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### Resilience in the Face of Crisis: A Literary Exploration of Pandemic Novels (Remnants of Resiliency and Survival: A Thematic Analysis on Pandemic Novels)



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**ABSTRACT:** In the midst of the global COVID-19 crisis, this qualitative study undertakes an examination of pandemic novels, taking out insights from a selection of ten prominent novels as its primary dataset. Employing both narrative and thematic analyses, the research delves into the portrayal of resilience and trauma processing within these literary works, with the ultimate goal of formulating a practical, yet handy, literary module designed to enhance student engagement. The analytical framework encompasses Resilience theory, Postmodernism, and Marxism, providing a comprehensive lens through which to explore how fictional survivors navigate and depict resilience. Symbolism takes center stage, notably through the metaphorical use of an infected rat, shedding light on the delicate balance between nature and civilization. The discussion on causative factors injects a sense of urgency and unpredictability, mirroring the intricate dynamics of real-world health crises and encouraging nuanced comprehension. The study goes beyond individual adaptability to scrutinize societal responses, contributing significantly to academic discussions. As the study concludes, the derived insights aim to facilitate readers in coping with the trauma induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, offering valuable perspectives on how fictional characters navigate and endure the challenges posed by the pandemic.

**KEYWORDS:** Face of Crisis; Literary Exploration; Pandemic Novels; Resilience

### I. INTRODUCTION

During the global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, students are facing new and challenging situations (Anga & Diaz, 2021). The pandemic's farreaching effects extend beyond the realm of health, permeating into various facets of daily life, including education (Aubry, 2011). As traditional coping mechanisms prove insufficient, this study explores a novel avenue adopted by students: the immersive engagement with pandemic novels. The increasing reliance on these literary works as a means of navigating the uncertainties of the pandemic forms the backdrop of this research (Bentzen, 2020).

The Problem and its Setting: The COVID-19 crisis, with its widespread implications on mental health and societal well-being, has spurred a surge in the consumption of pandemic-themed literature (Courtney et al., 2020). This phenomenon, particularly observed among students, raises intriguing questions about the role of literature as a coping mechanism during times of crisis (Camitan & Bajin, 2021). The need to understand how individuals, specifically students, engage with and derive resilience from pandemic novels becomes paramount (Carbo et al., 2020; Della Croce & Nicole-Berva, 2021). Exploring the manifestation of resiliency in fictional characters and the collective processing of trauma within these literary landscapes holds the key to unlocking valuable insights into the human experience during extraordinary circumstances.

Objectives of the Study: This research endeavors to achieve several key objectives. Firstly, it seeks to highlight how characters within selected pandemic novels manifest resiliency in the face of crisis (Augustine, 2019). Secondly, it aims to unravel the dynamics of group processes involved in collectively processing trauma caused by a pandemic within these literary contexts (Barde, 2020). Moreover, the study strives to contribute to the academic discourse by applying narrative and thematic analyses to offer a comprehensive understanding of the overarching theme of resiliency in pandemic literature (Anga & Diaz, 2021; Della Croce & Nicole-Berva, 2021). Finally, with the ultimate goal of providing practical support to students, the research aims to develop a self-relearning literary module based on the findings (Anga & Diaz, 2021; Della Croce & Nicole-Berva, 2021).

In essence, this study emerges as a response to the pressing need for a deeper understanding of the role of literature, specifically pandemic novels, in fostering resilience and providing solace during times of crisis (Camitan & Bajin, 2021). Through a meticulous exploration of characters, themes, and theoretical frameworks, this research aims to shed light on the transformative potential of literature in the face of adversity.

#### II. METHODS

In this study, a qualitative research design is employed to unravel the intricate nuances of resilience depicted in pandemic novels.

**Qualitative Research Design:** This study adopts a qualitative research design to delve into the nuanced aspects of resilience portrayed in pandemic novels (Ebrahimi et al., 2021). Recognizing the intricate nature of human experiences and responses to crisis, a qualitative approach allows for a rich exploration of the thematic elements within the selected literary works (Estrada et al., 2022).

