

English Literature

MAJOR TRENDS, THEMES & STYLES

Edited by

Dr Vinod K. Chopra



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**ALPHABETISING THE TRAUMA FACED DURING
PANDEMIC IN OLIVE SENIOR'S *PANDEMIC
POEMS: FIRST WAVE***

J. HINDU SREE

Pandemic Poems: First Wave by Olive Senior is an amalgamation of sequence of events that happened during pandemic and emergence of new words in glossary. Olive Senior has experimented a lot on poetic techniques, thereby bringing out denotation and connotation of incidents through terms which are frequently used in Pandemic period. These types of poems come under the category "Found Poems" in Literature. This Collection focuses much on how society and culture have undergone transformation to an extent of finding one's existence as an alphabet in Pandemic. Through Alphabetization, Olive Senior exposes all the major issues concerning humanity. This research article sets out to analyze the trauma undergone by people and the way in which the poet evinced it in her style. It also silhouettes the uncertainties, paralyzed fears, seamless traumatic experiences and scaled boundaries of hope sketched by Olive Senior in her patchwork of artistic representation of pandemic and human lives.

Jamaican Literature is internationally renowned and the island of Jamaica being the birthplace to many significant authors holds prominence in the literatures of the world. One of the most distinctive aspects of Jamaican Literature is the usage of local dialect known as "patois" and often referred as "nation language". This has become an important element in Jamaican fiction, poetry and theatre.

Jamaican poetry has the following qualities such as arise, think, speak and live. They are very confident in exposing the struggles and pain through poetry. Jamaica is marked by the tragedy of

genocide, exile and imposed amnesia. Yet, the poets and artists have found a way to invoke the spirit of early Jamaicans through the narratives of history and exploration of poetic landscape. Mostly, poems written by Jamaican poets discuss genre studies of peasant life, both rural and urban focusing on love for their land and nation. They embrace nativity. Some of the poems have even voiced out social and racial themes thereby throwing light upon oppression and colonization.

Contemporary Jamaican poetry has gained a transition and the celebration of fifty years of Jamaican independence has brought vital changes in theme, tone, life, plot of Jamaican Literature. This transition has born out of paradox and inherent ironies which expose pain, loss, poverty and deprivation. The most important poets of Jamaica are Claude McKay, Una Marson, Lorna Goodison, Edward Baugh, Olive Senior and so on.

Olive Senior is a renowned Jamaican poet, novelist, short story and non-fiction writer based in Ontario, Canada. She has published four collections of poems as well as short stories. Her notable works include *Talking of Trees*, *Gardening in the Tropics*, *Over the Roofs of the World* and *Shell*. She has won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize and overall winner of the 2016 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature for her recent collection of stories titled *The Pain Tree* published in 2016. She has written many non-fictions and most of her works have been adapted as drama and broadcast by the BBC and CBC.

Olive Senior's *Pandemic Poems: First Wave* published in 2021 echoes the zeitgeist of 2020. In the early first wave of Covid-19 Pandemic, Senior has started posting her series of *Pandemic Poems* on social media. Each poem is a stress or a paradox of the situations and the emerged emergency trends of Covid-19. Senior reassured connection to the reading public thereby posting a lot of poems online through which she exposed the strangeness of the first wave. Olive Senior in her preface writes, "These poems capture the paradox that even as we are forced into the consciousness of being a part of the world, we are at the same time forced to be apart." Through this poetry collection, she has made use of all trending pandemic lexicon which becomes part and parcel of new normal.

Pandemic has brought challenges to health along with transformations in society and culture. Olive Senior has thoroughly covered all the incidents that happened during Pandemic in such a way that usage of familiar words which entered gradually and these words got accumulated in every day- to -day activities. The

term "New Normal" is one such word used often these days to accept the changes and live with it in post-covid period. All the poems in this collection come under the category of "Found Poems" which are written with minor changes including changes in punctuation patterns, long spaces, prosaic forms, rhetorical and so on. These found poems incorporate scraps of materials from various sources tracing back to the style used in the second century known as "Cento". The Alphabetical listing and naming of poems is quite unique to delineate traumas in words which create an immense impact on the readers. The title of each poem appeals to all senses including olfactory. She has covered a lot of information not pertaining to just one region but the whole world beginning from George Floyd's incident to the stranded migrant workers in India.

There are more than seventy poems and each poem is arranged in such a way that it alphabetizes the trauma starting from "Flattening" till "Liberty". Each poem discusses all the incidents including social distancing, mask, quarantine, domestic violence, ICU, adjustment, vaccine, separation, negotiation and liberty. The tone of all the poems captures the spirit of the age which is both mental and psychological. The style of the poem is unique as well as appeals to the taste of the readers. It is written in simple words with pun and paradoxes. The language is quite similar to the language used on the web because most of the words are hashtags that got trending in 2020.

