

STATION ELEVEN ESSAY

Following the aftermath of the brutal and unrelenting Georgia Flu pandemic killing 99.9% of the human population worldwide, Emily St. John Mandel's novel *Station Eleven* commends remembering the prelapsarian world more so than suppressing it. Deeming the recollection and preservation of the past world as drastically important, particularly art and culture, Mandel emphasises that doing so will lead to the maintenance of a hopeful vision that civilisation can be re-established despite widespread destruction. Furthermore, remembering regrets, mistakes and failures made prior to the pandemic gives individuals new purpose, belonging and identity following such crisis. However, although not advocated as equally significant when compared to recalling the past, repression of memory is formidable throughout the novel when individuals unconsciously suppress trauma, sometimes with the consequence of distress.

Throughout her novel, Emily St. John Mandel outlines how memory evokes significant hope in a broken world through devices of preservation, specifically through the Travelling Symphony and Clark. Indeed, after emphasis is placed on "survival (being) insufficient" following the destruction cast upon society by the Georgia Flu in the survival group named the Travelling Symphony, members retain memories of the former world through art and culture. With particular focus on 16th century Shakespeare, the Symphony advocates the importance of remembering artistic history of the world prior to the Georgia Flu, intending to live a life that is not just "insufficient" and creating a sense of hope amongst those who were subjected to significant loss following the pandemic. Indeed, after central Symphony member Kirsten performs a *Midsummer Night's Dream* to onlookers found in the remote town of St. Deborah, with acting being "the thing (she) love(s) most in the world to do", she observes how the audience "stand(s) in ovation" and some individuals are "moved to tears". With the evident emotional link between individuals and memory creating connection between performers and their audience after the event of crisis, being that some are "moved to tears", Mandel advocates devices of preservation such as Shakespeare due to the hopefulness it creates amongst those who have gone through trauma and thus the importance of remembering such. Furthermore, it is acknowledged by Kirsten that the Symphony often "believed what they were doing was noble", emphasizing how they are preserving the memory of art through performing to those willing to watch. With the word "noble" having connotations of high morality and generosity, Mandel accentuates recollection of the prelapsarian world as being necessary in order to create magnanimity in a broken society so rebuilding can occur. Moreover, central character Clark has fond memories of the world prior to the Georgia Flu and wishes to safeguard as many items from it as possible. Certainly, the Museum of Civilization embodies the most significant device of preservation across the entirety of the novel - being made up of "taken-for granted miracles that had persisted all around (people)" in the former world, primarily being technology. Outlining that the "unlimited number of objects...that people wanted to preserve" were once "taken-for granted miracles", Mandel encourages that they are remembered as phenomenon's and suggests that the epiphany that humans were once ignorant towards such glory will create ambition to rebuild a similar civilization. Furthermore, Clark consciously acknowledges "how lucky he'd been...to have dwelt in that spectacular world" before it crumbled as a result of the Georgia Flu. The importance of memory is prevalent here as Clark's belief he was "lucky" to live and admire the "spectacular world" that existed before the devastation of the pandemic motivates him to preserve the expired civilization and create anew. Overall, the significance of remembering the past world becomes important in the preservation of both art and technology, once individuals are influenced by memories to re-establish society following large scale devastation.

Emily St. John Mandel places prominence on the importance of remembering past regrets and failures and how they influence individuals to create a new identity and purpose

following the events of crisis. The story stream of Jeevan Chaudhary follows his existential dilemma in his professions of the former world, as well as his discovery of new life and being after the demolition of civilization after the Georgia Flu. Indeed, hours before he is made aware from close friend Hua that the Flu is in fact a pandemic and present in Toronto, Jeevan converses with former paparazzo colleagues, venting that he "want(s) to do something that matters", rather than his rather hectic past work experiences of photographing celebrities and being a journalist. Jeevan's acknowledgement and epiphany of his lack of belonging in his profession becomes apparent only after the event of crisis - attempting rather unsuccessfully to save Arthur Leander from a heart attack whilst performing King Lear. Reflecting on his dissatisfaction with past employment and said experience, Jeevan is "blindsided by an unexpected joy" and is "certain he want(s) to be a paramedic". Although the "unexpected joy" he feels is rather juxtaposing following such a traumatic experience, Jeevan's hatred and regret towards his life choices become evident and the importance of such memories lead him on a path of positivity and purpose. Jeevan's memories of unhappiness in the past world are of utmost importance when it comes to his re-establishment of identity in the prelapsarian world. Indeed, although Jeevan realises "there were moments when he was overcome by good fortune" with the "tranquillity" and "woman" he has found as well as "having lived to see a time worth living", he "(doesn't) want to let go" of his memories of the past world. Realising their importance in the changes he makes following the destruction of the Georgia Flu and the establishment of his marriage and profession as a paramedic, Jeevan has a close connection with his memories of the world prior to the pandemic and thus "(doesn't) want to let (them) go". Furthermore, by calling the prelapsarian world a "time worth living" and describing it as a place of "tranquillity", despite the widespread devastation it has been exposed to, Jeevan's memories of his past life and decisions in work are evidently suggested to be more traumatic and influential in his life while his new identity is preferred and fitting to him as an individual. Certainly, Jeevan outlines that the illness created a "divide between a before and an after, a line drawn through his life" - a division of memory and new reality - giving him the opportunity to reflect and build a new purpose and belonging. Overall, Jeevan's reconstruction of profession and life post the pandemic emphasises the importance of remembering life prior to crisis in order to reflect, have new purpose and move forward.

