

A PSYCHOANALYTIC EXEGESIS OF TRAUMA IN COVID-19 POETRY: ROBERTS, SMITHA AND ADIMORA-EZEIGBO IN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: For thousands of years, pandemics have influenced human history, having a significant effect on economies, civilizations, and cultures. After first appearing in late 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic quickly spread over the world and affected almost every sphere of human existence. It has had a significant psychological and emotional impact in addition to its well-documented physical effects. Throughout history, poetry has functioned as a profound means of self-expression and a reservoir of collective memory, especially during times of crisis. The scope of this study is limited to analysing three poems written during or in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. They are “Yellow Was Her Colour” by Linda Roberts (Canada), “Misery” by Smitha T. G. (India), and “Song of a Caged Bird” by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo (Nigeria). These poems, selected from published anthologies, *COVID-19 Pandemic Poems*, *The Sky is Falling: A Collection of Pandemic Poems*, and *World on the Brinks: An Anthology of COVID-19 Pandemic*, respectively, reflect a broad range of voices, genres, and emotional registers. Although it does not attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of all COVID-19 poetry, the study aims to emphasize recurring themes of trauma representation and argue for poetry's role as both a symptom of and a solution to crises. We also aim to add to the current academic discussions in literary trauma studies, psychoanalytic critique, and literature related to pandemics. We have used Caruth's trauma theory to analyse the poems because it provides an appropriate framework for examining how poetry resolves the conundrum of expressing the inexpressible.

Keywords: Pandemic Poetry, COVID-19, Trauma Theory, Death, Psychoanalysis

INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, pandemics have influenced human history, having a significant effect on economies, civilizations, and cultures. They have led to improvements in medicine and disease prevention while revealing weaknesses in public health systems, from historical epidemics to contemporary crises. A quarter of Athens' population perished in the Plague of Athens (430–426 BC), one of the first known pandemics, which occurred during the Peloponnesian War. Historians suggest that it might have been smallpox or typhoid disease, but the precise pathogen is still unclear. Athens was ultimately defeated by Sparta, due to the epidemic's political and military debilitation. Others include the Black Death (1347–1351), the Plague of Justinian (541–543), the

Antonine plague (165–180 CE), and cholera, which became a worldwide hazard in 1817 after the first pandemic started in India. Six more cholera pandemics broke out throughout the following century, spreading via contaminated water sources. Millions of cholera cases are reported worldwide each year because of the seventh pandemic, which started in 1961. Millions of people were also killed by the Spanish flu (1918–1919), the Asian flu (1957–1959), the Hong Kong flu (1968–1970), and the Russian flu (1889–1893). Many deaths have also been caused recently by the HIV/AIDS Pandemic (1980s–Present), SARS (2002–2003), MERS (2015–Present), and Swine Flu Pandemic (2009–2010) (Sampatha, 2021).

After appearing in late 2019, the COVID-19 epidemic quickly spread over the world and affected almost every element of human existence. The epidemic has had a significant psychological and emotional impact in addition to its well-documented physical effects. A widespread sense of loneliness, dread, and uncertainty was triggered by the abrupt implementation of lockdowns, social distancing, and quarantine regulations (Holmes et al., 2020). Anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions became more prevalent because many people were being cut off from their regular support networks (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020).

The ubiquity of death and grief exacerbated the emotional impact. A worldwide sense of loss and confusion was exacerbated by public health messaging, daily mortality numbers, and the incapacity to carry out customary mourning practices (Park et al., 2021). Additionally, the loss of structure and routine upset people's sense of time and identity, which frequently led to trauma symptoms such as emotional numbness, dissociation, and insomnia (Van Der Kolk, 2014; Moreno et al., 2020). The trauma was significantly more severe for survivors and frontline workers, frequently resembling symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Lai et al., 2020).

Within this framework literature, especially poetry, became a vehicle for emotional expression and psychological processing. Poetry's ability to express the indescribable makes it a platform for discussing trauma, facing loss, and seeking purpose amid chaos (Alexander, 2021). In addition to influencing thematic concerns of contemporary poetry, the pandemic reaffirmed poetry's function as a cultural and therapeutic reaction to disaster.

