

STATION ELEVEN SUGGESTS THAT IS IT BETTER TO BE INSPIRED BY TRUTH AND BEAUTY THAN BY SUCCESS

Encompassed by the artificial excess of the modern-era, Miranda retreats as always, to the “beautiful wreckage of Station Eleven”, working silently and passionately with a mere pencil and sketchbook. It is through such authentic virtues of the characters by which Mandel’s accentuates her point that a life inspired by “truth and beauty” is far more fulfilling than one characterised by notoriety and possessions - the modern standards of a successful life. Yet, particularly in the new world, success was no longer limited to the conventions of society, but rather defined by the individual. Therefore, characters are able to find accomplishment through various avenues, whether it be art, history or human interactivity.

The modernity of the world pre-collapse had shaped the notion of success to be one of high profile wealth, power and fame. It is for this reason, Mandel suggests, that individuals were forever distracted from the sheer beauty that had persisted around them. Arthur was perhaps the epitome of a successful life in the old world, in which “celebrity... carried a certain currency”. Yet, his preoccupation with the “weight of [his] money and possessions” is evident in the fact that he had failed to realise how “distant [his] son” had become, at least before it was all too late. Also, his progressive loss of self is unquestionable, by Miranda especially, who had the “odd impression that he was [always] performing a scene”. In a similar way, Clark succumbed to the corporate world, which was “full of ghosts”, being that a sense of “awe or inspiration” was largely absent, or rather, overshadowed by the extravagant city lights. Only many years later would he realise how the confining nature of such a world would distort his priorities, and ultimately his sense of self, evident in the spontaneous haircut he opted for following the apocalypse. Ultimately, Mandel undermines the everyday distractions of the world pre-collapse, namely celebrity gossip and technology, which served not only to inhibit the human desire to “do something remarkable”, but to produce an insincere, unappreciative generation of “high-functioning sleepwalkers”. Certainly, Mandel argues, individuals who choose to conform to the modern-day definition of success, whilst simultaneously ignore all of the world’s natural wonders, will inevitably be “deeply unhappy”.

For Mandel, a fulfilling life is deemed not only the recognition, but the pursuit of what is truly important. Amongst this, moments of genuine beauty, and the appreciation of such “remarkable splendour[s]” is essential for remaining human. Despite civilisation’s shallow exteriors, Miranda lived vicariously through the magical world, her “constant”, that was Station Eleven. Evidently, success never concerned her, being that it didn’t “really matter to [her] if anyone else” saw her comics. Rather, her inspiration was sourced simply from the “sheer joy” art provided her. Once a woman so terribly insecure, to a woman who “repent[s] nothing”, Miranda continuously sought to uphold her morals and remained forever humble, and true, to her inner self. Likewise, The Travelling Symphony too possessed an affinity for art, and of all things that could provide a “beautiful respite from their daily cares”. It was through the formation of the Symphony itself that provided them “their only home”, as well as an outlet for creativity and inspiration. Certainly, Shakespeare was beautiful and moving as ever, illustrated through a man with “tears in his eyes” as he watch a twilight performance of A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Here, Mandel accentuates not only the endurance, but the blossoming of humanity following the collapse. As Clark dwells on the night sky and its “increasing brilliance”, Mandel celebrates the ability of the characters to emanate “truth and beauty”, in spite of their darkened circumstances. It is this appreciation of “what is best about the world” which offers a life of true meaning and sustenance, which unfortunately cannot be said of the corroding, and “warping” effects of fame and success.

It is this such fascination with the world’s “remarkable splendour[s]” that stimulates individual success in the new world. In fact, Mandel suggests that without the limitations of societal definition, perhaps truth, beauty and success can go hand-in-hand. In a past life, Jeevan

was a selfish paparazzo who was willing to go to any lengths to make a living, yet he certainly “didn’t like the footprints he was leaving”. Thus, humbled by the cataclysmic Georgian flu, Jeevan is able to accomplish his long-lived desire to “do something that matters”. Much like the people of the Undersea, Jeevan had “spen[t his whole life] waiting for [his] li[fe] to begin”, and it seems that in a way, he is finally able to attain his own version of success. Equally, Clark’s fulfilment lies in his transformation from a “successful-but-unhappy person” to that of an earnest, sincere one, who continually finds comfort in the most ordinary, but nonetheless “beautiful objects”. However, with that said, in the absence of societal construction, others are free to resort to alternative avenues of success. The Prophet and his “doomsday cult” drew inspiration, not through truth or beauty, but rather through the power of fate, which provided them their own deluded method of prosperity. Mandel implores the liberating ability of the survivors to channel their individual success in whatever seeks to inspire and sustain them. Yet it is also apparent that Mandel reprimands those who take advantage of their freedom by attempting to control others. However, sympathy is too felt for these such characters, as despite the limitless displays of beauty in the world, they still lack a sense of true “awe or inspiration”.

To be inspired by the “truth and beauty” that resides both within us and around us is ultimately what differentiates between mere existence and fulfilment. As Kirsten discovers the “pinprick of lights arranged into a grid” at the end of the novel, Mandel too captures how such inspiration invites possibility for the future of humankind. The survivors live through truth, hope and passion, forever reminiscing, on life’s “taken-for-granted miracles”. Thus, they channel their inspiration into ingenuity and are able to rebuild civilisation anew - because after all, “survival is insufficient”.