



**The Intervention between Art and Life:
A Study of the Meta-literary Modes in Emily
St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014)**

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to study the meta-literary modes employed in Emily St. John Mandel's novel, *Station Eleven* (2014). The outset of the paper provides a brief backdrop to introduce the usage of 'meta-literary' modes and expressions as possible vehicles to support textual analyses of significant episodes in the novel. The analytical part rendered in this paper tends to demonstrate the overt overlap between actual life and imagined art as exposed in Mandel's novel. Within the novel, Mandel has embedded another comic graphic novel, *Dr. Eleven*, to illustrate, relate, and emphasize the influences of her embedded novel on the lives of the characters in *Station Eleven*. The study also explores the role art plays in life through parallelism and coincidence. Besides, the study provides supporting examples and references from the performance of Shakespeare's plays: *King Lear* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as exemplified by the Travelling Symphony in *Station Eleven*. This technique based on the use of 'a play within a novel,' is called nested stories. Finally, the paper unveils the symbolic significances carried out by the objects as these 'meta-objects' are dense with a variety of indexical meanings beyond their literal ones; they represent hope and civilization for the characters in *Station Eleven*.

Keywords: meta-literary – parallelism – embedded – coincidence – significance.

الملخص:

التداخل بين الفن والحياة: دراسة للنماذج الميتا أدبية في رواية إيميلي ماندل
"المحطة الحادية عشر" (٢٠١٤)

يقوم هذا البحث بدراسة الأنماط الميتا أدبية المستخدمة في رواية إيميلي سانت جون ماندل "المحطة الحادية عشر"، ويبدأ بتقديم خلفية موجزة عن استخدام الأنماط الميتا أدبية كأدوات ممكنة لدعم التحليلات النصية للأحداث المهمة في الرواية. ويتناول الجزء التحليلي صور التداخل الصريح بين الحياة الواقعية والخيال الفني كما تعرضه الكاتبة في الرواية، حيث تتضمن رواية ماندل رواية أخرى؛ رواية مصورة كوميدية بعنوان: "دكتور إيفن"، لتوضيح، وربط، والتأكيد على تأثيرات روايتها المتضمنة على حياة الشخصيات في "المحطة الحادية عشر". تبحث هذه الدراسة أيضًا الدور الذي يلعبه الفن في الحياة من خلال التوازي والمصادفة. فضلًا عن ذلك، تقدم الدراسة أمثلة ومراجع داعمة من أداء شخصيات مسرحيات شكسبير: الملك لير وحلم ليلة صيف كما يتجلى في سيمفونية السفر في "المحطة الحادية عشر". تعرف هذه التقنية التي تعتمد على استخدام "مسرحية داخل رواية" بالقصص المتداخلة. ويكشف البحث في نهايته عن أهم الدلالات الرمزية المتضمنة بالعناصر والأدوات الميتا-أدبية المكتظة بكثافة وتسلسل لعدد وافر من المعاني التي يمكن الاستدلال عليها من وراء الشكل؛ تلك المعاني التي تمثل الأمل والحضارة لشخصيات الرواية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ميتا – أدبية – توازي – متضمن – تزامن – دلالة.

INTRODUCTION

Since its publication in 2014, Emily St. John Mandel's novel *Station Eleven* has achieved rapid success and won several awards. It became "finalist for the National Book Award and landed on the PEN/Faulkner shortlist and the longlist of the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction" (Schaub par. 1). In 2015, the novel was nominated and eventually won several other awards such as: the Arthur C. Clarke Award. According to Anders: "Clarke jury chair Andrew M. Butler explained the choice: 'While many post-apocalypse novels focus on the survival of humanity, *Station Eleven* focuses instead on the survival of our culture, with the novel becoming an elegy for the hyper-globalized present'" (par. 2). It was also voted by the British Fantasy Society members for one of British Fantasy Awards. The novel won the August Derleth Award for horror novels in 2015. In the same year, it won John W. Campbell Memorial Award for SF novel published in US. *Station Eleven* also won the Locus Award for sf novels in 2015. Also, in 2015 the novel won the Michigan Notable Book Award, and a Toronto Book Award (*Science Fiction Awards Database*). Despite the wide popularity and the number of awards, most research work on *Station Eleven* has been largely devoted either to study the novel's post-apocalyptic vision or probate it as a science fiction novel. Kabak, for example, regards it as a "post-apocalyptic pandemic novel . . . currently enjoying a surge of popularity after the coronavirus pandemic" (202). Of similar view, Watkins notes that the novel offers "two key texts that have survived the apocalypse: the plays

of William Shakespeare and the two issues of a graphic novel – *Dr Eleven* – privately published by an art student” (183). Nevertheless, several critics have considered the novel as a science fiction novel. Sherlock asserts that the novel “has been classed, due to its dystopian setting, as science fiction, and it notably won the 2015 Arthur C. Clarke Award for science fiction book of the year” (par. 4). However, the ideas relating between art and life in reflexive meta-modes of narrative are still worthy of more critical attention. The interest in this research has developed out of this thrust in an aim to introduce a different reading of the novel.

The events of *Station Eleven* occur in a non-chronological order. The novel is based on two timelines. Its plot keeps moving back and forth between life before and after the flu. Obviously, the novel is set twenty years after a devastating flu pandemic known at that time as ‘The Georgia flu’. This pandemic has destroyed civilization as it wiped out about ninety nine percent of the Earth’s population. Its plot begins on a snowy night in Toronto, North America, during a theater production of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, where the Hollywood actor Arthur Leander, the central character in the novel, is suddenly struck by a fatal heart attack on stage during the mad scene in *King Lear*. At that same night, the Georgia flu hits the globe. Immediately, there is no electricity or running water. Civilization is wiped out within a week.