While Mandel acknowledges that repressing traumatic memories can be important in moving forward for some individuals, she depicts that when it occurs unconsciously it is exasperating and distressing, thus being celebrated less than remembering. Specifically, those who have subconsciously eradicated negative experiences tend to cling to mirrors of impact - in Station Eleven being Kirsten's inability to remember most things from Year One of the pandemic and beforehand, besides Arthur Leander and her minor involvement in the production of King Lear. Indeed, with Arthur's mirror of impact metaphorically representing her only childhood memories before the pandemic, Kirsten goes "through every magazine she (can) find in search of him" rather frantically to preserve and hold on to the only memories she can treasure. The irritation of Kirsten towards her unconscious suppression of memory is evident through such desperate attempts to remedy any information on Arthur Leander, as "magazine scraps" are significantly useless following an apocalypse and are not necessary when searching for survival items such as food and water and never less she finds them drastically important anyway. Furthermore Kirsten's dissatisfaction with forgetting "countless things about the pre-collapse world", including her "mother's face" becomes clear when she "(finds) her past" in a magazine 8 years after the Georgia Flu. The confronting situation of finding "her past" in a lower art gossip magazine - including her as an 8 year old performing King Lear - and being unable to recollect her childhood and "her mother's face" on her own creates perspective for readers on the distressing nature of unconscious forgetting following trauma, being unfathomable to understand not having memories of our mother's face. On top of this, admitting that she has forgotten "countless things" about the prelapsarian world and only Arthur Leander distinctly, Kirsten's desire to preserve and cling to his mirror of impact on her life is evident, as well as Mandel's acknowledgement that forgetting is not

always sustainable when exposed to drastic survival circumstances. In an interview during Year 15 with François Diallo, Kirsten is described by him as a "strong and unbreakable" woman thanks to her repression of Year One and having "no memory" of the "unspeakable (trauma)" it contained. Furthermore, Kirsten tells Diallo that she "(has) no memories or few memories of any other way of living" when discussing the brutality of surviving in a world ridden of all law and enforcement of consequences. Being referred to as a "strong" and "unbreakable" woman outlines how repression of memory is effective in stabilising a child's mental wellbeing in times of mass destruction. As well as having "no memories...of any other way of living", Kirsten is able to adapt to new circumstances without hesitation due to past memories of the prelapsarian way of ordered and lawful living. Overall, although Kirsten is able to overcome upheaval from Year One of the Georgia Flu through suppression of memory, her feeling of disconnect with her childhood shows her discontent with forgetting, valuing remembering more so.

Throughout her novel *Station Eleven*, Emily St. John Mandel explores how remembering the world prior to devastation becomes more important than forgetting when it comes to preservation, re-establishment and self-reliance. However, repressing traumatic memories can be effective in remaining level-headed and acting in a way that will remunerate survival. Through central group the Travelling Symphony and character Clark, the significance of remembering and honouring the past world through preserving the memory of technological and artistic developments is evident through human connection and emotion it evokes. Furthermore, the story stream following character Jeevan exposes how the remembrance of past mistakes can lead to the discovery of a once unfound motivation to succeed and develop new purpose and identity, following widespread destruction. Lastly, while it is clear that character Kirsten has major frustration and disturbance when finding herself unable to recover suppressed memories of her childhood, the unconscious forgetting of trauma that occurred as a result of the Georgia Flu assists her in becoming a strong and unrelenting survivor in the postlapsarian world.