

ENGLISH – STATION ELEVEN ESSAY

All of Station Eleven’s narrative streams result in a loss of innocence. Is this a fair statement?

Throughout her novel ‘Station Eleven’ Emily St John Mandel explores how mass pandemic can impact people’s moral compass, the way in which individuals behave and perceive what makes life worth living.

In the novel Mandel laments how in the pursuit of notoriety and fame, individuals can become disconnected with their morality and become obsessed with the superficial components of life. Mandel’s characterization of Arthur as an actor who had become “extremely, unpleasantly famous” and lost touch with his own family as he was plagued by a lust for “money, fame and immortality”, demonstrates how in modern civilisation one can easily become misguided and lose meaningful connections with others. This notion is further accentuated by Arthur’s tragic death as at the scene of his passing an audience member exclaims “Christ what a thing. You die, and they call your lawyer”. Through this Mandel conveys how the superficial nature of Arthur’s life had culminated in him having no genuine relationships even with his own son, that a life consumed by materialism can dehumanise someone. Although Arthur began to “repent almost everything” with “regrets crowding around him like moths to a light” as he became disgusted with the way in which he had been living, his intentions to become a better father, live a purer life and reconnect with “his distant son”, were ultimately cut off by his death. Thus, Mandel presents how a superficial lifestyle can disconnect one with their family and other meaningful relationships, a sad reality of modern civilization.

Furthermore, Mandel highlights how the confronting nature of isolation and scarcity can unravel one’s primal instincts. Through her portrayal of Kirsten, a young actor with the “Travelling Symphony”, Mandel reveals how becoming separated with one’s community can make life purposeless, culminating in savagery and regret. When travelling with the symphony Kirsten had “never felt more alive” and was in love with the “camaraderie and music and Shakespeare”. However, once she is separated from the group and must fend for herself in the post-collapse world, Kirsten loses touch with her civilised self and becomes disconnected with the motto “Survival is insufficient” that she once swore by. This crisis results in Kirsten turning to savagery in an effort to reconnect with the “Symphony” as “there’s nothing she can’t survive, because there’s nothing that she won’t do”, conveying how the terrors of the post-collapse world unleash her animalistic side, a loss of innocence. Moreover, Kirsten is haunted by the mystical “idea of dragging the soul’s [of her victims] across the landscape like cans on a string” and wishes she could regain her innocence in a “parallel universe where [she had] no knife tattoos”. Through this, Mandel highlights how being exposed to the underlying horrors of the post-collapse world can culminate in individuals losing their once fruitful outlook on life, a viewpoint which had a sense of purpose, and instead turn to a directionless life of simple survival.

Although the narrative streams of Arthur and Kirsten seeing a double loss of innocence Although Clark is disillusioned in the pre-collapse world, unsure of his purpose in life, he ultimately finds direction and develops a hopeful outlook on life through the museum of civilisation. Before the collapse worked as a job training executive a career where he was “successful-but-unhappy”, however after the epidemic he finds his identity through the preservation of artefacts and mementos. Clark erects the “Museum of Civilisation” where he stored “beautiful objects” that may have been of “no real value” but are significant in the regeneration of civilisation as “the more we know about the former world, the better we’ll understand what happened when it fell”. Through her characterization of Clark, Mandel champions the enduring nature of art and how its preservation can instil meaning into an

individual's life that was previously purposeless, forming a positive perception of the world. Furthermore, Mandel's portrayal of Clark also demonstrates the empowering nature of human connection, meaningful relationships with others, and its inherent ability to provide those who are misguided in life with a sense of direction and comfort. Mandel conveys this notion through her depiction of Clark's habits at the airport as "the citizens" had "taken to meeting every night, an unspoken tradition", in which Clark "loved the conversation" and the "moments of lightness" but most of all "not being by himself". Thus, Mandel celebrates how genuine connections with others can provide one with inner peace.

Within her novel Mandel laments how in modern civilisation the will for people to live a wholesome and innocent life is tainted. Despite this, the narrative stream of Clark champions how in the post-collapse world losing one's innocence is not the only option, as truly living through finding meaning in one's surroundings and developing a hopeful outlook upon life is possible.