Twenty years have passed and everything is over now, and signs of civilization begin to re-emerge. Kristen, a child who was there when Arthur died and now a young performer, moves with a troupe of classical actors and musicians called the Travelling Symphony. Kristen and August, Dieter, Alexandra, and others wander in wagons performing Shakespeare's plays. At each stop, Kristen searches the place and the deserted homes in search for any magazines with information about Arthur, whom she grievously remembers. She carries with her a set of graphic novels that Arthur gave her before his death. This set is called *Dr. Eleven* written by Miranda Carroll, Arthur's first wife. The story travels in flashbacks to the interconnected lives of Arthur and his wives, his friend, Clark Thompson, his son, Tyler, and Jeevan, a paparazzi/paramedic. Jeevan was also there among the audience of the play when Arthur died.

Kristen, along with the troupe, encounters a violent Prophet and head of a doomsday cult, who turns out later to be Tyler Leander, Arthur's son. Tyler, the Prophet, threatens the troupe's existence. Fearing the Prophet, the Symphony escapes to a settlement in a former major airport known as the *Museum of Civilization* which contains a collection of old-world artifacts such as: credit cards, car engines, and red stiletto heeled shoes which the survivors had found and preserved. The Prophet follows Kristen and attempts to kill her, when a boy in his group shoots him and then commits suicide.

The Museum is run by Arthur's best friend, Clark Thompson. After Arthur's death, Clark, along with Elizabeth and Tyler, catch the same flight to Toronto to attend Arthur's funeral. However, due to the flu outbreak, they land in Severn City, where they form a small committee with a number of other survivors. In this City, Clark finds the museum and runs it. The novel ends as the Symphony heading South towards a set of electric lights that recently appeared on the horizon.

METHODOLOGY

The research methods used in the study and scrutiny of the novel involve textual analyses, applications of the meta-modes used. The aim of this paper is to prove that the boundary between art and life is equivocal. In order to pursue this argument, this research paper is divided into three parts: the first deals with *Station Eleven* as an example of a metafictional work; the second shows how Mandel uses the technique of 'nested stories' to illustrate the coincidence between Shakespearean motifs and those of *Station Eleven*; and the third deals with the symbolic significance of objects in *Station Eleven*.

METAFICTION

The 1950s and the 1960s have both witnessed the emergence of the 'metafiction' technique in literature. Many theorists and critics have provided various definitions to the term. The first reference of 'metafiction' was mentioned in the 19th century by Andre Gide, a French writer, who defined it as 'artistic works

within works.’ The term ‘metafiction’ itself was first coined by William H. Gass in his 1970 essay “Philosophy and the Form of Fiction”:

There are metatheorems in mathematics and logic, ethics has its linguistic oversoul, everywhere lingos to converse about lingos are being contrived, and the case is no different in the novel. I don’t mean merely those drearily predictable pieces about writers who are writing about what they are writing, but those, like some of the work of Borges, Barth, and Flann O’Brien, for example, in which the forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed. Indeed, many of the so-called antinovels are really metafictions. (qtd.in Scholes 28)

He then defines ‘metafictions,’ in his 1980s essay, “Philosophy and the Future of Fiction,” as “fictions about fiction” (11). Thus, in both essays, Gass indicates the feature of self-reflexive works, which lead to the growth of interest in self-reflexive writing in literature. Patricia Waugh provides a comprehensive definition of the term as follows:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of

construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (2)

Metafiction, indeed, aims at erasing the boundary between fiction and reality. With the help of metafiction writers violate the linear narrative to reveal their creative process of writing.

Waugh explains that the terms 'metapolitics', 'meta rhetoric' and 'metatheatre' serve as a reminder of the broader cultural interest in the question of how people reflect, create, and mediate their experiences of the world that has existed since the 1960s. She demonstrates that, metafiction addresses such themes through its formal self-exploration by using the classic metaphor of the world as a book but frequently recasting it in terms of modern philosophical, linguistic, or literary theory. She adds, " If, as individuals, we now occupy 'roles' rather than 'selves', then the study of characters in novels may provide a useful model for understanding the construction of subjectivity in the world outside novels." Accordingly, just as our knowledge of the world is perceived through language, " literary fiction (worlds constructed entirely of language) becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of 'reality' itself." Waugh concludes, "“Meta' terms, therefore, are required in order to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers. In fiction they are

required in order to explore the relationship between the world *of* the fiction and the world *outside* the fiction” (3).

Linda Hutcheon argues that contemporary novel is representational. She believes that metafiction “demands that he [the reader] be conscious of the work, the actual construction, that he too is undertaking, for it is the reader who, in Ingarden's terms, ‘concretizes’ the work of art and gives it life” (39). Mandel’s *Station Eleven* is a perfect example of such a contemporary metafictional novel. In the novel, one of the characters, Miranda, writes a graphic novel, entitled *Dr. Eleven*. *Dr Eleven* is a comic book series with the first volume titled “Station 11, ” and the second titled “The Pursuit.” “Station 11,” from which the novel’s title is derived, mirrors the struggle of the characters, including the struggle of Miranda herself.

Dr. Eleven, the protagonist of *Dr. Eleven*, is a scientist who lives in Station 11, a space station designed to look like a world. The story takes place 1,000 years in the future. Fifteen years later, a group of the station residents, who had lived in the Undersea region, decide to return to Earth, but Dr. Eleven opposes them.

