
Survival Is Insufficient: The Motto Of Dystopian World In Station Eleven

The story Station Eleven by Emily St. John Mandel, is a story about the breakdown of civilization, but it also explores, actually what drives civilization today. Through the contrast of society before the collapse to depictions of life after it, Mandel is able to explore the idea that we exist to benefit and serve society through different perspectives. Before the collapse, civilization is presented as mundane, pointless, and problematic while still appealing to people like Arthur and Miranda for the anonymity, privacy, and freedom it offers. However, this also illustrates the way that civilization disconnects people from each other. It isn't until after the collapse that people like Kirsten and Jeevan reflect on the technology we have and realize that humans seem to sleepwalk through life rather than take the effort to appreciate it.

In the novel, time is measured from before and after the pandemic with Year 0 corresponding to the time of the Georgian Flu Outbreak and continues until Year 19 in a world that's post-outbreak. Arthur Leander is an extremely successful actor who died of a heart attack on stage the night of the Georgia Flu pandemic. Mandel moves back and forth in time - from Arthur's early days as a film star to years after his death with a theater group known as The Travelling Symphony. Before the outbreak, Arthur is very famous and his wife Miranda Carroll host ten guests at their house to celebrate their wedding anniversary and the opening figures of Arthur's latest film. Miranda feels very uncomfortable with the lifestyle and values that come with being a celebrity and feels out of place in Hollywood. She is hoping everyone will leave but by midnight nobody is showing signs of leaving. Near Miranda, Clark Thompson is talking to a woman named Tesch, who is pretentiously asking him what he does. Clark tells her that he does Management Consulting in New York City. Miranda overhears this conversation and remembers talking to Tesch earlier in the night but she can't seem to remember what she does for a living. Miranda recognizes that she has some rudeness in her tone and assumes that she must be well known. This sends Miranda's thoughts into a panic as she thinks to herself, "Is it possible that Tesch is actually extremely famous and Miranda's the only one at the table who doesn't know this? Yes, that seems very possible. These are the things she frets about" (Chapter 15). Miranda is thinking this way because she feels self conscious around these people who are wealthy and successful. Her perspective on how people serve society is focused on those who are famous and have a lot of money but since Miranda has much less success than Arthur, she feels as if she does not fit in among the crowd because she is not benefitting the party that's full of elitists. Arthur overhears Clark talking and joins the conversation from the far end of the table. Tesch then turns the topic of conversation to Miranda's work. Miranda says that she's almost finished, and isn't sure if she'll publish it when she is done. Arthur backs up the book that Miranda is working on and says, "It's brilliant, - I mean that. Someday she'll show it to the world and we'll all say we knew her when" (Chapter 15). Tesch then asks Miranda, "What's the point of doing all that work, if no one sees it?" (Chapter 15), Miranda maintains that it is the work that's important to her despite thinking that it sounds pretentious. She states that doing the work is what makes her happy because spending hours working on it is peaceful and it doesn't really matter to her if anyone else sees it. Tesch claims that Miranda's actions are very admirable but doesn't seem to comprehend that she's not doing it for fame. Immediately Tesch compares her to an outsider artist in a Czech film she also refused to show her work during her lifetime. This shows that Miranda has a different idea of benefitting society because she doesn't

believe that her book should be read by anyone besides her. While Tesch is only concerned with the fame and legacy that could be left behind with being an artist. After the party Miranda goes out to smoke a cigarette because she is very stressed about her current life situation. She ends up talking to a man with a camera who seems innocent and just interested in the lives of Miranda and her famous peers. Miranda criticizes his job by saying that he stalks people but the guys claims that she doesn't understand because she doesn't have to "work for a living" (Chapter 15). For a few minutes Miranda is telling this man a lot about her life that she is thinking about right now and then says "You're welcome. You people live for that kind of gossip, don't you?", to the guy with the camera. He responds, "No, I live on that kind of gossip, actually. As in, it pays my rent. What I live for is something different - Truth and beauty" (Chapter 15). The next day Miranda's friend Jeevan shows Miranda a gossip news article that is titled "Amid Rumors of Arthur's Infidelity, Miranda Wanders the Streets of Hollywood at Four AM Crying and Smoking". This shows how Miranda trusted someone because she thought she could get something off her chest after a stressful night but it really damaged her image to the public when she didn't do anything. Society in this part of the world thrives on creating versions of famous people's realities that people can talk about and be interested in. It was the guy with the cameras role to get a story worth reading but at the expense of Miranda's privacy and public image. It is evident that before the collapse created from the Georgia Flu, people saw how much they were helping society as the amount of fame or wealth they received. People always compare themselves to others like Tesch with her need to rudely ask about what people do for a living or like the camera guy who gained popularity and wealth of exploiting another person's story.

