

"Exploring Human Endurance in Post-Apocalyptic Literature: A Study of Station Eleven and The Road"

S. Peerani

Assistant Professor of English, Jamal Mohamed College (Autonomous), Trichy, Tamil Nadu

Author e-mail id: sabiyabanu7801@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to analyse the apocalyptic novels Station Eleven by Emily St. John Mandel and The Road by Cormac McCarthy. These novels explore the results of the disastrous events that transform the world and the lives of the people. The novel Station Eleven by Emily St. John Mandel pictures about the global flu pandemic and the importance of art in saving humanity and the society. The novel The Road portrays unidentified disastrous journey of a father and son travelling in a landscape without hope and civilization. On comparing these two novels they similarly address the condition of humans and their resilience and focuses on the importance of preserving culture. They both similarly explores the psychological and emotional effects of disastrous events on victims but they are different in their narrative style. They also concentrate on the struggles of survivors in a collapsing world. They have survival and human condition as a theme in general. The novel Station Eleven ends with optimistic tone but the novel The Road ends with gloomy note leaving the young boy in an uncertain future.

Keywords: Apocalyptic, disastrous events, flu pandemic unidentified disaster, humanity, society

Introduction

Post-apocalyptic is a genre of storytelling and it is often found in literature, video games and movies. Post-apocalyptic genre explores life in the world after a major catastrophic event that drastically altered or destroyed civilization. The events such as nuclear war, pandemics, alien inventions, climate change, or even supernatural forces can cause the apocalypse, The term apocalyptic is often used to describe a genre of fiction and it focusses on the survival of individuals or small group in a harsh and danger, often lawless world where the basic resource are scarce. The most common themes of apocalyptic works are survival, rebuilding civilization, isolation and community, environmental destruction and technological decay. In post-apocalyptic setting, the world we live in is destroyed and so the survivors have to navigate a new unfriendly environment in order to save their lives.

Station Eleven is an apocalyptic novel by Emily St. John Mandel and it was published in 2014, this novel won the Arthur C. Clarke Award. It was a finalist for the National Book Award and was also

a finalist of Toronto Book Award. It is a postapocalyptic novel exploring life after a devastating flu pandemic named as Georgia Flu pandemic which almost vanished the humanity.

Station Eleven was written by Emily St. John Mandel, a Canadian writer who was born on 1979, in Comox and she is best known for her novel *Station Eleven*. She was attending the school of Toronto Dance Theatre and her debut novel is “Last Night in Montreal” in 2009. Her writings were famous for its lyrical prose, complex characters and interwoven narratives. At present she lives in New York city with her family.

The Road is also an apocalyptic novel written by Cormac McCarthy and it was published in 2006. This novel won the Pulitzer prize for Fiction and James Tait Black Memorial Prize. This novel also won the National Book Award for Fiction. This novel explores the life of a father and a young son navigating a hopeless Post-apocalyptic landscape.

The Road was written by Cormac McCarthy, an American novelist who was born on 1933 in Providence, Rhode Island. He has written numerous novels. His works has made a significant impact on contemporary literature and some of his works were adapted into films. The novel *The Road* was adapted into a film in 2009, directed by John Hillcoat and starring Viggo Mortensen. His writings are characterized by sparse punctuation, poetic language and philosophical explorations of human nature and morality.

The novel *Station Eleven* opens with a performance of Shakespear’s King Lear in Tornoto. A famous actor named as Arthur Leander collapses on stage and dies of a heart attack. He dies on the evening of a global pandemic which was known as Georgian Flu, spreading rapidly and destroying a large population. The narration shifts to the after effects of the pandemic showing the lives of the survivors and the novel focuses on the lives of various characters. A young girl namely Kristen Raymonde who was a child star in the King Lear performance. She survives the pandemic and joins in a travelling symphony, who travels through the post-apocalyptic landscape, presenting Shakespearean plays and music to isolated survivors. Jeevan Chaudary, a former paparazzo turned paramedic, He helped Arthur before the pandemic. He survives the pandemic and seeks safety in an abandoned hospital along with his brother. Arthur’s friend Clark Thompson ends up living in an airport becomes a community hub for survivors. The prophet is one of the main antagonist in *Station Eleven* and his real name is Tyler Leander son of Arthur Leander and Arthur’s second wife Elizabeth Colton.

His group threatens and dominates weaker communities demanding to obey his teachings. The travelling symphony travelled through the post-apocalyptic landscape and they met with the prophet group and a confrontation developed between two groups. The travelling symphony continued performing and spreading hope among survivors. This novel ends with a hopeful note and it highlights that survival is important but at the same time keeping culture and human connections alive makes life truly meaningful.

