with the precision of a photograph and reappeared in her dreams continuously. Around the age of fifty she used to spend several months in therapy with a psychiatrist who understood her and helped her overcome this. She did not feel horror or sadness anymore but she could clearly describe what the emptiness and calm she felt, at the time without feeling overwhelmed by emotion.

Trauma inflicted by historical events can have lasting effects that are passed down through generations. Allende explores the importance of memory and storytelling in preserving cultural identity and collective memory. Characters often grapple with the traumatic events of the past, seeking to make sense of their experiences and find healing through remembrance, resilience, and solidarity. Most of the characters in the novel experience exile or displacement as a result of political persecution, economic hardship, or social upheaval. Forced to leave their homeland behind, they confront the trauma of displacement, loss of identity, and the challenges of adapting to new environments while preserving cultural heritage. After the death of her father, they had to migrate which also affected her. She had to cope up with the new changes. It was in her initial stage of growth that she had to go through these and thus had to go through developmental trauma. Her father's death paved way to her emotional trauma. Her family's migration caused a trigger in her mind where she was forced to leave her own house and country and move to an unknown land where she met new people and followed new customs.

Throughout her 100 years, Violeta experienced the deaths of many people close to her. Allende describes each character's approach to death quite differently. Jose Antonio fought off dying, Josephine died quietly and stoically, Arsenio committed suicide, Roy Cooper kept his cancer a secret until his death, Facunda had a sudden and painless end and Harald died of heart failure.

"Harald had a nice life and a nice death. He went out singing, drinking, and in love, but for me it was a heavy blow; my heart broke" (308). The fear of the pandemics is always prevailing in the novel and in the heart of Violeta. After the Spanish flu, the fear of the pandemic coming again was always inside her. She kept it suppressed inside her mind but exactly after 100 years later, the fear resurfaced again in the form of Covid. The history repeated itself, and she found the subject was unavoidable.

Pandemic literature, encompassing a broader spectrum than just novels, reflects the societal, psychological, and scientific dimensions of disease outbreaks. Pandemic novels, often classified as a subset of dystopian or apocalyptic fiction, explore the consequences of widespread disease outbreaks on societies and individuals. Here are some common features found in pandemic novels:

- i) **Global Catastrophe:** Pandemic novels typically depict the rapid spread of a deadly virus or disease on a global scale. The outbreak often leads to widespread panic, breakdown of infrastructure, and significant loss of life.
- ii) **Survival Struggles:** Characters in pandemic novels must navigate the challenges of survival in a world ravaged by disease. This includes finding food, shelter, medical supplies, and protection from both the virus and other survivors who may resort to violence or desperation.
- iii) **Isolation and Quarantine:** Quarantine measures, enforced by authorities or self-imposed by survivors, play a significant role in pandemic novels. Characters may be confined to their homes, quarantine zones, or isolated communities as they attempt to avoid exposure to the virus.
- iv) **Social Disintegration:** Pandemic novels often explore the breakdown of social structures and norms in the face of crisis. Governments may collapse, institutions may fail, and social order may disintegrate as fear and desperation drive people to extreme behaviour.
- v) **Ethical Dilemmas:** Characters in pandemic novels are frequently confronted with difficult ethical decisions. They may be forced to weigh the value of individual lives against the greater good, grapple with issues of resource allocation, and confront moral ambiguity in a world where traditional ethical frameworks may no longer apply.
- vi) **Scientific and Medical Themes:** Many pandemic novels incorporate themes related to science, medicine, and epidemiology. Characters may include scientists, doctors, and researchers working to understand the nature of the virus, develop a cure or vaccine, and contain its spread.
- vii) **Psychological Impact:** Pandemic novels explore the psychological toll of living through a global health crisis. Characters may experience fear, grief, trauma, and existential despair as they confront the fragility of life and

the collapse of the world they once knew. viii) Hope and Resilience: Despite the bleakness of their circumstances, pandemic novels often emphasize themes of hope and resilience.

Characters may find strength in their connections to others, draw inspiration from acts of kindness and sacrifice, and ultimately strive to rebuild their lives and communities in the wake of devastation (Jones).

These features contribute to the compelling narratives and thought-provoking themes that characterize pandemic novels that contemplate the fragility of human civilization and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of unimaginable adversity.

