

Station Eleven: A Novel by Emily St. John Mandel

2014: New York: Alfred A. Knopf

Notes by Barbara Keating for UUFM Book Discussion March 26, 2020

Character	Notes
Arthur Leander	Canadian-born actor; finds success in Hollywood. He has been married, at various times, to three different women: Miranda, Elizabeth, and Lydia. He dies of a heart attack while performing the title role in <i>King Lear</i> just before pandemic.
Jeevan Chaudhary	Paparazzi-turned-paramedic who gives CPR to Arthur Leander on stage; survives the epidemic by stockpiling food and self-quarantine with Frank before hysteria breaks out.
Kirsten Raymonde	Child actress in Arthur's final production of <i>King Lear</i> . She grows up after the epidemic and joins the Symphony, the band of traveling actors. Interviewed by librarian Francois Diallo in Year Fifteen after collapse.
Miranda Carroll	Arthur's first wife; creator of the graphic novel <i>Dr. Eleven</i> . After divorcing Arthur, she enters the corporate world and becomes a shipping magnate; dies in Singapore during the pandemic.
Elizabeth Colton	Arthur's second wife; Hollywood actress; divorces Arthur; moves to Israel. She and Arthur have a son, Tyler; she and Tyler survive the pandemic.
Tyler Leander	The son of Arthur and Elizabeth. He grows up after the pandemic; becomes religious; teaches that the pandemic spared the morally good. The Prophet.
Clark Thompson	Arthur's best friend from his days as a young Toronto actor; corporate success in London as an adult. He becomes the curator at the Museum of Civilization at Severn City Airport.
Charlotte (Charlie) Harrison	Second cello of Symphony; stops with husband Jeremy (sixth guitar) in St. Deborah by the Water to give birth; their absence when symphony returns is suspicious.
Sayid	Kirsten's lover and one of the Symphony members kidnapped by the Prophet.
Deiter	A member of the Symphony, kidnapped by the Prophet.
August	A member of the Symphony; travels with and breaks into houses with Kirsten.
Frank Chaudhary	Jeevan's brother; paraplegic confined to a wheelchair.
Tanya	A child wrangler for the production of <i>King Lear</i> , and Arthur's lover.
Dr. Eleven	Physicist. Lives in a Space Station. A comic character.
Eleanor	12 year-old stowaway runs away with Symphony; promised bride of The Prophet
Adapted from character list retrieved 24Jan'20: https://www.gradesaver.com/station-eleven/study-guide/character-list	

Themes	Notes
Death; uncertainty of death; death and survival	"explores death both on a personal and global scale. ... characters [connected] through Arthur and his death ... emphasizes the impact individual lives, and ... deaths have on a ... large network of ... people. ... juxtaposition of a single death with mass death [suggests] how <i>all</i> of the dead are unique and important in the same way that Arthur is, [depicts] how mass death can ... make those who died anonymous or just a statistic. ... survivors often wonder why they survived while others didn't ... a desire to find meaning in survival ..."
Divorce	Arthur has 3 ex-wives; "People did not know ... Arthur's personal life, ... because he had divorced several times ... made it difficult for his colleagues to determine the people who were closest to him."
Themes continued on next page ...	

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Faith and Fate	“portrays faith as offering many of the same values of art: ... purpose and community ... injects continuity and permanence into a terrifying, changing world. ... faith is rooted in the idea that everything happens for a reason. ... Faith for individuals can be the means of personal survival, but in society it can become a means for power and control.
Civilization	“explores ...what civilization is ... through different lenses. Before collapse, civilization is presented as mundane ... stifling, or even misguided and problematic. Arthur’s and Miranda’s transition from their small island to larger cities ... disconnection between humans and nature...” Island sky full of stars vs obscured in cities by light pollution ... cities appeal to them for anonymity, privacy and freedom. “In the golden age of technology, humans seem to sleepwalk through life. ... cellphone zombies ... completely disconnected from ... environments and people around them. But after the collapse, ... technologies ... revealed to be miraculous. ... In modern society, people seemed to be isolated by their technology. But without technology ... people are truly, physically cut off from each other, unable to know what is going on in the world ... or even in the next town.... the reason people take the privileges of civilization for granted is our inability, or perhaps refusal, to see just how fragile civilization is.”
Memory	“Memory can be a comfort and source of hope. ... how easily memories can slip away and be lost, and how the sense of losing one’s memories can be a source of terrible anxiety. ... lost memories can be a blessing: Kirsten regards her inability to remember any of Year One after the collapse as a gift, an escape from otherwise unbearable trauma. ... memories of trauma can impact people ... even good memories can be painful ... as those who best remember civilization before the collapse miss it most after. ... communal memory ... [some] remember pre-collapse world very well, young remember it indistinctly and [those] born post-collapse know [only] what other people remember and choose to tell. ... The Traveling Symphony ... preserving memories of the past by performing their art. Clark preserves memory with his Museum of Civilization ... Memories build social bonds ...communal memory is a way of holding on to humanity after the collapse.”
Art	“ ... presents art as something that endures. ... Art is powerful enough to survive the epidemic ... because it isn’t reliant on technology or modernity. ... art survives because it is so vital and so inextricably connected to human life. Art offers people a way to understand the world and to connect to a world now gone. It offers a way to connect to each other. ... art connects people to the shared history of humanity.” ... “Survival is insufficient. ... it is the human instinct to create and celebrate art that makes us human.”
Adapted from: Retrieved 24Jan’20: https://www.enotes.com/topics/station-eleven ; Retrieved 24Feb’20: https://www.litcharts.com/lit/station-eleven/themes	

