

Zoom Chat Week 7: Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven* (Parts 5-9, pp. 167-333)

Kyle: Characters the story eventually give religious significance to the plague and begin a cult that is led by The Prophet. They believe that the plague wiped out only the bad people and those remaining were good. This is vaguely like the Flood in the bible which shows interpretations of this kind are not unprecedented. Do you think this could happen in real life? Is there any evidence of this in the current pandemic?

Whitney: I was glad to see in the end that there was a community that was starting to get back on the grid! I wonder if the new community will welcome the outsiders and how come the traders who came to the airport from that city with power did not mention the advancements? Were they doing this intentionally? the twists and turns to this story were wild! All the little connections made at the end were so good! What do you all think happened to Elizabeth? what do you think the overall message station 11 tries to convey is? Do you think she wants us to see just how fragile we are and how dependent we are on things that are all just luxuries that we take for granted?

Lina: Why do you think Mandel included the scene with Charlie staring at the clean tea set and Kirsten feeling the presence of something in the room? It seemed a little out of place to me with the supernatural not seeming to exist in the rest of the book.

Grant: During the years before the collapse in Station Eleven the characters continued to pass on this paperweight with a storm cloud inside of it. It eventually ends up and stays with Kirsten. Then later on even though it serves no purpose and is useless for survival in the post-collapse world, it continues to be held on to by Kirsten while never being thrown away. Do you think the paperweight was meant to be a symbol of something or some idea?

Josie: Station Eleven focused a lot on the arts and how people use them to mentally escape from their own realities. Do you think that mental escape is a good or damaging coping mechanism for someone during a time of crisis? Some may argue that escaping reality is more hurtful rather than helpful.

Rhi: 1. Why do you think that Kirsten and her friends get knife/arrow tattoos to signify the number of people they have killed? It is not something they are proud of, so why permanently and publicly display it? 2. At the end of the novel, it appears that the town Jeevan lives in has figured out how to harness the power of electricity again. Why do you think Mandel choose to end the book in this way, rather than having the characters continue to live without the old comforts of technology? Does it undermine or strengthen her message about the importance of the arts?

Natalie: 1. I may have missed it, but who was Victoria? 2. How have we seen Arthur grow over the course of the novel?

Alexis: I thought it was interesting in the airport that they still educated children about the past, but I also know there were other settlements where children were purposefully not taught about the past. What is the significance of remembering or not remembering the world before the pandemic, especially thinking about connections to the museum inside the airport?

Sierra: Why does the Author chose to end the novel with Clark things about the things he does? Arthur remembers Miranda saying "I regret nothing," and uses that to deepen his understanding of Lear, "a man who regrets everything," as well as his own life. How do his regrets fit into the larger scope of the novel?

Tim: From Page 303, why does the boy shoot and kill himself after shooting and killing the prophet? Is it grief, guilt, or something else? (Even though he was dissatisfied with the prophet, that doesn't explain killing himself).

Brooke: What is the significance of the opening quote from Czeslaw Milosz to the story? Does it change the way you view certain aspects of the novel?

Reed: What does Tyler having a page from station 11 symbolize? Is the author expressing that Tyler's evil was developed from the circumstances and he could have been a good guy?

Zoe: Throughout Station Eleven there is a lot of reflection on the past and what specific experiences were like (tasting an orange, using a computer etc.) what experiences have we lost due to covid and what experiences will we reflect on/ be asked about by younger kids who have never experienced life before a pandemic?

Victoria: Many characters we saw held on to their art forms very closely. Do you think that bringing their art and continuing to practice was a helpful survival technique? Was traveling and performing better than being sitting ducks, and even learning new skills?

Samantha: In Chapter 36, when Jeevan starts to travel on his own after Frank dies, he comes across a small group of individuals. One of them is named Ben, who shares he is immune to the Georgia Flu. Ben remarks blankly that he is "the luckiest man alive." In this case, with so much death, do you think being immune to such a devastating disease is a blessing or a curse?

Alexis: Also analyzing the Milosz quotation at the beginning: "The bright side of the planet moves toward darkness / And the cities are falling asleep, each in its hour, / And for me, now as then, it is too much. / There is too much world." given that the end of the book suggests there is new civilization beginning to emerge with the lighted town seen from the control toward, is there too much world even in this post-pandemic world? What is too much world? Is the world going to inch towards that again which will lead to another fall?

John: On page 302, the Prophet asks Kirsten "Do you know who's coming?" When she answers no, he says that whoever is coming is too late. He then begins blurring his religious philosophy with lines from Dr. Eleven. Initially, I expected him to answer that "Jesus Christ" was coming

given the apocalyptic significance of the second coming of Christ in the book of Revelations. However his answer that it is "too late" and subsequent dive into Dr. Eleven makes me wonder: Why does he fuse Dr. Eleven into his religious philosophy? Is this his abandonment of religion? Did you find this to be an unexpected moment too?

Victoria: Another question is that every character seemed to remember different things from life before. What types of things would you hope to remember if we lost everything?