August believes so much in this theory that he imagines a series of “parallel universes”: one in which there was no pandemic, and another where there was a pandemic but “survivable” (200). Though Kristen thinks that it was August who invented this theory, she herself imagines herself in “that other, shadow life” (201). She wishes she lived in a parallel universe where her

comic, *Station Eleven*, was real, and where she had no knife tattoos on her wrist.

Kirsten's two knives tattoos symbolize the people she killed. She murdered the first when she was fifteen when a man tried to rape her. That was shortly after joining the Symphony. Two years later, she killed again when a group of men tried to take food, animals, and a woman from the Symphony by force. Thus, the two knives stand for "her many killings" while the tattoos of the knives are symbols of "her scars from the killings" ("Survival Is Insufficient" 60). This is why she wishes she would just live in that beautiful parallel universe depicted in the comic: "I mean a parallel universe where we boarded Station Eleven and escaped before the world ended" (202)

Before giving Arthur the first two issues of her *Dr. Eleven* comics, Miranda thinks to herself about how her interest has recently shifted from Dr. Eleven himself to the inhabitants of the Undersea. She grows less interested in Dr. Eleven while more sympathetic to those who reside in the Undersea. The inhabitants of the Undersea want to return to Earth, but Dr. Eleven opposes the idea:

The focus of the work had gradually shifted. For years Dr. Eleven had been the hero of the narrative, but lately he'd begun to annoy her and she'd become more interested in the Undersea. These people living

out their lives in underwater fallout shelters, clinging to the hope that the world they remembered could be restored. The Undersea was limbo. (213)

Dr. Eleven represents " Miranda's desires for closure, control, and escape." On the other side, the Undersea has come to stand for a limbo—"a paradoxically permanent state of impermanence." *Dr. Eleven* is a parallel to Miranda's life and state of mind: " when Miranda's life is the most settled and stable, she resonates with the Undersea, whereas, when she is relatively vulnerable, she shows interest in Dr. Eleven's leadership" (*SuperSummary* 43-4)

Receiving the news of Arthur's death, Miranda attempts to find a flight to attend the funeral. However, she cannot find a flight because of the flu outbreak which resulted in the airport closing. In addition, she wakes up the following morning with a fever. Exhausted, she makes her way to the beach and contemplates the rising sun which reminds her of Station Eleven's seascapes:

A wash of violent color, pink and streaks of brilliant orange, the container ships on the horizon suspended between the blaze of the sky and the water aflame, the seascape bleeding into confused visions of Station Eleven, its extravagant sunsets and its indigo sea. The lights of the fleet fading into morning, the ocean burning into sky. (228)

Thinking about the container-ship, she soothes herself with the thought that the people on the container ships were safe as they must be isolated from the pandemic.

Throughout the novel, Mandel employs the *Dr. Eleven* comics to reveal the underlying attitudes of the characters. For instance, Mandel uses the comic series to emphasize how Kristen and the Prophet are foils to each other. Quoting lines about living in a fallen world from the comic "Station Eleven", the Prophet says: "We are the light moving over the surface of the waters, over the darkness of the undersea." Kirsten replies: 'We long only to go home'. This line is mentioned during a face-off between Dr. Eleven and the people of the Undersea. She continues, 'We dream of sunlight, we dream of walking on earth.' Still quote from the comic, she adds, 'We have been lost for so long.' In response to her, the Prophet utters his final line, "But it's too late for that" (302).

This reveals the Prophet's identification with the text. Quoting lines from "Station Eleven" to one another, Kirsten and the Prophet expound what has been implied all along: "that the series has become, for each of them, a metaphor for the life they now live. [. . .]. Kirsten and the prophet differ in where they place their interpretive sympathies: while the prophet quotes lines that represent Dr. Eleven's outlook, Kirsten quotes lines sympathetic to those that live in the Undersea" (*SuperSummary* 27).

The Prophet believes it is wrong to go back home while Kristen insists they should go home. She identifies the inhabitants of the

Undersea with the survivors of the Travelling Symphony. While thinking if the Prophet recognized the text, he is shot. Staring at the dead body of the Prophet, Kristen is handed a copy of the New Testament which was found in the bag of the Prophet. Opening it randomly, she finds a piece of paper inside it. This page turns out to be torn from another copy of “Station Eleven”, not hers. This page depicts Dr. Eleven taking command after the death of his mentor/friend:

The entire page devoted to a single image: Dr. Eleven kneels by the lifeless body of Captain Lonagan, his mentor and friend. They are in a room that Dr. Eleven sometimes uses as a meeting place, an office area with a glass wall that overlooks the City, the bridges and islands and boats. Dr. Eleven is distraught, a hand over his mouth. An associate is there too, a speech bubble floating over his head: “You were his second-in command, Dr. Eleven. In his absence, you must lead.” (304)

Thus, as mentioned earlier, “Station Eleven” is a metaphor for the life of the Prophet: The Prophet represents Captain Lonagan, the mentor and friend of Dr. Eleven. They receive the same fate.