Excerpts by Barbara Keating; February 2020

Sections describe scenes before and after the viral pandemic with a 99% mortality rate ...

Book Jacket: “An audacious, darkly glittering novel set in the eerie days of civilization’s collapse, ...a nomadic group ... Traveling Symphony ... moves between settlements of an altered world ... performing Shakespeare and music ... written on their caravan a line from *Star Trek*: **“Because survival is insufficient.”**”

Page 17: “The name the news outlets were going with – **the Georgia Flu** – had struck Jeevan as disarmingly pretty.”

Page 37: “There was the flu that exploded like a neutron bomb over the surface of the earth and the shock of the collapse that followed, the first unspeakable years when everyone was traveling before everyone caught on that **there was no place they could walk to where life continued as it had before** and settled where ever they could, clustered close together for safety.”

Page 74: “The point of coming to this city wasn’t school.... **School was just his method of escape.** The point was the city of Toronto itself.

Pages 110-1: The disorientation of meeting one’s sagging contemporaries, memories of a younger face crashing into the reality of jowls, under-eye pouches, unexpected lines, and then the terrible realization that **one probably looks just as old** as they do.

Page 115: “Some towns are easier to visit than others. Some places have elected mayors or they’re run by elected committees. **Sometimes a cult takes over, and those towns are the most dangerous.** ... they’re unpredictable. **You can’t argue with them, because they live by an entirely different logic.**”

Page 119: Dieter: “that quote on the lead caravan would be way more profound if we hadn’t lifted it from *Star Trek*.” Quote: “**Survival is insufficient.**” (note: from *Star Trek: Voyager*, episode 122, aired first time in September 1999, written by Ronald D. Moore.)

Page 123: Eleanor: Prophet would marry a 12-year old because “He had a dream where God told him he was to repopulate the earth.”

Page 139: Kirsten about Prophet & St. Deborah: “They call themselves the light. ... **If you are the light, then your enemies are darkness, ...then there’s nothing that you cannot justify.** There’s nothing you can’t survive, because there’s nothing that you will not do.”

Page 148: “The beauty of this world where almost everyone was gone. If hell is other people, what is a world with almost no people in it? Perhaps soon humanity would simply flicker out, but Kirsten found this thought more peaceful than sad. **So many species had appeared and later vanished from this earth; what was one more?**”

Page 162: Dahlia re: Clark’s coaching executives: “differentiate between changing people and changing behaviors ... I’ll bet you can coach Dan, and probably he’ll exhibit a turnaround of sorts, he’ll improve in concrete areas, but **he’ll still be a joyless bastard ...he’ll still be a successful-but-unhappy person ... who just seems like he wishes he’d done something different with his life,** I mean really actually almost anything ...”

Page 195: Kirsten: “the people who have the hardest time in this current era [after the Georgia Flu], the people who struggle the most with it are the people who remember the old world clearly ... **the more you remember, the more you’ve lost.**”

Page 207: Responding to Miranda who asked why Arthur called her after years: “**You know where I’m from.**” ... lived on an island, took ferry to school, night sky brilliant “in the absence of all these city lights.” ... paddled canoes to look at petroglyphs, fished for salmon, walked through deep forests, “but all of this was completely unremarkable because everyone else we knew did these things too, and here in these lives we built for ourselves, here in these hard and glittering cities, none of this would seem real if it wasn’t for you.”