Narrative and Thematic Analysis: The research made use of both narrative analysis and thematic analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the overarching theme—resiliency (Gibbs & Egermann, 2021). Narrative analysis facilitates the examination of storytelling elements, while thematic analysis uncovers recurring patterns and motifs related to resilience within the narratives (Glatter & Finkelman, 2021).

**Theoretical Frameworks:** In the reading of ten pandemic novels, the researchers apply three distinct theoretical frameworks—Resilience theory, Postmodernism, and Marxism (Hsu, 2017). These frameworks provide a lens through which to analyze how resilience is portrayed and interpreted in the context of fictional narratives (Ledesma, 2014).

#### The novels selected:

Title	Author	Year
The Plague	Albert Camus	1947
The Stand	Stephen King	1978
Love in the Time of Cholera	Gabriel Garcia Marquez	1988
Blindness	Jose Saramago	1995
The Years of Rice and Salt	Kim Stanley Robinson	2002
Station Eleven	Emily St. John Mandel	2014
Severance	Ling Ma	2018
The Book of M	Peng Shepherd	2018
The Old Drift	Namwali Serpell	2019
Nights of Plague	Orhan Pamuk	2021

These frameworks serve as analytical lenses through which the portrayal of resilience by survivors of a pandemic is examined. Resilience theory aids in understanding individual and collective adaptation strategies (Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2017). Postmodernism provides insights into the deconstruction and reconstruction of societal narratives (Peters, 2021), and Marxism offers a lens to explore the socio-economic dimensions of resilience (Peters, 2021).

Purposeful Application: The utilization of Resilience theory, Postmodernism, and Marxism is purposeful. By dissecting the manifestation of resilience through these diverse lenses in the selected novels, the study aims to unravel the multifaceted nature of how fictional characters cope with and overcome the challenges posed by a pandemic. This exploration, rooted in theoretical perspectives, contributes to a holistic understanding of the dynamic interplay between individuals and their socio-cultural environments during times of crisis.

Contributions to Coping Mechanisms: The overarching goal of this methodological approach is twofold. Firstly, it seeks to illuminate how the manifestation of resilience in fictional characters within the ten pandemic novels can serve as a source of coping for readers grappling with the real-life trauma associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Nicomedes et al., 2020; Marilla, 2021). Secondly, by discerning the survival strategies employed by these fictional characters, readers are invited to glean insights that may inform their own adaptive responses to the ongoing crisis (Mumtaz et al., 2021).

Development of Self-Learning Literary Module: The results derived from the narrative and thematic analyses, augmented by the insights drawn from the theoretical frameworks and the analysis of the ten selected novels, form the foundation for the creation of a Self-Learning Literary Module (Pang et al., 2019). This module, designed based on the resilience themes uncovered in the novels, aims to provide students with a transformative educational tool, fostering both academic engagement and personal resilience (Meza, 2020).

In essence, the methods employed in this study are intricately woven to unravel the complexities of resilience in pandemic literature, drawing from the diverse narratives presented in the ten carefully selected novels. The research transcends the fictional realm to offer practical insights for readers navigating the challenges of a global crisis (Ogueji et al., 2021; Mishra & Rath, 2020).

#### III. TREATMENT OF THE DATA

This study adopts a perspective that views literature as a profound reflection of life, considering the narratives within pandemic novels as insightful mirrors of human experiences during times of crisis. The treatment of the data involves a comprehensive textual analysis and thematic analysis, guided by three theoretical frameworks: Resilience theory (Skalski et al., 2022; Pietromonaco & Overall, 2021), Postmodernism (Saxon, 2020), and Marxism (Prainsack, 2020).

Textual Analysis: Resilience theory, with its focus on adaptive strategies and overcoming adversity (Skalski et al., 2022; Pietromonaco & Overall, 2021), serves as a lens through which the researchers closely examine the textual nuances within the selected pandemic novels. This involves identifying explicit manifestations of resilience, character actions, and adaptive behaviors that resonate with the principles of Resilience theory. Textual analysis allows for a meticulous exploration of how characters navigate challenges and depict resilience within the intricate fabric of the narratives.