On the last day of his life, Arthur gives Kristen a copy of *Dr. Eleven*. We learn later that he gave the other copy to his son, Tyler, who turned out to be the Prophet. On that same day, Arthur calls his son, and asks him about his opinion concerning the comic. He even asks his son to explain what he understood

from the comic for him: "It's like a planet, but a little planet," Tyler said. "Actually it's sort of broken. It went through a wormhole, so it's hiding in deep space, but its systems were damaged, so on its surface? It's almost all water." (324)

Tyler explains that Dr. Eleven and his people live on islands in a city, which is dangerous because of the big seahorses. When Arthur asks about how dangerous the seahorses are, Tyler says, that in case the seahorse catch any of the people, it pulls him/her under to "an underwater place" called the Undersea, and thus this is how people belong to this place. During her last moments on an empty beach on the coast of Malaysia, Miranda recalls an image from 'The Pursuit, the second volume of *Dr. Eleven*. She remembers a scene where Dr. Eleven is visited by the ghost of his mentor. They have the following exchange:

Dr. Eleven: What was it like for you, at the end?

Captain Lonagan: It was exactly like waking up from a dream. (330)

Dr. Eleven impacts the lives and actions of others, such as Kristen and the Prophet, who are used to justifying their actions within the world. Near the end of the novel, Kirsten gives Clark a copy of *Dr. Eleven* to preserve in the museum "to ensure that at least one of the comics would be safe in case of trouble on the road That way, at least one book will always be safe" (331). As Clark reads the sci-comic, he pauses over one scene which seems quite familiar to him:

A woman with square-framed glasses is reminiscing about life on Earth: “I traveled the world before the war,” she says. “I spent some time in the Czech Republic, you know, in Praha,” and tears come to his eyes because all at once he recognizes the dinner party, he was there, he remembers the Praha woman, her glasses and her pretension. The man sitting beside her bears a passing resemblance to Clark. The blond woman at the far end of the comic-book table is unmistakably Elizabeth Colton, and the man beyond her in the shadows looks a little like Arthur. Once Clark sat with all of them in Los Angeles, at a table under electric light. On the page, only Miranda is missing, her chair taken by Dr. Eleven.

As observed in the above extract, Miranda is Dr. Eleven. Clark continues reading:

In the comic-book version Dr. Eleven sits with his arms crossed, not listening to the conversation, lost in thought. In Clark’s memory the caterers are pouring wine, and he feels such affection for them, for all of them: the caterers, the hosts, the guests, even Arthur who is behaving disgracefully, even Arthur’s orange-tanned lawyer, the woman who said “Praha” instead of “Prague,” the dog peering in through the glass. At the far end of the table, Elizabeth is gazing into her wine. In memory, Miranda excuses herself and rises,

and he watches her slip out into the night. He's curious about her and wants to know her better, so he tells the others he needs a cigarette and follows her. What became of Miranda? He hasn't thought of her in so long. All these ghosts. She went into shipping, he remembers. (300)

Throughout her life, Miranda "pours her heart and soul into Dr. Eleven, her 'constant,' which has strong autobiographical undertones. As she changes, her sympathies as an artist move from Dr. Eleven to the people of the Undersea, whom she sees as living in a state of perpetual uncertainty. Miranda's compassion for them mirrors her compassion for herself, including her younger self, along with her repeated insistence that she does not 'regret' or 'repent' anything." (*SuperSummary* 30-1)

In chapter 14, and after a few years of separation, Miranda receives a call from Arthur. He asks her to meet him at a hotel, where they spend the night together. The next morning, she looks in the mirror and thinks, "*I repent nothing*" (89). She later asks Arthur whether it was "dishonorable" to walk out on Pablo, her boyfriend. Arthur replies, "Can you call the pursuit of happiness dishonorable?" (90). The word 'pursuit' used by Arthur in the above line is derived from the title of the second volume of *Dr. Eleven*, thus exemplifying its impact on the characters of the novel.

Miranda creates *Dr. Eleven* as "a semiautobiographical creative outlet." She draws inspirations for some of the space station's

design from the lobby of Neptune Logistics. Her fictional universe gains depth "when it accurately predicts some of the philosophical and moral dilemmas that face those who survive the collapse." (*SuperSummary* 34).

NESTED STORIES

‘A story within a story’ literary device is sometimes referred to as ‘nested stories’. There are many examples of nested stories; one of which is ‘a play or a film within a book’. Mandel uses this technique in *Station Eleven* to demonstrate the central role art plays in the novel. Art, in this novel, allows people to understand, process, and escape their lives. It connects different parts of the novel together after the flu, 20 years later, people or the characters perceive art as a way of connecting with others as well as with themselves. Though the novel seems to be pessimistic, it describes a world of hope, with people coping with loss. It is about the power of art to nurture the characters back to their best selves. According to Mandel, *Station 11* is ultimately and purposefully a hopeful book. It serves as "a reminder that art – a play, a comic book, a musical interlude, a museum display, even an apocalyptic novel – can be the best means towards cultivating a civilization and preserving our humanity" (*Station Eleven* 3).

Interviewed by Lincoln Michel about the role that art plays for humans in the middle of any disaster, Mandel answers, "art reminds us of civilization, with all that that implies. You could perhaps say that it reminds us that we're human. We have an

instinct for art, even in the midst of catastrophe, and you see that in any of the most desperate places on Earth: people play music in refugee camps and put on plays in war zones."

Mandel then confesses that, while writing *Station Eleven*, she was influenced by a play called *Being Shakespeare* that was written by Jonathan Bate. It was then that Mandel "encountered the idea of Shakespeare as a man whose life was heavily marked by the episodes of bubonic plague that swept over England again and again in that era." This idea is elaborated as follows,

Shakespeare lived a life in which "survival is insufficient." He was the first child in his family to survive infancy, and he changed the world forever. He transcended surviving and created a lasting power that even a plagued, destroyed world could experience. The Traveling Symphony transcended booking a normal show to taking people out of their struggled life. ("Survival is insufficient" 65).