Poetry as a Form of Self-Expression and Collective Memory During Crises

Throughout history, poetry has functioned as a profound means of self-expression and a reservoir of collective memory, especially during times of crisis. Poetry becomes more than just a literary genre during times of social unrest, conflict, or mass trauma like pandemics; it becomes a psychological necessity and a cultural relic that captures the emotional realities of a generation.

Poetry's special capacity to condense intense feelings into exact words contributes to its use in times of crisis. According to Bachelard (1994), poetic expression "does not describe an object but a reverberation of being" (p. xvii). Poetry thus serves as a vehicle for people to externalize their inner turmoil, providing a mirror and a container for feelings that may otherwise be unimaginable. Poetry offers a symbolic framework that allows sadness, worry, loneliness, and hope to coexist and find expression during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic, when psychological suffering frequently surpasses the vocabulary that can be used (Alexander, 2021, p. 148).

Poetry also functions as a kind of collective witnessing that goes beyond the individual level. It turns into a tool for processing, remembering, and historicizing collective trauma. Hirsch (2008) claims that poetry serves as a place of “postmemory,” a phrase that describes the way trauma is passed down through people and generations, particularly when silence or fragmentation is the main language of trauma (p. 106). Numerous poets, both well-known and up-and-coming, captured the emotional nuances of the COVID-19 pandemic, lending voice to a collective experience that news reports and statistics were unable to adequately capture. These poems now preserve the lived reality of a historical moment by acting as literary archives of emotion.

Furthermore, poetry facilitates a process known as “working through” trauma, as noted by LaCapra (2001). This process allows individuals to confront and alter traumatic memories by revisiting them in a structured manner (p. 89). The limitations of poetic form—such as line breaks, rhythm, and metaphor—offer psychological safety for emotional exploration by providing containment. For instance, the fragmentation of a free-verse poem or the repetitive structure of a villanelle can both demonstrate control over and reflect the disorientation of trauma (Caruth, 1996, p. 10).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital media were also crucial in democratizing access to poetry and transforming it into a global conversation. Poems went viral on social media, encouraging cross-border camaraderie and adding to a transnational repository of resiliency. According to Gillis (2007), memory is socially formed rather than passively preserved, and poetry frequently serves as a catalyst for this process, influencing how societies recall and understand crises (p. 5).

Even while pandemic literature is still receiving attention, there is a significant knowledge vacuum on how these poetic works serve as both reactions to and reflections of psychological suffering. This activity is well-suited for a psychoanalytic approach since it allows for the investigation of unconscious motivations, latent meanings, and symbolic patterns present in poetic language.

This study's scope is limited to analysing three poems: “Yellow was the Colour” by Linda Roberts (USA), “Misery” by Smitha T,G (India), and “Song of a Caged Bird” by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo (Nigeria), written during or in response to the Covid-19 outbreak and published in three anthologies: Covid-19 Pandemic Poems, The Sky is Falling: A Collection of Pandemic Poems, and World on the Brinks: An Anthology of Covid-19 Pandemic respectively. Poems in the three anthologies reflect a broad range of voices, genres, and emotional registers. In addition to thematic material like death, loneliness, and anxiety, our study focuses on formal elements like fragmentation, repetition, metaphor, and stillness. These factors often point to more serious psychiatric illnesses. Although it does not attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of all Covid-19 poetry, the study aims to emphasize recurring themes of trauma representation and argue for poetry's role as both a symptom of and a solution to crisis. We also aim to add to the current academic discussions in literary trauma studies, psychoanalytic critique, and literature related to pandemics. It is therefore expedient, at this juncture, to examine what other critics have written about Covid-19 poetry.

Critics' Perspective on COVID-19 Poetry

The COVID-19 pandemic has sparked an extraordinary surge of poetic creativity worldwide, leading academics, critics, and cultural observers to reflect on poetry's function in recording, coping with, and opposing shared trauma. In the aftermath of lockdowns, collective sorrow, and pervasive existential doubt, poetry has surfaced as a cultural medium particularly suited to express the emotional and psychological aspects of the crisis. Current research on COVID-19 poetry mainly focuses on three key themes: its healing capacity, its function as social record, and its interaction with trauma aesthetics.