Page 209-10: Arthur says re scholar: “He has this extremely impressive pool of knowledge, brings a lot to the table, but at the same time he’s completely **supportive of my vision** for the part.” Miranda thinks: “*Supportive of my vision?* **He’d adopted new speech patterns.** But of course he had, because she she’d last seen him there had been eleven years of friends and acquaintances and meetings and parties, travel here and there, film sets, two weddings and two divorces, a child. It made sense, she supposed, that **he would be a different person by now.**”

Page 211: Arthur re: his letters being sold: “I was angry at first, I’m still angry, but the truth is, I think I deserved everything I got. ... **I treated Victoria like a diary** ... I used her as a repository for my thoughts. I think I stopped thinking of her as a human being reading a letter. The truth is, I think I actually forgot she was real” ... Miranda thinks: “He looked up – and here, a pause in which Miranda could almost see the script: ‘Arthur looks up. **Beat’ Was he acting? She couldn’t tell.** Did this happen to all actors, this blurring of borders between performance and life? The man playing the part of the aging actor sipped his tea ...”

Page 219: Clark re calling Arthur’s ex-wives about his death: “ ... it seemed wrong to let them read about it in the newspaper; he had an idea – too sentimental to speak aloud and he knew none of his divorced friends would ever own up to it – that **something must linger,** a half-life of marriage,

some sense memory of love even if obviously not the thing itself. He thought these people must mean something to one another, **even if they didn't like one another anymore.**"

Page 223: Arthur re: coming from Delano island; "... that place was so small. Everyone knew me, not because I was special ..., just because everyone knew everyone, and the claustrophobia of that, I can't tell you. I just wanted some privacy. For as long as I could remember I just wanted to get out, and then I got to Toronto and no one knew me. Toronto felt like freedom" ¶ "And then you moved to L.A. and got famous," Clark had said, "and now everyone knows you again." ¶ "Right. ... I guess you could say Toronto was the only place I've felt free."

Page 252: "A **rape** on the night of Day Eight-five [after collapse], the airport woken by a woman's scream. They tied the man up until sunrise and then drove him into the forest at gunpoint, told him if he returned he'd be shot. **'I'll die out here alone,' he said, sobbing, and no one disagreed but what else could they do?**"

Page 259: "I just want them to know that it happened for a reason." ¶ "Look, Tyler, some things just happen." ... ¶ "But why did they die instead of us?" the boy asked, ... ¶ "**Because they were exposed to a certain virus, and we weren't. You can look for reasons, and god knows a few people have driven themselves half-crazy trying, but Tyler, that's all there is.**"

Page 261: Elizabeth choosing to leave airport with religious wanderers; "We just want to live a more spiritual life ..." "I should have done more for her, Clark thought. **I should have pulled her back from the edge. But it had taken everything he had to stay back from the edge himself,** and what could he have done? When the group disappeared ..., he was certain he wasn't alone in his relief."

Page 288: She wanted to write [a play] something modern, ... that addressed this age in which they'd ... landed. **Survival might be insufficient,** she'd told Dieter ... **but ..., so was Shakespeare.** He'd trotted out his usual arguments, about how Shakespeare had lived in plague-ridden society with no electricity and so did the Traveling Symphony. But, look, she told him, the difference was that

they'd seen electricity, they'd seen everything, they'd watched a civilization collapse, and Shakespeare hadn't. **In Shakespeare's time the wonders of technology were still ahead, not behind them, and far less had been lost."**

Page 323: Arthur decides to give Tanya \$47,000 to pay off student loans with 'no strings attached.' "He felt an unexpected peace. **He would jettison everything that could possibly be thrown overboard, this weight of money and possessions, and in this casting off he'd be a lighter man."**

Page 327: Arthur overheard Miranda say, "**I repent nothing**" to her reflection in the mirror. ... "the words stayed with him. ... **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. ... They way he'd spent his entire life chasing after something, money or fame or immortality or all of the above."

Osterholm, Michael T. and Mark Olshaker. 2020. "Is the corona virus outbreak a pandemic yet? It's now clear that the virus was never going to be contained. What's next?" *Star Tribune*, February 25: Page A-7. Also authors of *Deadliest Enemy: Our War against Killer*.

Covid-19 spreads like influenza through the air; can quickly overwhelm resources; will continue for months. Vaccines many months away. Lockdown a delaying tactic. Top priority: protect healthcare workers. Requires international cooperation; not isolation. Many lifesaving drugs come from China and India. Requires thorough, transparent disclosures to the public. Keep calm. Wash hands. Stock some reserve critical medication but not too much as hoarding creates shortages. Plan contingencies. Cross-train key staff. Watch each other's health and welfare; prepare to care for moderately ill if hospitals overtaxed.

(Osterholm Nobel conference recommendations: be prepared for schools, work businesses to close for weeks; only essential personnel to be out. Have food and medication at home for month or two.)

Pandemic docuseries on Netflix streaming: Episodes 1) It Hunts Us; 2) Pandemic is Now; 3) Seek, Don't Hide; 4) Hold Onto Roots; 5) Prayers Might Work; 6) Don't Stop Now. All episodes have vignettes on front-line work, vaccine debates, research, funding cuts, viral outbreaks.