Thematic Analysis: Postmodernism, with its emphasis on deconstruction and the reconstruction of narratives (Saxon, 2020), guides the thematic analysis aspect of the study. Thematic analysis involves identifying recurring themes, motifs, and symbolic elements related to resilience across the ten pandemic novels. Postmodernism encourages the exploration of how societal narratives are constructed and reconstructed within the context of a pandemic. This approach delves into the layers of meaning embedded in the texts, unraveling the complexities of resilience in the postmodern literary landscape.

Marxism and Socio-Economic Dimensions: Marxism, as a lens, is applied to understand the socio-economic dimensions of resilience portrayed in the pandemic novels (Prainsack, 2020). This involves examining how economic structures, power dynamics, and class struggles intersect with the characters' resilience. Marxist analysis contributes a critical perspective, revealing underlying societal tensions and inequalities that influence the characters' responses to the pandemic. By doing so, it enriches the thematic exploration, adding depth to the understanding of resilience within a broader socio-economic context.

Integration of Theoretical Frameworks: The three theoretical frameworks are seamlessly integrated into the treatment of the data, providing a multifaceted analytical approach. This integration enables a holistic understanding of resilience in pandemic literature. Resilience theory contributes insights into individual and collective adaptive responses; Postmodernism uncovers layers of meaning and narrative construction; Marxism unveils socio-economic influences shaping the characters' experiences. Together, they form a comprehensive framework for interpreting the textual and thematic elements within the selected novels.

Synthesis for Self-Learning Literary Module: The insights derived from the treatment of the data, encompassing textual and thematic analyses through Resilience theory, Postmodernism, and Marxism, serve as the foundation for synthesizing key findings (Saxon, 2020). These findings, in turn, inform the development of a Self-Learning Literary Module. The module is designed to provide students with a transformative educational tool, integrating theoretical perspectives and literary insights to foster resilience and coping strategies in the face of crisis.

Ethical considerations: In conducting this study, ethical considerations were paramount. The selection and analysis of pandemic novels were carried out with careful attention to respecting intellectual property rights and acknowledging the creative work of authors (Segreto & Deigin, 2021; Skalski et al., 2022). Additionally, any potential impact on readers' emotional well-being was taken into account, and efforts were made to present findings responsibly (Pfattheicher et al., 2020). The study adheres to ethical research practices, ensuring transparency and integrity in the exploration of resilience themes within pandemic novels while maintaining the dignity of the literary works and their creators.

Overall, the treatment of the data in this study is guided by a holistic approach that acknowledges literature as a reflection of life. The triangulation of Resilience theory, Postmodernism, and Marxism in the textual and thematic analyses enhances the depth and breadth of the exploration, offering a nuanced understanding of resilience in the context of pandemic novels.

### IV. FINDINGS

In the exploration of the selected pandemic novels, it becomes evident that various factors and agents contribute to the onset of the depicted pandemics (Willroth et al., 2021). A recurring motif, especially notable in novels where the Bubonic Plague is a central theme, is the prevalence of the infected rat as the most common agent (Tica et al., 2021). This recurring narrative device serves not only as a catalyst for the unfolding crisis but also as a symbolic representation of the unpredictable and often uncontrollable nature of pandemics (Speidel, 2018; Stovall, 2020).

Thematic analysis: Ten themes came to the surface. These are: Individual Adaptation and Survival Strategies; Community Bonds and Solidarity; Symbolism of Nature and Civilization; Challenges to Societal Structures; Impact on Mental Health and Coping Mechanisms; Unpredictability and Urgency; Interconnectedness of Ecosystems; Survival Strategies in Post-Apocalyptic Settings; Exploration of Cultural and Historical Perspectives; and, Reflections on Real-world Pandemic Implications.

Symbolism of the Infected Rat: The motif of the infected rat transcends its literal role as a carrier of disease; it embodies a symbolic layer of meaning within the narrative fabric (Tica et al., 2021). The rat becomes a metaphor for the interconnectedness of ecosystems, the vulnerability of human societies to external forces, and the fragility of the delicate balance between nature and

civilization (Speidel, 2018; Stovall, 2020). This symbolism resonates with the broader discourse on pandemics, emphasizing that these crises are not isolated events but are deeply rooted in the intricate web of ecological and societal dynamics (Zhang et al., 2022).