During the epidemic, a substantial amount of research highlights the healing and catharsis potential of poetry. According to Alexander (2021), poetry evolved into a "psychological holding space" that serves as a collective emotional register as well as a private coping strategy for people navigating grief, uncertainty, and loneliness (p. 147). Gross and Hume (2020), support this view when they note that social media and online platforms like Poets.org, Instagram, and Twitter were essential venues for "emergency poetics," enabling individuals to communicate and experience each other's emotive realities in real time. By democratizing poetic expression, these platforms dissolved the distinction between private narrative and public conversation (Gross & Hume, 2020).

COVID-19 poetry has been examined as a means of cultural memory and social documentation in addition to its therapeutic benefits. According to Langer (2022), poetry produced during the pandemic adds to a "textual archive of crisis," documenting not only emotions but also particular instances of pandemic life, such as mask-wearing, cheering for medical personnel, quarantine exhaustion, and vaccine hesitation (p. 203). In this way, poetry mediates the connection between personal suffering and collective history, functioning as both an individual artifact and a collective record. This is consistent with Gillis' (2007) theory of collective memory, according to which literature serves as a medium for societies to recount, reinterpret, and remember common experiences.

The aesthetics of trauma and the formal characteristics of pandemic poetry are the subjects of another critical thread in the literature. A lot of COVID-19 poetry has fragmented, repeated, and nonlinear elements, which resonate with Caruth's (1996) idea of trauma as an inseparable experience. Many poems, according to Fraser (2021), display "a poetics of dislocation," in which traditional grammar, narrative, and form disintegrate in reaction to the breakdown of everyday life (p. 88). The psychological ruptures brought on by extended exposure to grief, terror, and loneliness are frequently reflected in these stylistic breaks. Pandemic poetry's use of ellipsis, silence, and surreal imagery is indicative of a larger aesthetic known as "traumatic realism," which Marder (2021) defines as a representational style that aims to depict that which cannot be represented (p. 116).

It is important to note that research on the moral and political implications of COVID-19 poetry is also expanding. According to Ahmed (2022), pandemic poetry is not just introspective; it frequently criticizes racism, systemic inequity, and state failure, especially in situations when the virus made pre-existing social inequities worse (p. 59). This politicized poetics places the epidemic

inside overlapping patterns of vulnerability and power, rejecting romanticized or universal depictions of suffering.

The collection *Walking the Battlefield*, edited by Martin Juwa, William Mpina, and Beaton Galafa, has been analysed by Nick Tembo (2021) who posits that Malawian poets emphasize themes of hope and human resiliency while simultaneously capturing the confusion and instability brought on by COVID-19. He contends that the poems provide a forum for discussing the resilience of the human spirit in the face of deadly diseases. Mickias Musiyiwa (2021) uses the "existence-as-war" paradigm to analyse and understand Flight Rufaro Mlambo's digital poetry in both English and ChiNdau. According to Musiyiwa, Mlambo's writings depict the battle against COVID-19 as a real and symbolic conflict, in which poetry is used as a weapon to combat the virus and social denial.

The anthology *World on the Brinks*, edited by Ikechukwu Otuu Egbuta and Nnenna Vivien Chukwu, is examined from a postcolonial perspective by Kayode Niyi Afolayan (2024). Afolayan contends that the poems call for a resurgence of humanitarian ideals and institutional recovery in Third World countries, reflecting on the pandemic's effects on both the domestic and global levels. Using an eco-semiotic framework, Odia and Kalu-Bazuaye (2022) investigate how poets from Cameroon and Nigeria portray the complex interrelationship between environment and mankind during the COVID-19 pandemic. They contend that the epidemic has prompted a re-examination of how people engage with nature, emphasizing both the healing potential of nature and its restorative qualities (p. 27). The critics examine poems by authors including Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika, Kayode Iwayemi, Balogun Kehinde, Alfred Fatuase, and Marinus Samoh Yong from the text, *World on the Brinks: An Anthology of COVID-19 Pandemic*. Eco-semiotic signals, or images and symbols associated with nature, are used in these poems to illustrate how the pandemic has affected the environment and vice versa. In Iwayemi's poem "Shall I Then Express You Unblamed?" for example, the poet depicts nature being restored in the midst of human damage, implying that God sanctioned this change (p. 156). In a similar vein, Yong's "Our Loss, Nature's Gain" illustrates how animals retake areas that people have left empty during lockdowns, signifying the return of nature (p. 172).