The first poem in this collection focuses on an optimistic pattern titled "Flattening the Curve". It suggests the idea of reduction in Covid-19 cases as the curve flattened gradually. The paradox presented in the poems highlights that nature is in the control of man. That's why this new curve has arisen in the road that never had bumps. Man has moved towards artificial aspects which keeps nature away from him that is why wildness tries to capture the unnatural. As Olive Senior quotes:

"This curve

That so urgently

Needs flattening now?" (1)

There are a few poems in this collection that exactly appeal to reader's attention by the style that the poet has incorporated to present the idea. The Poem "S for Social Distancing" is written as:

"What if you

Wanted to." (3)

The double space between each line indicates the term "Social Distance" which the poet makes use of style to bring out the essential theme which also becomes a visual feast to the eyes of the readers. The poem "M for Mask" is written in a serious tone of amalgamating the usage of mask in "Masqueraders" to its use as "Everyone's streetwear". It delineates the death which is tragic and it is hidden by masks which become a safety measure to prevent human beings facing death during Covid-19 crisis. Inductively, Olive Senior has made use of all incidents to present traumas faced by each and every individual all over the world. In her poem, "W for Waiting", She discusses the pain of many Indians who got stranded in railway stations not knowing what to do as suddenly Lockdown got into force. She writes as, "Is this Life? Asks Laxmi, 700 miles from home and children" (5).

The poems titled "Q for Quarantine roots", "L for Locked out", "C for Cherry Blossoms", "H for Hand", "D for Domestic Violence", "F for Fight", "T for Touch" examine the struggles which are reduced to words in Covid- 19. These afflictions imposed a great threat to culture and life. In each section of the poems, Senior has brought a coherence in aligning up the suffering which are one and the same at the shallow level but differ in their parameters at the deeper one. In the poem, "U for Underlying Conditions", Olive senior writes as, "Studies Show: Disempowerment makes people ill" (16).

As a poet, Olive Senior has experimented with style and each poem is a stress on the word or phrase trending at the period. The next set of poems beginning with "C for Corona" till "C for Contact Tracing" merges and proliferates the aspects, pains, struggles faced by doctors thereby highlighting these poems as interdisciplinary. Now the poet moves in a centripetal way of moving towards the main narrative of tracing the origin of Covid, how the doctors have to work to fight the unwanted guests and how measures were taken to stop Covid-19 as a communicable disease. In one of her poems, Senior highlights the passion of doctors through her short affirming words. She says,

"POEMS FOUND ON THE ICU FLOOR

During a 12-hour shift

I take a single break.

Our Patients are so sick

We don't want to leave them." (24)

In the poem "B for Breathe", Senior has become the voice of the voiceless by delineating racism faced by George Floyd who was choked to death without any reasons just because he is black. Olive Senior feels very emotional while writing this poem which gets exposed the way in which she has written as

"Mama

Mama

I can't." (37)

Poems like "Z for Zoom" exemplifies how everything has transitioned to digitalized online platforms including classrooms to flipped classrooms for more than a year. There are poems which portray the new normal life that the people are getting ready to accept like socially distanced events and so on. Even the ecosystem responds to the covid situation through its demographic changes. Olive Senior presents the second wave aesthetically with pun and paradoxes. In the poem, "W for Wave, Second", she presents, "Let's hope it will signal waving, not drowning" (61).

The poet ends the collection with satirical terms like negotiation, ease, less, hope and liberty because she ends the collection with a tone of hopelessness because of reckless measures taken by almost all governments amidst Covid crisis of giving unwanted relaxations which throws light upon the value of human beings' life in today's world. She ends with "Give me Liberty and Give me death" (91).

The poet has silhouetted traumas, paralysed fears, uncertainties which got evinced in her style. Pandemic Poems: First Wave acts as an evidence to the whole world and for the posterity which is yet to come. It becomes a recorded history in versification. Through her style and choice of words, Senior has imprinted the challenges and trauma in better ways to make people understand the value of everything in everyone's life.

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English Literature: Major Trends, Themes and Styles offers to the readers a bouquet of forty-four scholarly essays dealing with the significant trends, themes and styles in English literature. These essays are presented in an easy, informal and obsequious style. The book has covered a broad spectrum under its ambit. The learned scholars have meticulously delved deep into the trends and themes that evolved and resurrected with the passage of time. The researchers have dived deep into the vast sea of literature and have explored and offered an array of trends, themes and styles, thus, making the book a galaxy studded with the stars in the shape of articles that are nonpareil. English literature has witnessed diverse trends and movements across the ages and that is what the writers of multiple essays have captured and apprehended proficiently the shifting trends and paradigms in the field of literary arena in this kaleidoscopic venture. Reading of these essays for the prudent readers will be just like embarking upon a journey to different ages. It is all due to the untiring and arduous labour of the researchers that the book resulted in a fabulous read. It is hoped that the illustrative essays in this book will inform and enlighten the readers and at the same time kindle their interest in the exciting adventure among the masterpieces of literature that is the primary objective of education, literary criticism and appraisal. Hope this book will turn out to be a rewarding reading for everyone who wish to read, absorb, digest and cherish hues of literature.



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