Throughout *Station Eleven*, there are numerous instances of art and life overlapping. Chapter one begins as follows:

THE KING STOOD in a pool of blue light, unmoored. This was act 4 of *King Lear*, a winter night at the Elgin Theatre in Toronto. Earlier in the evening, three little girls had played a clapping game onstage as the audience entered, childhood versions of *Lear's* daughters, and now they'd returned as

hallucinations in the mad scene. The king stumbled and reached for them as they flitted here and there in the shadows. His name was Arthur Leander. He was fifty-one years old and there were flowers in his hair.
(3)

Suddenly, Arthur, the aging actor, collapses on stage during the performance of the play, *King Lear*. Mandel writes: “Regan and Cordelia were holding hands and crying by the curtain, Edgar sitting cross-legged on the floor nearby with his hand over his mouth. Goneril spoke quietly into her cell phone. Fake eyelashes cast shadows over her eyes” (6). The moment of Arthur’s death, while performing the role of King Lear, is a proof that “The boundary between actor and audience blurs and the world of performance seems to spill over into reality” (Smith 290).

The scene of Arthur’s death is at first seen as part of the performance. Before falling on stage, Arthur skips a few lines. Miranda narrates: “not only was this the wrong line but the delivery was wheezy, his voice barely audible. He cradled his hand to his chest like a broken bird. The actor portraying Edgar was watching him closely. It was still possible at that moment that Arthur was acting” (3). However, “He [Arthur] swayed, his eyes unfocused, and it was obvious to Jeevan that he wasn’t Lear anymore” (3-4). Unable to save Arthur, Jeevan, the paramedic, feels that “his role in this performance was done” and looks for the “easiest way to exit the scene” (6).

Walking out the theatre, snow begins to fall on Jeevan. This reminds him of the fake 'plastic' snow, falling on stage the night Arthur died: "Snow was falling on Yonge Street. It startled Jeevan when he left the theater, this echo of the plastic translucencies that still clung to his jacket from the stage" (9). Pieter Vermeulen illustrates, "the collision of nature and culture resonates beyond the theater. It begins snowing in the city, as if in 'an echo of the plastic translucencies' on stage (9), and the muted cataclysm in the theater coincides with a global epidemic that will kill most of the world population in only a few days" (16). This is an example of the parallelism between real life and fiction.

The public, death, and candles of Shakespeare's time are present as well in the days of the Symphony. This is explored through the performance of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in chapter eleven: "Then I must be thy lady." Lines of a play written in 1594, the year London's theaters reopened after two seasons of plague. Or written possibly a year later, in 1595, a year before the death of Shakespeare's only son.

Mandel writes, " Shakespeare was the third born to his parents, but the first to survive infancy. Four of his siblings died young. His son, Hamnet, died at eleven and left behind a twin. Plague closed the theaters again and again, death flickering over the landscape" (57). Thus, the epidemic, which arose during the lifetime of Shakespeare, resembles the Georgia Flu. Both viruses destroyed the population.

As Philip Smith observes, "Shakespeare's life, one character in *Station Eleven* declares, was 'defined by' the plague-the word 'plague' appears 105 times in his plays, and 'disease' sixty times" (294). Smith further points out the similarities between the Georgia Flu (embodied in *Station Eleven*) and the plague (represented in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*):

In that play, Titania reports in a passage quoted in *Station Eleven* that her disagreement with Oberon has thrown nature out of balance. Particularly noteworthy is her assertion that "rheumatic diseases do abound" (58). Significantly, however, the play is a story of recovery and even apocalypse averted. *Midsummer*, likely produced for an aristocratic wedding, is generally thought to have been written in 1594, only shortly after England's theaters were closed for two seasons on account of plague. It is not a play about the end, therefore, but about revival and, if the wedding thesis is true, new beginnings. The players of The Travelling Symphony decide against performing *King Lear* or *Hamlet*-Shakespeare's two most apocalyptic plays-because, in a post-apocalyptic setting, they are too "depressing." They choose *A Midsummer Night's Dream* because, in a time when the apocalypse is very much apparent, the staging of revival does not simply act as a form of escapism, but a catalyst for recovery. As one actor suggests, "the evening calls for fairies" (44). (294)

Therefore, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* signals the possibility of reawakening.

In addition, in the Symphony's performance of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Kirsten plays the role of Titania, a fairy queen who falls in love with someone other than Oberon, her husband. Ironically, the role of Oberon is played by Sayid, Kirsten's ex-boyfriend. This is another example of the parallel between real life and fiction. Another instance of the parallelism between art and life is shown in the relationship of Arthur with Kirsten. Their relationship, which takes on a fatherly aspect, corresponds to her role in the play as young Cordelia, one of Lear's daughters.

Arthur's talent as an actor has a negative impact on his personal life, as Miranda, Clark, and Elizabeth all suspect him of acting at times when he should be sincere. In chapter 15, Miranda thinks, "I prefer you with a crown" (98), when she sees Arthur dressed as a king for a role he is playing. In that case, her behavior is the opposite of Clark's. During his meal with Arthur, Clark suspects that Arthur is putting on a show:

Arthur was talking about an endorsement deal of some kind, men's watches, his gestures loose. He was telling an animated story about his meeting with the watch executives, some kind of humorous misunderstanding in the boardroom. He was performing. Clark had thought he was meeting his oldest friend for dinner, but Arthur wasn't having

dinner with a friend, Clark realized, so much as having dinner with an audience. He felt sick with disgust. (112)

Both incidents demonstrate that there is a fine line between the performing arts and everyday life.