With its striking depictions of serene oceans and smiling volcanoes, Asika's "The Earth Is at Peace Again" suggests that environmental damage has reversed as a result of less human activity (p. 137). These depictions support the authors' claim that the epidemic has shown the interdependence between humans and the natural environment and allowed nature to "regain its lost essence" (p. 27). Odia and Kalu-Bazuaye further point out that some poets have proposed that COVID-19 might be cured by using traditional herbal therapies that are drawn from nature. The poem "Who Says Madagascar?" by Fatuase highlights the potential of natural resources in battling the virus and criticizes international health officials for ignoring traditional therapies (p. 14). By using this eco-semiotic lens, the study shows that pandemic poetry from Cameroon and Nigeria not only addresses environmental issues but also asks readers to re-evaluate how humans fit into the natural order.

Perhaps the singular article that explores a plethora of themes in COVID-19 poetry is that of Diala (2022). He examines pandemic poetry from so many angles: Ade Adejumo's "mobility of spaces and the intangibility of borders in the wake of the pandemic" (212); Chinyere Otuu Egbuta's

highlight of “the proneness of all humankind to the virus” (213); Linda Edem-Davies’ account of “the virus’s defiance of social borders” (214); Alfred Fatuase’ claim that “the World Health Organisation “gang[s] up” to discredit the remedy for COVID-19 ascribed to scientists in the African country of Madagascar” (219); Marinus Samoh Yong’s claims of “the efficacy of African herbs to cure COVID-19 and ... alleged Western denials of that virtue” (219); etc. However, his and others reviewed above have not analysed pandemic poetry through the lens of Caruth’s trauma theory.

Cathy Caruth’s Trauma Theory and COVID-19

A key figure in trauma studies, Cathy Caruth developed a theory of trauma that emphasizes the paradoxical aspect of traumatic experience by drawing on poststructuralist ideas and Freudian psychoanalysis. Caruth makes the case that trauma is an experience that cannot be fully known or comprehended at the time of its occurrence. This view is contained in her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). The belatedness of trauma, its propensity to resurface in invasive and fragmented forms long after the initial incident has occurred, is what defines it (Caruth, 1996, p. 11). Caruth asserts that a temporal rupture is a hallmark of trauma. According to her, it is “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully comprehended and is consequently not available to consciousness until it expresses itself again, repeatedly, in the survivor’s horrors and repetitious acts.” (1996, p. 4). The idea of direct representation is complicated by this delayed reply. Trauma endures as an unassimilated experience, a wound in the psyche that defies incorporation into story and meaning.

This is further shown by Caruth’s interpretation of Freud’s Beyond the Pleasure Principle. She understands the recurring symptoms seen in trauma survivors as the mind’s urge to revisit an incident that was never properly registered in the first place, rather than as a wish to remember (Caruth, 1996, p. 7). This reinterpretation frames trauma as a failure to know rather than a failure to recall. Therefore, Caruth highlights that trauma communicates not via words but rather through gaps, silence, and indirect expression—modalities that are especially well-suited to poetic language. The broken structure and elliptical language frequently found in poetry relating to pandemics are consistent with the idea that trauma is an inseparable experience that defies complete symbolization. According to Caruth, literature can serve as an essential platform for bearing witness to trauma, especially when it does not aim for catharsis or closure: “It is in the manner it [trauma] defies full awareness that it asks the question of how we listen to the voice of trauma” (Caruth, 1996, p. 9). Therefore, poetry provides a way to listen, an openness to what cannot be expressed explicitly but nevertheless demands to be heard. Thus, a critical framework for examining how poetry resolves the conundrum of expressing the inexpressible is provided by Caruth’s trauma theory.