Grant: @Natalie, Victoria was the friend of Arthur back home that he wrote the letters too. She later created and published the book Dear V. Also, I think we have seen Arthur grow through out this book by seeing his need to leave the island wanting privacy but also fame. Then throughout the book he is always chasing the next thing. And by the end he does not want anything new that is materialistic and only wants to be with his son. We have seen him learn and grow by seeing how he has realized the things that are actually important in life.

Maria: In chapter 46 on page 269, Jeevan's friend asks, "Does it still make sense to teach kids about the way things were?" What are your thoughts in response to this question? Do you think it matters if knowledge about the past makes kids unhappy?

Tim: @Maria Knowledge of the past is crucial. "Those who are ignorant of the past, are destined to make the same mistakes"

Samantha: I think remembering the past is important because it grants motivation for present generations to move forward and improve the world around them. In other words, hearing about the past gives hope for the future.

Brooke: Tim, I agree. I think learning about the past is important, but I also think the way it is taught is crucial as well. I don't think it should be taught in a nostalgic way.

Zoe: It kind of makes me think of people who say "I was born in the wrong generation"

Samantha: Omg Zoe lol

Zoe: Its important to learn about the past and then we can use the good and remove the bad from our future

Sierra: @Victoria, I would hope to remember the foods of my childhood, the way they looked and tasted. I want to remember things like dances, past times, video games, maybe even simple things like books. Overall, I wouldn't want to forget the simple things, which are the things that are easily forgotten.

Tim: @Samantha I agree. Notice how In oppressive governments, they spread propropaganda that conceals what life was before the oppressive regime. This is so the people do not know what

they have lost, and thus, will not strive to improve their current situation. See N.Korea, Soviet Union, etc.

Kyle: It also costs resources to maintain records of that past. In an apocalyptic scenario it might not be worthwhile.

Rhi: I agree, we can learn a lot from the past. It's better to educate children than try to "preserve their innocence" and leave them in the dark because it could negatively impact their lives. Also, like Maria is saying, since it appears at the end of the novel that people have found a way to harness electricity again, I think it would be important for the children to know about old technology so they can help try to rebuild it or create new technology

Kyle: I want my central heating.

Reed: and emergency rooms

Natalie: lol kyle. Or you could be like Kirsten and completely block out certain parts of the past because it's too painful to remember.

Sierra: I think it's important to teach kids about the old ways for two main reasons. One, you should always have a record of history, even if it makes you sad. You can't forget the past and discount it. For "if you don't remember the past, your doomed to repeat it," you need to learn about it so you don't repeat mistakes. The second reason is to give hope for the future or maybe give them knowlege needed to restore some parts of the old world.

John: To answer the reason for why power and technology has not been pursued after the collapse. On page 179, the power and water goes out at Jeevan and Frank's place. When that happens, Frank begins talking about a "tree house". In addition, Jeevan says that there were "inexplicable moments of peace" in the silence and darkness. He even describes that "he had never felt so close to his brother." Therefore, this could provide some of the reason for the lack of pursuit of technology. In the absence of technology, some feel a sense of nostalgia and closeness that is constantly interrupted by modern technology.

John: Another question I had: What is the significance of Dr. Eleven being a comic book? Theoretically, it could have a novel, a film, a painting, or any other form of art. So why a comic book?

Tim: @John Oh, that makes sense

Maria: Has anyone else thought about how they can't just "throw things away?" What is life like with no trash pick up service? Of course, a lot of the world functions this way now.

Brooke: @John, that's a good question. Maybe it has something to do with comic books being considered "low art" while certain music and paintings are "high art." Because of the focus on

art in the novel, Mandel might be wanting to show that not only certain forms of art are better or are better for changing the world. I'm not sure though.

Rhi: I liked when Mandel brought up the issue of medicine post-apocalypse, how Kirsten's brother died because of a foot infection, and I think someone else died simply because they did not have access to insulin. It also makes me think about the current state of medicine in America though, how access to medicine in modern day is a privilege, and an expensive one at that. Some people cannot afford the lifesaving treatments and medications that are available today (like insulin!!) or if they live in rural areas do not have easy access to hospitals and die because of this lack of access and that is truly awful

Alexis: I keep memory boxes of so many little random things like concert tickets, so i have a hard time parting with trivial things from memorable events in my life

Tim: @Rhi You also have that girl who left the airport and presumably died in the woods when she left to find the medicine Exeffnor.

Grant: @Maria, I have thought about services like that as well. As for their trash, I'm sure they just have to burn their waste or dispose of it in some similar way.

Samantha: @Alexis same, I have 4 folders full of trivial things from each year of high school lol

John: @Brooke That would also contrast with the "high art" of Shakespeare that is the most revered form of art by the Symphony. Also, the golden age of comic books was in a time period before television became the dominant form of media.

John: So there's an element of nostalgia to it.