In chapter 39, two weeks before Arthur's death, Miranda arrives in Toronto for business. While there, she goes to meet Arthur at the Elgin Theatre. Arthur warns Miranda about the upcoming publication of *Dear V.: An Unauthorized Portrait of Arthur Leander*, contained in a book published by his childhood friend, Victoria. However, he assures her that did not say anything 'unpleasant' about her in his letters. When Miranda asks him if he intends to sue Victoria for publishing these letters without his consent, Arthur proposes that he deserves to have the letters published. As he speaks, Miranda "had an odd impression that he was performing a scene." Miranda could not tell whether he was acting. She contemplates, "Did this happen to all actors, this blurring of borders between performance and life?" (211) Thus, again, the line between art and life seems to be unclear.

Arthur's portrayal of King Lear, an ageing monarch who must distinguish between the superficial and the sincere in his relationships with three daughters, is especially pertinent as Arthur reflects on his relationships with his three wives in chapter 53:

He found he was a man who repented almost everything, regrets crowding in around him like moths to a light. This was actually the main difference between twenty-one and fifty-one, he decided, the sheer volume of regret. He had done some things he wasn't proud of. If Miranda was so unhappy in Hollywood, why hadn't he just taken her away from there? It wouldn't have been difficult. The way he'd dropped Miranda for Elizabeth and Elizabeth for Lydia and let Lydia slip away to someone else. The way he'd let Tyler be taken to the other side of the world. The way he'd spent his entire life chasing after something, money or fame or immortality or all of the above. He didn't really even know his only brother. How many friendships had he neglected until they'd faded out? On the first night of previews, he'd barely made it off the stage. On the second night, he'd arrived on the platform with a strategy. He stared at his crown and ran through a secret list of everything that was good. (327)

Having many regrets, Arthur finally decides to give up his career and spend more time with his son:

He'd definitely decided: when Lear closed, he was moving to Israel. The idea was exhilarating. He would shed his obligations and belongings and start over in the same country as his son. He would buy an

apartment within walking distance of Elizabeth's house and he'd see Tyler every day. (317)

Unfortunately, these significant realizations come too late for Arthur, just like they did for King Lear. Arthur dies before achieving these goals, and his death is characterized as a form of awakening. This metaphor "extends to the world itself, which died symbolically at the outbreak" (*SuperSummary* 29).

These instances raise a question, that is implied, about the role of art in society. Leah Gardner states, "Part of the human experience is the need to have meaning, a purpose for being on Earth. . . . There has to be more to life, whether it's beauty, heartache, art, compassion, freedom, or Shakespeare; there has to be some reason that people work so hard every day to survive."

This question about the relation between art and society has "dogged the Symphony since they'd set out on the road" ("Survival is Insufficient" 50). A partial response is given by the Symphony through their motto: "Because survival is insufficient." The implication of the motto is that life has a meaning beyond surviving.

The motto "Survival is Insufficient" holds a lot of meaning for the Traveling Symphony. For the Symphony, their purpose is not to survive but to cherish the time they spend together. According to Brook Clark, "The traveling players are deliberately preserving the beautiful art as something worth doing in the face of a collapsed world-in fact, the only thing worth doing in a

collapsed world" (14). They did not surrender to the fears of the upcoming future-after the Georgia flu. Instead, they searched for a kind of solace. For instance, Kirsten, who had lost everything as a child, turned her sorrow into something that could save humanity.

When life imitates art, it elevates rather than degrades, and the work of the Travelling Symphony is no exception. For example, Kristen attempts to define the Symphony's contribution to human welfare as she collects costumes from an abandoned house: "What the Symphony was doing, what they were always doing, was trying to cast a spell. [...] The lives they brushed up against were work-worn and difficult, people who spent all their time engaged in the tasks of survival" (151). Kristen also keeps searching for any publications of the comic novel.. The members of the Travelling Symphony share a common interest, that is, performance. Thus, as the motto implies, each person in *Station Eleven* has a purpose to live for rather than just survive.

In *Station Eleven*, Mandel unintentionally mixes high and low culture when Kristen adopts a line from *Star Trek* – "Survival is Insufficient". In an interview with Lincoln Michel, Mandel defends her position by declaring,

I think I was so immersed in that idea as I was writing the novel that it didn't really occur to me that I was borrowing from high vs. low culture when I used Shakespeare and Star Trek. I suppose I was also immersed in the world of the book, where life is so

cleanly divided into before the collapse and after the collapse; Shakespeare and Star Trek just seemed like two elements of the culture of "before." I took that line from Star Trek, "survival is insufficient," because it seemed to me to be an elegant expression of a sentiment that I believe to be true.

Adopting this line as a motto, Kristen is mocked by her fellow Shakespearean actors and musicians for doing so. On one occasion, Kristen and Dieter engage in a conversation after leaving St. Deborah by the Water: "All I'm saying," Dieter said, twelve hours out of St. Deborah by the Water, "is that the quote on the lead caravan would be way more profound if we hadn't lifted it from *Star Trek. Survival is insufficient*: Kirsten had had these words tattooed on her left forearm at the age of fifteen and had been arguing with Dieter about it almost ever since. (1191).

This argument is probably one of the most essential parts of the novel. In fact, Dieter and Kirsten are not arguing about her tattoos, but about this line from an episode of Star Trek. Dieter believes that Kristen should have adopted a Shakespearean line instead: "The best Shakespearean actress in the territory, and her favorite line of text is from *Star Trek*" (120).