The novel *Violeta* resonates themes and characteristics prevalent in pandemic literature like: i) Social Disruption: *Violeta* delves into the impact of a disease outbreak, examining societal upheaval through the lens of political turmoil and historical events, which mirrors the chaos seen in pandemic narratives. ii) Personal Struggle and Resilience: The protagonist, Violeta faces personal challenges and adversities that reflect the resilience seen in pandemic literature. iii) Exploration of Human Connections: The characters navigate complex interpersonal dynamics and form bonds in the face of adversity, echoing themes of connection and community found in pandemic literature. iv) Themes of Fear and Uncertainty: The novel explores similar emotional landscapes through its portrayal of characters grappling with uncertainty and the unknown. v) Resilience and Adaptation: Characters in the novel demonstrate resilience as they confront challenges and adapt to changing circumstances, echoing the themes of resilience found in pandemic literature.

Conclusion

The pandemic has had profound effects on societies worldwide, touching almost every aspect of human life. The pandemic has put immense strain on healthcare systems globally. Hospitals and medical facilities have been overwhelmed with patients, leading to shortages of beds, medical supplies, and personnel. Healthcare workers have faced unprecedented challenges and risks during the pandemics. It has forced healthcare systems to reprioritize resources and reallocate funding to address the immediate needs of patients. Pandemics had significant effects on the economy, including lockdowns and restrictions aimed at controlling the spread of the virus that led to reduced consumer spending, business closures, and disrupted supply chains, all of which contribute to a decrease in economic activity. Businesses may lay off employees or shut down entirely during a pandemic, leading to increased unemployment rates and decreased household income. This can result in widespread job losses across different sectors, leading to increased unemployment rates.

Pandemics impacted education in several ways for example, school closures disrupt regular learning routines, leading to gaps in education and potential learning loss, particularly for students without access to remote learning resources. Social isolation, anxiety about health, and uncertainty can negatively affect students' mental well-being, leading to decreased focus, motivation, and academic performance. School closures deprive students of the social interactions crucial for their emotional and social development, potentially leading to feelings of loneliness and isolation.

The pandemics has had significant effects on mental health worldwide. Lockdowns, social distancing measures, and restrictions on gatherings have resulted in increased feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Many people have experienced the loss of loved ones due to the pandemics, and the inability to properly grieve or hold traditional funeral services has

added to the emotional burden. Pandemics have significantly impacted globalization and travel in several ways as it often led to the imposition of travel restrictions and the tightening of border controls, hindering the flow of goods, services, and people across countries. Travel bans, quarantine measures, and fear of infection lead to a significant decrease in travel, both domestically and internationally, affecting tourism, business travel, and migration patterns.

The project attempted to explore the traumatic experiences of the people who have been through the pandemics and have faced the negative impacts of the disastrous epidemics. It mainly focused on the novel *Violeta* by Isabel Allende, which is a pandemic novel published in 2022. Violeta, the protagonist of the novel lives for 100 years. The novel sheds light on her life experiences; she was born during a pandemic and died during the another. In the project, attention is drawn towards the personal experiences of the characters and stories, about what they have lost, what they had left behind. This study is to discover the real-life experiences of the characters during pandemics in the novel *Violeta*.

The pandemics had a significant impact on the characters' daily lives, leaving them with painful and traumatic memories that shattered their identities and affected their new lives. The lingering effects of trauma are evident in many facets of their lives, and a pervasive sense of unease pervades the novel. Fear, triggered by the perception of danger, motivates safety behaviours and plays a major role in the story. Symptoms of anxiety and depression rose during the pandemic, especially among those who lost jobs loss, young adults, and women.

The theory of trauma is briefly explained in the project as an emotional response to a stressful, frightening, or distressing event. Its different types, effects, causes and consequences are also discussed. The sense of the uncanny is also explored in the project. It further sheds light on the plot of the novel and how the novel portrays different aspects of the

pandemic and the feeling of dread experienced by the protagonist and other characters. It also highlights the features of pandemic literature and confirms that the novel *Violeta* resonates with pandemic literature, emphasizing that pandemics are unforeseen causing trauma and a sense of uncanniness among the public. The novel *Violeta* can be confirmed as a pandemic novel, as it illustrates all the characteristics of a pandemic novel and demonstrates its profound impact on humans.

Defining literature in wider perspective, it can be seen as an imitation of human life and action; it is a reflection of human society. Literature not only reflects society but also serves as a mirror in which members of society can look at themselves and see the need for positive change. Pandemics often elicit complex emotions in individuals and societies, characterized by uncertainty, unease, and a sense of the uncanny as they disrupt normalcy and create uncertainty about the future. Recognizing and understanding these psychological reactions can foster resilience and help people cope with the challenges caused by pandemics. Novels like *Violeta*, where the protagonist lives through two pandemics, create awareness about overcoming adversity in times of uncertainty. As we face uncertainty about future pandemics, such narratives undoubtedly influence society and culture by providing knowledge and lessons about survival. Literature being a cultural artefact continue to capture life for posterity.

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