Rhi: @Tim You're right! That part was so sad

Sierra: @John I think the reason for Station Eleven being a comic book is to allow for a medium that everyone could understand or a medium that could last past an age of technology. If the comic would have been a movie or show, or some type of medium that relies on technology it would have been lost to time and it would defeat it's purpose. For it's purpose in the novel is to act as a link from the new post illness age to the past and as a reminder to the past. In terms of it being something that everyone can understand, we see adults having the comic and kids. It was designed so anyone at any age could read it and understand it. If it was a novel, the kids would have properly not read it and discounted it. Plus with it being a comic book, you also get pictures, which helps has a way to connect to the story and connect with the past that is presented

Brooke: @John, That's true! There's extra nostalgia in the comic books, but I think there's also a sort of reference to the cyclical nature of entertainment where it's a forever rotating wheel of what is popular at the time.

Josie: I honestly loved the intricacy of the characters in this book. They seemed to have a lot of individual struggles that allowed a broad scope of different topics to touch on.

John: @Sierra That seems like such a logical explanation! Comic books have the dual purpose of being considered by some as "low art" and "low tech."

Taylor: Hello! So sorry I'm late. Here is my question: Can it be said that technological advancements have only made us as a society weaker in some ways? There was talk on page 266 of someone dying of not having insulin, page 267 of someone dying by just stepping on a nail, and then there was that girl in the airport looking for Effexor and others for cigarettes to curb the withdrawal. While there's no real preparation for going without those kinds of things, maybe there's something we can do to anticipate the sudden loss of technology and the things that practically hold our hand to help us get by in this world. Maybe having too much technology is only making us more vulnerable when we have to go without it.

Tim: Will younger kids growing up in the COVID-19 pandemic affect them long term, like the Georgia Flu pandemic affected Tyler?

Sierra: I agree, I think Tyler is a product of this childhood and the troubling times. A lot of things that shape our lives happen in childhood. He was raised during a pandemic and was around religion constantly, that's all he knew. So he adapted in the only way he knew how. If he would have been raised in a different environment I think he would have turned out differently.

Taylor: Yeah, as we are incredibly molded by our parents and especially in changing times like that, I think we can place most of the blame on his mother making the decision to go with the religious group.

Samantha: @Tim Gen Z certainly will I think, simply because a lot of us are in our adolescent/pre-adulthood years. That is a time where people are psychologically more vulnerable.

John: Monty Python: "Bring out yer dead!"

Kyle: It seems like Kirsten and her crew fell very hard into Shakespeare while Tyler and Elizabeth fell into the Bible/religion.

John: @Kyle That's an astute observation, but true!

Reed: people respond to trauma differently though

Taylor: And she was scared of herself after that because she wiped off the knife of blood and felt nothing after killing that first person

John: Here's an interesting thought. In Station Eleven and Year of the Flood, the narrative constantly switches points in time. This includes years before the apocalypse and different years after the apocalypse. But imagine a story that could be told featuring a deadly pandemic but involving characters who ACTUALLY travel in time to try fix the problem. Do any of you know of such a novel?

Victoria: Everyone is ready for spring break lol

Kyle: Oh yes

Samantha: @John The closest I can think of is the plot of Avengers: Endgame lol

John: @Samantha I literally just thought the same thing.

Brooke: That's a good point, John!

Kyle: I feel like worrying about aliens is a little scarier than if they were called Martians. Knowing where they come from makes space seem a little smaller.

Samantha: OH GOD

John: I agree with you, Kyle. That's similar to what I was trying to say.

Lina: For too much world, I think of endless twitter threads

Kyle: Ha

Taylor: If we were torn down, could we build back up better?

Lina: ^^ Right, it might get worse, or just the same

Taylor: That's the whole reason we're recording history, right?

Tim: It doesn't have to collapse to change. We can change what we have. Also, change can lead to collapse. See Civil rights movement

Rhi: @Alexis I completely agree! "too much world" can definitely be things that aren't exactly physical, like societal standards. They're always changing and vary from culture to culture and yet they exert so much pressure and that can be exhausting and seem like too much

Tim: We fixed things without collapsing society

Lina: Did Arthur die from the flu or just a normal heart attack? I was never certain

Taylor: I'll email the author and ask because that's going to bug me now

Samantha: I was going to say that too Lina

John: The awakening world echoes the line that Dr. Eleven asks his mentor about death. His mentor says that death is like waking up from a dream.

Taylor: Ships are easier to imagine than airplane

Brooke: You don't need electricity to sail a boat

Samantha: Also it made me think of how when people in Nordic cultures died they were sent off into ships and I connected that to Miranda's death

Tim: When going into the unknown, it is scary and exciting at the same time. You don't know if what you encounter will be better or worse than what you already know. So, the ending could be hopeful or quite tragic depending on what will be encountered.

Rhi: That is an interesting point. Given all of the commentary on phones and electronics etc., it would be interesting to see how much people decide to bring back into their lives. Will they try to bring back cellphones and all of the world's tiny distractions, or go without?

Taylor: I think the part where Kirsten was looking into the telescope led ME to believe that it was a new world. It made me think they were starting anew

John: When asked about Tesla and SpaceX, Elon Musk said that renewable energy was inevitable and Tesla merely helps to speed it along. However, he claims that planetary exploration is not necessarily inevitable. The goal of SpaceX, he states, is to change that.