According to Mandel, the only thing that has survived the pandemic is art, represented by Shakespearean plays. The reaction of the audience, when they watch one of the plays, is an evidence of the importance of art in life: "THE AUDIENCE ROSE for a standing ovation. Kirsten stood in the state of

suspension that always came over her at the end of performances, a sense of having flown very high and landed incompletely, her soul pulling upward out of her chest. A man in the front row had tears in his eyes” (59).

As Annika Fischer emphasizes, “ Every form of art is a way for individuals to express themselves. But, when survival is constantly at the forefront of one’s mind, it replaces everything else.” She adds, “ The Traveling Symphony is a light in this dark way of living; they remind people that while art may not be important for literal and physical survival, it is a necessity to emotional and spiritual well-being. To simply survive is not enough” (“Survival is Insufficient 91). So, each person should have a purpose to live for.

The phrase “survival is insufficient” is applicable to roles the characters play in their real lives, not just on stage. Each of the main characters in *Station Eleven* is connected with Arthur Leander in some way or another. He impacts their lives, whether directly or indirectly. For instance, after Arthur collapses on stage, Jeevan informs Kristen that “he [Arthur] was doing the thing he loved best in the world.” Jeevan recalls an interview with Arthur that he read before where Arthur confessed, “I’ve waited all my life to be old enough to play Lear, and there’s nothing I love more than being on stage, the immediacy of it.” Jeevan then notes that Arthur died while doing the thing he always dreamed of, that is acting: “then the last thing he ever did was something that made him happy” (8). Affected by Arthur’s

story, Kristen decides to dedicate her life to do the thing she loves, to act. Another example of the influence of Arthur on the characters is shown through the career shift of Jeevan. Jeevan turns from a paparazzi to a paramedic, where he felt he could do better. Therefore, it is Arthur's character that holds the narrative together. All the characters seem to be connected to him, either before or after his death.

METAOBJECTS

Martin P. Eve propounds that *Station Eleven* "is saturated with objects that seem to stand for other, potentially critical, politicised objects from the reader's time: things-not-in-themselves" (3). Indeed, several objects in this novel take on symbolic significance. They represent memories of technology—memories of the past. The most important objects include: vehicles (ships/airplanes), a paperweight snow globe, and a museum.

In chapter 24, Kristen and August reach an abandoned house, where they find various items from the relics of the past. Among these items is "a metal Starship *Enterprise*" (150). This starship is a foreshadow for the later decision of the Symphony to go explore new lands. In *Station Eleven*, the disappearance of airplanes serves as the most vivid reminder that the world has changed. The characters keep looking up the sky hoping they could see an airborne plane. Dieter confesses to Kristen, "If I ever saw an airplane, that meant that somewhere planes still took off. For a whole decade after the pandemic, I kept looking at the

sky.” Dieter then recalls a dream he had about an airplane that passed overhead: “In the dream I was so happy,” he whispered. “I looked up and there it was, the plane had finally come. There was still a civilization somewhere. I fell to my knees. I started weeping and laughing” (134).

Dieter, as well as the other characters, feels that the existence of any plane would mean the return of civilization. They hope the flu never existed. Simultaneously, the last plane that lands at Severn City Airport is an epitome of death as well as “the difficult decisions that must be made in order to survive” (Lisa), as it carries people infected with the Georgia flu. Thus, airplanes represented both hope and despair.

Furthermore, the Prophet uses the symbol of an airplane as a mark. In Chapter 38, August realizes that the scar on the man they met was a mark used by the Prophet, in the shape of an airplane. It is Arthur who realizes that the scar, on a man he and Kristen met at a gas station, was a sign used by the Prophet. This sign was in the shape of an airplane, as mentioned in the following exchange:

“Yes, but the symbol itself, the pattern of the scar. How would you describe it?”

“I don’t know,” she said, retrieving her knife. “It looked like a lowercase *t* with an extra line through the stem.”

“A shorter line. Toward the bottom. Think about it. It isn’t abstract.” “I *am* thinking about it. It looked abstract to me.”

“It’s an airplane,” August said. (204)

Thus, the airplane here can refer to the Prophet.

Early in the novel, Mandel gives the reader an ‘AN INCOMPLETE LIST’ of all the things that have vanished due to the flu:

No more diving into pools [. . .]. No more ball games [. . .]. No more trains [. . .]. No more cities. No more films, [. . .]. No more screens [. . .]. No more concert stages [. . .].

No more pharmaceuticals. [. . .]. No more flight. No more towns [. . .]. No more airplanes, [. . .].

No more countries, all borders unmanned.

[. . .].

No more Internet. No more social media, [. . .]. No more reading [. . .]. No more avatars.

Méndez-García clarifies, “In the absence of these activities, the survivors turn to the objects that made them possible, not so much because of their personal connection to the objects themselves, but because of what they represent, to avoid the fragmentation of the memory of the past” (120). In this way,

metadata "speculatively signal the extension that is hidden by any one human observation of presence" (Eve 13).

Station Eleven ends with Clark anticipating 'another world just out of sight' (333). The phrase 'out of sight' holds a double implication. At the beginning of the novel, the phrase carries a negative connotation: out of sight, Arthur Leander dies from a sudden heart attack, while a pandemic dominates the world and destroys it. Nevertheless, by the end of the novel, the phrase refers to something positive: "For Mandel, the new world is just around the corner, ever more proximate than we might hope, even as it represents a reconfiguration so drastic as to render it unrecognisable to the present" (Eve 14)). Eve elaborates, "Signalling that readers should be searching for 'another world' that is 'just out of sight' is the primary metatextual indicator with which Mandel conditions her readers to seek the invisible or the unspoken, within reach, for interpretative unveiling" (14). This goes back to the fact that "the objects that are found from the old world in the future of *Station Eleven* are indistinct from how they appear to the reader of the text" (Eve 16). In fact, the meta-objects in this novel seem to bring the past and the present together. They act both as "a record of cultural memory, of private but also public actuality" and "tangible proof that civilization and humanity have existed" (Méndez-García 119).