Caruth and the Psychoanalytic Poetics of Trauma: An Analysis of Three Poems

Trauma is perceived by Cathy Caruth as a paradox of experience rather than just a psychological injury. It is an event that is too overpowering to be registered in the moment and returns later in distorted, fragmentary forms like dreams, symptoms, or recurrence (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). Her observations, which have their roots in Freudian psychoanalysis, reaffirm themes like suppression,

the paranormal, and the will to repeat, presenting trauma as a narrative crisis as well as a psychological injury. The three COVID-19 poems, which form our corpus, are analysed below using Caruth's trauma theory.

Linda Roberts' "Yellow was her Colour"

Roberts's elegiac poem places the individual loss within a larger context of pandemic-induced pain by utilizing psychoanalytic concepts like delayed affect, psychic splitting, and suppressed mourning. Not just death, but death without its ritualistic and symbolic frameworks—no funeral, no farewell, no closure—is presented by the speaker. The lack of these rituals removes mourning from its usual storyline, making the experience traumatizing—what Caruth (1996) calls an unclaimed experience, and what Freud previously defined as a wound that evades the ego's psychic barriers and is therefore not entirely ingrained in consciousness.

A harsh confrontation with absence, both literal and metaphorical, is expressed in the lines,

No hand to hold, in the deafening silence;

Delicate skin and bone gone cold....

The sensory emphasis on "skin and bone" transforms the body into a memento of unprocessed grief, while the "deafening silence" emphasizes the emptiness left by the removal of social rituals. In terms of psychoanalysis, this picture represents what Freud calls the disavowal of reality, a situation in which the mourner observes the loss but is unable to reconcile it, leading to a rift in which the ego remains intact while affect is separated from cognition and banished to the unconscious, where it festers.

In this context, the dream functions as a psychic bridge, a place where the intolerable may be cautiously approached. The speaker's admission: "I want to believe that it was you, in my dream...", serves as both a declaration of desire and an example of dream-work, which is the process by which suppressed material resurfaces in a disguised, frequently symbolic form (Freud, 1900). "I want to believe" is a conditional tone that betrays a deep ambivalence. The dream is regarded as existing in a transitional state between reality and fantasy, as well as between presence and absence. This oscillation reflects the nature of trauma itself, which Caruth notes is not fully experienced at the time but reappears later as a belated afterwardness, fragmented and affect-laden (Caruth, 1996, p. 11).

Thus, the dream turns into a place of symbolic return rather than resolution. It is a rehearsal instead of a conclusion, a haunting instead of a recovery. The mourner tries to say goodbye in retrospect during this spectral visit, but the act is insufficient due to the doubt surrounding the dream's actuality. Caruth's theory that trauma "demands representation but resists it," appearing only in fragments, symptoms, or metaphor, is consistent with this fragmentary, affectively soaked return.

Furthermore, the dream in question can be seen as a substitute formation, a psychoanalytic concept in which the mind creates a symbolic object to represent what has been lost and cannot be

completely grieved. Because the loss itself was never truly recognized, the dream figure becomes such a surrogate—present but not entirely real, representing the paradox of sorrow that has no end. The unconscious performs the dream to cover a narrative gap and to mimic a farewell that reality denies. The dream is not only recalled. In this way, Roberts' poem does not just depict grief—it enacts the very structure of traumatic memory. The speaker is caught in the loop of belated mourning where the trauma of the loss continues to reverberate in symbolic form, and the elegy becomes both a testimony and a symptom, articulating what the psyche cannot bear to know but must endlessly try to narrate.

Smitha T. G.'s "Misery"

Smitha T.G.'s "Misery" turns the home, which is not usually a place of disaster, into a stage for emotional collapse by mapping trauma via everyday household life rather than through spectacle. The poem's calm intensity, which depicts a subject trapped in a psychological bind, internally unravelling and externally composed, is what makes it so brilliant. The statement "Suffers sleeplessness but pretends as normal..." captures this strain.