The novel *The Road* is about a father and his young son travelling through a post-apocalyptic world. In this novel the world is destroyed by some unnamed disaster. The father and son are travelling south and they are hoping to reach a warmer place. In this novel there is no particular name mentioned for the father and son and they are referred to as “the man” and “the boy.” There arrives scarcity of food and they started to face threats from other survivors for food. The father and son face various dangers which include violent fights with other survivors who turned to cannibalism. Throughout the journey, the father is in the need to protect his son. In order to survive, the man and the boy are made to travel through a harsh and dangerous world and they continuously face threats from cannibals who try to eat them for food. The father protects his son from all the dangers and he tries very hard to keep his son very safe. Throughout the journey, weakened by illness, he remains determined to protect his son. The novel beautifully explains the father and son bond and the duty of a father in saving his son’s life from danger. The man and the boy found a house with supplies but it didn’t help the father’s health to recover. The man finally dies leaving his son alone and the boy cries over the death of his father and he fears a lot to stay alone. The boy found a family who takes him in, providing a sense of hope for the future.

Station Eleven and *The Road* share several key similarities. These two novels are set in post-apocalyptic worlds where the characters fight to survive after catastrophic events. Survival is the primary concern in both novels. Both novels show how characters find hope and meaning despite the devastation around them. In *The Road*, the father and son struggle to survive in an isolated landscape, depending on their bond and hope to move forward. Their relationship reflects the theme of hope and the everlasting human spirit. In *Station Eleven*, the characters like Kristen Raymonde and Arthur Leander also fight with a transformed world. Kristen, a member of the traveling symphony, finds the purpose and connection through art. Even after his death, the character Arthur’s past actions impact others’ lives. Both novels explore the importance of human connections and how the past impacts the characters’ current lives. In both novels, survival is a central theme and human relations are given the main focus. Art and culture play significant roles in both novels. In *Station Eleven*, a traveling symphony preserves and celebrates art and culture. In *The Road*, the memory of pre-apocalyptic

culture and the father's desire to protect his son's conscience are quietly significant. Memory and legacy are explored in both novels. Both works question the nature of humanity and civilization. *The Road* focuses on the bond between the father and his young son, exploring the theme of protection, love, and sacrifice. Similarly, in *Station Eleven* the older characters take on protective parental roles over the younger ones. These two novels show the deep isolation felt by the characters as they travel through the destroyed world. Both novels interweave the present life with the memories of the past. In *The Road*, the father recalls his life before the pandemic, comparing it with the transformed present life. In *Station Eleven*, flashbacks of life before the pandemic are used to explore the loss of art, culture and normalcy. Despite the bleakness of their worlds, both novels contain the symbol of hope. In *The Road* carrying the fire concept represents the hope, morality, and the perseverance of human values. The motto "Survival is insufficient" is used in *Station Eleven* to express that life is more than survival and it should also include art, culture and human connection. Isolation is a prominent theme in these two novels. In *The Road*, the characters are in their struggle to survive in a lifeless world. *Station Eleven* represents the physical isolation due to the pandemic and emotional isolation due to the loss of their loved ones. Although *The Road* is more extreme in its sparseness, both novels use a relatively minimalistic approach. McCarthy's spare language reflects the barren surroundings, and Mandel's work is equally accurate even if it jumps between timelines and characters.

Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* is written in a straightforward, uncomplicated style with few words and short sentences, giving the reader a sense of emptiness and desolation. The novel paints a vivid and bleak picture of a harsh post-apocalyptic world. It centers on the love and battle for survival between a father and his son. They bear the "fire," which stands for humanity and hope. The book is divided into brief sections and frequently presents the father's opinions straight. The story feels universal because no one knows the names of the characters or what caused the apocalypse. It also examines difficult decisions between doing what is right and surviving.

Time travel is used by Emily St. John Mandel in *Station Eleven* to tell the story and depict life before, during, and after a significant disaster. With symbols used to deepen the message, the calligraphy is lovely and evocative. The story emphasizes human relationships and character growth while stressing the importance of survival and art. The entire piece has a reflective tone, with flashbacks offering context and commentary on memory and society. The work is still relevant today because of its compelling post-apocalyptic atmosphere and believable characters, even though it is set in a possible future.

Different perspectives of life after the breakdown of civilization are presented by *The Road* and *Station Eleven*. While *The Road* depicts a bleak and barren terrain in which a deep sense of loss and basic instincts are needed to survive, *Station Eleven* examines the endurance of art, culture, and memory as essential components of humanity's existence. The two novels have different themes and perspectives: *Station Eleven* is more upbeat and suggests that civilization, despite its fragility, is maintained by human relationships and creativity, while *The Road* is harsh and pessimistic and emphasizes the father-son relationship as the final bastion of hope. When these two pieces are compared, it is clear that *Station Eleven* highlights the possibility of rebirth and regeneration, while *The Road* highlights the devastation and dehumanizing impacts of disaster.

References

- 1) "Station Eleven by Emily St. John Mandel Plot Summary | LitCharts." LitCharts, www.litcharts.com/lit/station-eleven/summary.
- 2) GradeSaver. "The Road Summary." GradeSaver, 31 July 2023, www.gradesaver.com/the-road/study-guide/summary#google_vignette.
- 3) Coccia, Mario, and Igor Benati. "Comparative Studies." Springer eBooks, 2018, pp. 1–7.
- 4) Adrian. "Book Review - Station Eleven - Emily St. John Mandel — Book Shelf Discovery." Book Shelf Discovery, 16 Feb. 2024, www.bookshelfdiscovery.com/books/book-review-station-eleven-emily-st-john-mandel.