One of the key functions of metadata in *Station Eleven* is the 'Museum of Civilization.' The Museum, which contains "Artifacts from the old world", is set up in a closed terminal in

the Severn City Airport. The museum starts when Clark Thompson "placed his useless iPhone on the top shelf [of the Museum]. [. . .], so he added his laptop, and this was the beginning of the Museum of Civilization" (254-5). Clarks then continued to collect objects that seemed "useless" to other people and placed them on the shelves of the Museum:

There seemed to be a limitless number of objects in the world that had no practical use but that people wanted to preserve: cell phones with their delicate buttons, iPads, Tyler's Nintendo console, a selection of laptops. There were a number of impractical shoes, stilettos mostly, beautiful and strange. There were three car engines in a row, cleaned and polished, a motorcycle composed mostly of gleaming chrome. Traders brought things for Clark sometimes, objects of no real value that they knew he would like: magazines and newspapers, a stamp collection, coins. There were the passports or the driver's licenses or sometimes the credit cards of people who had lived at the airport and then died. Clark kept impeccable records. (258)

In *Station Eleven*, the museum objects are "markers of that lost civilization, either because they provide aesthetic pleasure or because they work as an antidote against forgetting-not individually as with the sentimental object but as a species." They are reminders of the time when there was technology, thus

communication among people. Now, all these objects, which were forgotten, exist in the museum. Therefore, as Méndez-García 120 observes, "The Museum of Civilization is a celebration of small, normal, worldly things that we take for granted because we can afford not to think about their not being there or one day not being "usable" or "useful" anymore" (120). The Museum represents the hope that one day technology/civilization will be revived.

Among the objects at the Museum are a paperweight, and a snow globe. Clark was "fond of beautiful objects," He was "moved by every object he saw there, by the human enterprise each object had required." one of the objects that attracted his attention was a paperweight snow globe." Looking at it, he thinks,

Consider the mind that invented those miniature storms, the factory worker who turned sheets of plastic into white flakes of snow, the hand that drew the plan for the miniature Severn City with its church steeple and city hall, the assembly-line worker who watched the globe glide past on a conveyer belt somewhere in China. Consider the white gloves on the hands of the woman who inserted the snow globes into boxes, to be packed into larger boxes, crates, shipping containers. Consider the card games played belowdecks in the evenings on the ship carrying the containers across the ocean, a hand

stubbing out a cigarette in an overflowing ashtray, a haze of blue smoke in dim light, the cadences of a half dozen languages united by common profanities, the sailors' dreams of land and women, these men for whom the ocean was a gray-line horizon to be traversed in ships the size of overturned skyscrapers. Consider the signature on the shipping manifest when the ship reached port, a signature unlike any other on earth, the coffee cup in the hand of the driver delivering boxes to the distribution center, the secret hopes of the UPS man carrying boxes of snow globes from there to the Severn City Airport. (255).

He wonders about how the paperweight has passed down from one character to another till it reached the Museum.

Clark, who bought it at a museum gift shop in Rome, gives it as a gift to Arthur and Miranda on the night of their third-anniversary. Miranda keeps for a long time till one day she sends it back to Arthur to the Elgin Theatre by courier. Perhaps the paperweight reminds her of her failure in the relationship with Arthur, or perhaps she wants to get rid of any attachment with Arthur. On the other hand, the paperweight represented nothing to Arthur: " he found there were no memories attached to it; he had no recollection whatsoever of Clark having given it to them, and anyway the last thing he wanted in his life was a paperweight" (321). Wanting to let go of material possessions, Arthur gives

Tanya the paperweight Miranda sent over. Perhaps, he is letting go Miranda herself. Tanya, in turn, gives Kristen the paperweight to distract her after Arthur's death.

A few years later, Kristen explains to Diallo that she kept the paperweight Tanya gave her because "it was beautiful" (39). Thus, this object which was "a smooth lump of glass with storm clouds in it, about the size of a plum" and "of no practical use whatsoever, nothing but dead weight in the bag" (66) was appreciated by Kristen, who as a young child, found it to be "the most beautiful, the most wonderful, the strangest thing anyone had ever given her" (15). The paperweight snow globe is a symbol of the beauty to be found in any object, without getting emotionally attached. Both Miranda and Kristen liked the globe and found it to be a beautiful object. It serves as "a reminder that art and beauty are essential for more than surviving" (Méndez-García 122). As a result, in a world where everything has collapsed, this desire to hold onto such ordinary objects is an epitome of the past.

CONCLUSION

It has become apparent from the previous discussion that Emily Mandel's novel relies much on the use of metafictional tenets reflecting upon Shakespearean drama within narrative precepts. It has also employed what is named as 'nested stories' and 'metaobjects' which also relate to the norm prescribing metafictional narrative. Along with this, the research has drawn much on the use of parallelism between the graphic novel, *Dr. Eleven*, and the struggles led by the characters on a larger scale in the novel. Besides, Mandel's implementation of the so called 'nested stories' has been proven to illustrate the similarities between the Shakespearean motifs and those manipulated in *Station Eleven*. As it approaches its concluding steps, this paper tended to show the novelist's use of the narrative metaobjects and how they can be viewed as an epitome of the past and the future.

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