In the world after the collapse, the amount one person can contribute to society is limited because there is no more structured society. This forces people to find happiness in themselves and not with showing off their fame or possessions to others. In Year Twenty, the Symphony argues in order to distract themselves from the danger created by the prophet. Kirsten Raymonde is a girl who was eight at the time of Arthur's death and looked up to him very much at the time. Dieter, an actor and friend of Kirsten, says that the Symphony's motto, would be more profound if it weren't taken from Star Trek. But Kirsten, who has this line tattooed on her left forearm, disagrees. Mandel writes that the motto of "Survival is insufficient" (chapter 19) has Kirsten arguing with Dieter about the significance of this quote because Dieter believes that the origin of a meaningful value can't come from any level of artistic creation. However, in a post-apocalyptic world all art has value because of the value that people find in it. People don't only find value in high art or cherished masterpieces and Star Trek is something that means a lot to Kirsten. This shows how people are free to choose their own path and values that make them happy in the post-apocalyptic world because they are not pressured by society to do something that is deemed beneficial to people around you. In chapter 30, Jeevan Chaudhary and his paraplegic brother Frank, are stuck in Frank's apartment that has been filled up with supplies. These were the first few days of the pandemic, so they both still had hope that rescue would come. As the days go on, Frank puts his energy into his project to distract himself from the situation. Jeevan often contemplates how human the city is, and how so many pieces of society relies on an interconnected infrastructure of people. He thinks to himself that there has "always been a massive delicate infrastructure of people, all of them working unnoticed around us, and when people stop going to work, the entire operation grinds to a halt" (Chapter 30). This thought shows how Jeevan previously perceived society as a structured base for humanity that will never leave, when in reality he is realizing that the only reason things work is because people complete jobs for it to function. Jeevan's version of society is now changed because he doesn't know how he can benefit society without it functioning the way he expects it to. Jeevan

is just left to take care of his brother. Near the end of his second decade in the airport, Clark thinks about how lucky he has been to survive, and to see one world ends and another begins. He feels lucky to have lived among all the wonders of civilization. Since about 50% of the people in the Severn City Airport were actually born there, he took it as his job to teach about the previous world because he has seen it for himself. It is an interesting thought to see that “he was explaining now, to a sixteen-year-old who’d been born in the airport, the planes didn’t rise straight up into the sky. They gathered speed on long runways and angled upward” (Chapter 42). Though it is difficult to describe to a younger generation what civilization was like before the collapse, Clark feels that, since he possesses memories and experiences of the world, it is his duty to pass them on into the new generations of people. Through these teachings and misconceptions he recognizes that the technology of the modern day were taken for granted, as they now seem so amazing to the kids of the future. It can be seen throughout the story that people who lived before the collapse have a very different view of how an individual should benefit society than those afterwards who must learn to appreciate the things they once had.

By comparing the changes in perspectives of Arthur, Jeevan, Miranda, and Clark from before the Georgia Flu to the post-pandemic world, it is evident that these characters changed how they sought to benefit society. Before the collapse, our modern civilization puts stress on people for pointless reasons and forces people to feed off others to succeed, while at the same time, appealing to famous or rich people like Miranda and Arthur. This idea is a reflection of our modern society and it’s shallowness and how we are so concerned with pop culture and being famous rather than appreciate the people and technology, what they can offer and what they add to society.