Narrative Impact: The prevalence of the infected rat as a common agent in the selected novels not only contributes to the narrative causation but also plays a pivotal role in shaping the characters' responses and resilience strategies (Tica et al., 2021). The sudden and often chaotic emergence of a pandemic, catalyzed by the infected rat, forces characters to confront the fragility of their existence and adapt in real-time (Walsh, 2020). This narrative impact adds layers of tension, urgency, and unpredictability, enhancing the overall thematic exploration of resilience in the face of a rapidly unfolding crisis (Zhang et al., 2022).

Variability in Causative Factors: While the infected rat emerges as a recurrent factor, it is essential to acknowledge the variability in causative factors across the selected novels (Tica et al., 2021). Each narrative presents a unique blend of circumstances, ranging from natural disasters to human-made catastrophes, contributing to the complexity of the portrayed pandemics (Sun et al., 2020). This variability not only enriches the literary landscape but also mirrors the diverse origins and manifestations of real-world pandemics, emphasizing the importance of understanding the multifaceted nature of global health crises (Pfattheicher et al., 2020).

Implications for Real-World Understanding: The exploration of various factors and agents causing pandemics within the novels holds significance for real-world understanding (Zhang et al., 2022). By drawing parallels between fictional narratives and historical or contemporary pandemics, readers gain insights into the broader implications of how societies grapple with unexpected health crises (Tica et al., 2021). The infected rat, as a recurring motif, prompts contemplation on the intricate interplay between nature, human behavior, and the emergence of infectious diseases, offering readers an opportunity for reflection on the vulnerabilities inherent in our interconnected world (Walsh, 2020).

Literary and Societal Resilience: The discussion of causative factors in the selected novels intertwines with the broader theme of resilience (Van Breda, 2018). Characters, faced with the sudden onset of a pandemic, navigate a complex landscape shaped by the infected rat and other contributing elements (Scrivner et al., 2021). The exploration of resilience in this context extends beyond individual adaptability to encompass societal responses, the reevaluation of societal structures, and the quest for collective solutions (Van Breda, 2018). Thus, the literary portrayal of causative factors becomes a lens through which the study of resilience unfolds, shedding light on both individual and societal capacities to withstand and overcome crisis (Willroth et al., 2021).

In essence, the discussion of various factors and agents causing pandemics, with the infected rat as a focal point, enhances the depth and complexity of the selected novels. This exploration not only enriches the narrative dynamics but also offers readers a thought-provoking reflection on the intricate relationship between fictional portrayals and real-world complexities in the context of global health crises (Tica et al., 2021).

#### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

*Manifestation of Resiliency*: Characters in ten selected pandemic novels exhibit resilience through actions like adaptation, determination, and cooperation.

*Thematic Analysis*: The narrative and ten themes for the thematic analysis provide a comprehensive view of the resiliency theme.

Theoretical Frameworks: Resilience theory, Postmodernism, and Marxism inform the understanding of how survivors depict resilience.

Selection Criteria: A set of criteria guides the selection of the ten novels.

Agents Causing Pandemic: Various factors, with the infected rat as the most common agent, contribute to the pandemic in the selected novels.

Representation of Resilience: Resilience is portrayed through explicit actions and allegorical elements, including nature imagery and themes of rebirth.

Self-Learning Literary Module: A self-relearning literary module is developed based on results of the study (see appendix).

### CONCLUSION

This research contributes insights into resilience portrayal in literature during crises, offering readers both familiar and unique experiences. In the explored pandemic novels, resilience and crisis response unfold amid diverse causative factors, notably the symbolic motif of the infected rat. Beyond its literal role, the rat becomes a metaphor, highlighting the delicate balance between nature and civilization. This symbolism deepens the narratives, encouraging reflection on broader pandemic implications in the context of societal and ecological vulnerability. The discussion of causative factors dynamically shapes the narrative with urgency and unpredictability. Variability in pandemic origins mirrors the multifaceted nature of real-world health crises, fostering nuanced understanding. Drawing parallels between fiction and reality prompts contemplation on the intricate interplay between nature, human behavior, and infectious disease emergence. The study of resilience extends beyond individual adaptability to encompass societal responses, offering a holistic lens for characters and societies navigating crises. As this literary journey concludes, insights derived can inform both scholarly discussions and reflections on our shared human experience amid global health uncertainties.

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