Evoking classic Freudian dissociation, a psychological process in which the conscious mind continues to work while the unconscious absorbs and confines the unbearable affect, the woman's emotional disintegration is submerged under the surface of routine in this instance. Repetition of pretence: "pretends as normal", indicates stable performance, a flimsy exterior covering an interior gap. The ego preserves surface coherence at the price of deeper psychic reality in Freud's idea of the split subject, a self, fragmented by repression, which is mirrored in this disjunction between appearance and interior state.

With lines like "no peace of mind" and "everything changed in two weeks," the poem's iterative phrasing enacts what Freud (1920) called the compulsion to repeat, a defining characteristic of trauma in which the psyche re-enacts aspects of the initial wound not to master it but to bear witness to its unresolved presence. Cathy Caruth expands on this notion, contending that trauma is found in the ongoing recurrence of the past event rather than in the event itself, often through language that falls short of fully capturing what it aims to convey. These recurring sentences incessantly revolve around a psychic absence rather than advancing a narrative. They are symptomatic statements, distinguished more by what they do not express than by what they do say.

The non-representability of trauma is dramatized by this recursive pattern. The poem performs trauma's stuck temporality, a suspended state in which the past reasserts itself as an unassimilated present, instead of linear advancement or cathartic conclusion. The home becomes eerie: familiar yet tinged with unimaginable fear. The woman's stoic performance, silence, and insomnia all suggest that her psyche is under siege and is unable to articulate or externalize her hurt.

A moment of cataclysmic release marks the poem's conclusion:

She faints on the floor

Everything altered in a second.

This statement sets up what psychology would refer to as a psychic breach, or more accurately, a return of the repressed, the point at which the ego's barriers give way and the suppressed trauma bursts into awareness. Where language fails, the body steps in; fainting becomes a somatic symptom, a physical manifestation of what cannot be contained in the mind. According to Lacanian theory, this is an encounter with the Real, the aspect of experience that defies symbolization and upends the subject's symbolic order.

This moment, which Caruth refers to as the "waking of the wound," occurs when trauma is felt for the first time, even though it is still not fully comprehended (Caruth, 1996, p. 11). The abruptness captured in the expression, "in a second", highlights how trauma has a non-linear temporality. This is a belated shock, a postponed experience with an injury that was never fully lived in the moment of its genesis, rather than a breakdown brought on by accumulation.

In the end, "Misery" shows how trauma can invade and transform the home into a psychological battlefield. The woman's breakdown is an unavoidable result of a psyche straining to maintain its bounds beneath the weight of the unimaginable, not a sign of weakness. The poem turns into a sort of painful palimpsest, with the language of everyday sorrow on the outside and the echo of something unspoken, eerie, and unresolved underneath.

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's "Song of a Caged Bird"

Freud's idea of the eerie, which is that which is both familiar and alien, intimate and alienating, is strongly echoed by Adimora-Ezeigbo's metaphor of the "caged bird," which effectively captures the feeling of trauma as an ontological estrangement. The speaker's room becomes "an enormous coffin" in this poem, turning the domestic space, typically connected to safety and containment, into a place of claustrophobic dread.

This metaphor is overdetermined symbolically and serves several purposes: it represents the blurring of the lines between life and death, the interior and the outside, the home and the grave. The former private haven has been transformed into a funerary chamber, symbolizing the psychological suffocation of living through a pandemic. Here, the once-familiar place is "defamiliarized," haunted by the spectral presence of a life that can no longer be lived freely and the threat of mortality. Freud (1919) defines the eerie as the return of something once suppressed that suddenly becomes present.

In this sense, trauma is not a single rupture but rather a continuous existential state, a prolonged suspension of agency in which the subject is trapped in a state of limbo between extinction and survival. The poem dramatizes the gradual erosion of subjecthood rather than the drama of the solitary incident. The speaker's terrifying admission, "A new god I must fear and worship," emphasizes this.

