

IN STATION ELEVEN, FORGETTING IS AS IMPORTANT AS REMEMBERING. DO YOU AGREE?

In the wake of a devastating epidemic, selective memory plays a critical role in terms of the ability to maintain a sense of sanity. In Emily St. John Mandel's novel, *Station Eleven*, following a collapse of civilisation, Mandel acknowledges the importance of being able to forget certain events that restrict individuals from moving forward with their lives. However, Mandel simultaneously portrays the equal importance of the widespread nostalgia for, and the resulting aim to re-establish, only the positive aspects of a lost society whilst placing a significant emphasis on the inaccuracies that often arise due to the association of emotions with memories.

Mandel validates people that must suppress troubling memories due to a lack of ability to address and cope with such experiences. Kirsten is able to stifle her presumably traumatic memories from Year One, ultimately coming to the realisation that "whatever that year on the road contained...it was nothing she wanted to know." Her lack of memory of this period allows her to avoid being plagued by such trauma "through all the nights of [her] life." Mandel upholds a prominent idea throughout her novel that "the more you remember, the more you've lost," ultimately leading many characters to preferentially forget particular events rather than handle loss. In some of the towns that the Travelling Symphony pass through, "the children didn't know the world had ever been different," a mechanism created to prevent the children from having to cope with the loss of technology and civilisation. Miranda's *Dr. Eleven* comics act as a recurring motif throughout *Station Eleven* with a prescient plot that predicts a world in which humans are confined to living situations that are dictated by apocalyptic circumstances, foreshadowing the collapse of the modern world that occurs due to the spread of the Georgia Flu in the novel. The intertextuality of the comics provides a parallel to the novel in which the divide between those who live on the islands above and those who live in the Undersea reflects the debate taking place in the larger narrative between those who cope with disaster by remembering the old world and those who wish to forge ahead and build something new. Much like the characters in the post-apocalyptic world, the people of the Undersea in the *Dr. Eleven* comics find themselves "looking over [their] damaged home and [trying] to forget the sweetness of" their past lives, further portraying the essential concept of characters having to disregard memories in order to fully engage with the present state of their lives as the nostalgia for the past overrides the ability to adapt to the seemingly less desirable present.

Mandel explores the impact of associated emotions on the significance and legitimacy of events and the ability of memories to be altered by personal experience or emotions at the time. Mundane objects can often be made valuable through linked memories and connections, such as the glass paperweight, which "[Kirsten] still carries with her because she thinks it's beautiful," despite it being impractical. The paperweight is a motif through which the links between the characters is traceable and links Kirsten to the pre-collapse world, reflecting her longing for her past. However, the paperweight holds no significance to Arthur because "when he held the glass lump in his hand he found there were no memories attached to it," therefore to him it ultimately represents only the clutter and materialism he wants to escape, leading him to give it to Tanya almost immediately upon receiving it. Conversely, Mandel warns that such associations can also distort the actual memories by creating a sense of bias in terms of personal experience. Portrayed at the dinner party, Miranda and Arthur have conflicting recollections of how their relationship initiated; Arthur describes the experience as exclusively romantic but Miranda claims that he "doesn't tell the whole story." Miranda's experience is revealed to have been much more negative as she "reflects on the more personal details of the story that Arthur doesn't share with the guests, and the trauma of Pablo drunkenly waiting for her back at the apartment," portraying the importance of remembering the full version of events without omission.

Mandel condones the human instinct to record, seemingly depicting that communities have an obligation to preserve and pass on memories. The preservation of knowledge makes it possible for the productive aspects of lost civilisation to be re-established in the post-collapse world as “people want what was best about the world.” The younger members of the Symphony rely on communal memories for their understanding of what the pre-collapse world was like, often preserved in art, objects and stories that are passed on. The interviews conducted by Francis Diallo for the New Petoskey News in Year 15 conveys this preservation of memories. The publication of a newspaper in the post-collapse world represents the rebuilding of civilisation through “creating an oral history of this time, and an oral history of the collapse,” implying that some future civilisation will want record of what occurred. Similarly, Frank and Jeevan reflect on the way that recorded memories of individuals ensure “they’ll never truly die” in the sense of an almost immortal significance and value in the world. Despite Arthur’s death in the opening scene of the novel, his relevance is maintained through his connections with people and the memories they keep of him. The idea of memory through records speaks to the question of Jeevan’s name being omitted from Arthur Leander’s obituary as Frank insists that “first we only want to be seen, but once we’re seen, that’s not enough anymore. After that, we want to be remembered.” Although Jeevan survives and the memory of his heroic deed is passed on, his name is lost to history simply by virtue of not being recorded in the obituary, demonstrating the importance of actively preserving memories to ensure they remain relevant and valued through future generations.

Ultimately, Mandel places large emphasis on the importance of memory in everyday life, equally legitimising the significance of being able to either remember or forget certain experiences in order to successfully move forward both as individuals and as a society. As well as validating the need to avoid obsessing over and therefore being restricted by negative experiences from the past, Mandel advocates for the celebration and remembrance of, as well as the subsequent instinct to record, the positive aspects of civilisation, encouraging the re-establishment of these in a new society.