Similar to the contradictory omnipotence of the maternal imago in Freudian theory, this statement marks a significant symbolic substitution in which the virus takes on the role of an all-powerful

and erratic deity—both guardian and executioner. According to the ritualistic vocabulary of "fear and worship," trauma imposes new rules of existence that call for sacrifice, obedience, and submission. According to Caruth (1995, p. 153), trauma takes over the subject's narrative autonomy and imposes a foreign script on the self, causing the subject to become re-scripted rather than sovereign.

The psychoanalytic idea that trauma frequently necessitates symbolic expression because it is otherwise psychically unmanageable is echoed by this conversion of pandemic reality into spiritual metaphor. Like a "new god," the virus is both an interior force and an external menace that shapes beliefs, behaviour, and perception. It turns into a symbolic superego that controls movement, space, and even thought.

The image of the bird is very important. This imprisoned bird, which is often associated with freedom, transcendence, and the soaring spirit, is a strong metaphor for the loss of agency and the foreclosure of the future. As a metaphor for a symbolic castration—the psychological sensation of having once-possible freedoms taken away, the imprisoned bird turns into a cipher of its own negation. This is consistent with Lacanian interpretations of the libidinal self, ensnared in the chain of signification, where the subject recognizes its limitations in both action and desire.

On a darker note, the caged bird also alludes to Freud's theory of the death drive (Thanatos), which is a drive toward non-being, dissolution, and stasis. A self in suspended animation, living not in vitality but in endurance, is suggested by the chamber as a "coffin," the suspended, lifeless routine, and the godlike virus that demands surrender. The will is emptied out and the psyche lingers in a transitional state, unable to act or come to an end, making life nothing more than a postponement of death. The imprisoned bird thus becomes a figure of entropic stillness, the contradiction of a live person in psychic death, rather than merely a metaphor of confinement.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's poem thus turns into a meta-psychological allegory for how trauma affects the self, including its internal reconfigurations, symbolic reversals, and temporal displacements. Here, trauma is depicted rather than told, metaphorically embodied rather than explained. Similar to the traumatized mind it depicts, the poem uses inversions, replacements, and hauntings to communicate, a symbolic language that captures what direct representation is unable to.

According to psychoanalysis, these three poems depict trauma as a struggle between language and silence, presence and absence, and consciousness and the unconscious. Each poem serves as a psychological artifact, attesting to trauma's resistance to integration, whether through dream-work (Roberts), dissociative patterning (Smitha), or symbolic entrapment (Adimora-Ezeigbo). Caruth's observation that trauma is "outside the bounds of representation" and yet compulsively demands narration (Caruth, 1996, p.5) is important in this context because the poems reveal the ghostly, fragmented, and unresolved aftershocks of trauma rather than "resolving" it.

Conclusion

Pandemics, which frequently disrupt human existence, have significantly influenced history and altered how individuals and societies cope with trauma. This study demonstrates that poetry serves

as an essential medium for expressing, sharing, and remembering the psychological effects of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond mere artistic expression, poetry acts as a therapeutic outlet and a cultural repository, encapsulating the complex emotions of fear, grief, and isolation.

By analysing selected poems from various cultural backgrounds, this paper emphasizes the common emotional experiences of the pandemic while also showcasing the distinct formal techniques that poets employ to address trauma. The frequent use of metaphor, fragmentation, and stillness reflects an effort to represent and contain psychological pain. Additionally, poetry's role as both a personal coping strategy and a collective memory tool highlights its vital importance during times of global crisis.

Caruth's trauma theory enhances our understanding of poetry related to COVID-19 by illustrating how trauma defies linear storytelling and conscious understanding. Her ideas of belatedness, repetition, and the inadequacy of language to fully capture traumatic experiences resonate with the formal characteristics of many pandemic poems—such as fragmentation, ellipsis, surrealism, and dislocation. By applying Caruth's perspective to selected poems from three continents, this study reveals how poetry embodies and processes trauma—not by providing solutions, but by creating space for the unspoken, the unspeakable, and the yet-to-be-understood. Pandemic poetry, as illuminated by Caruth's theory, serves not only as a record of events but also as a deep exploration of how we continue to navigate what remains incomprehensible.

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