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”WE LONG ONLY TO GO HOME”
Post-apocalyptic Nostalgia in Emily St. John Mandel’s
Station Eleven

TIIVISTELMÄ

Eeva Punkari: "We long only to go home" – Post-apocalyptic Nostalgia in Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*
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Tarkastelen tutkielmassani postapokalyptisessa kirjallisuudessa toisinaan ilmenevää nostalgiaa eli katkeransuloista menneen ajan kaipuuta, joka kohdistuu kertomuksen maailmanloppua edeltäneeseen aikaan, usein teoksen julkaisuajankohdan maailmaan. Tutkimusaineistonani on kanadalaisen kirjailijan Emily St. John Mandelin vuonna 2014 ilmestynyt postapokalyptinen tietisromaani *Station Eleven*. Romaani kertoo amerikkalaisen yhteiskunnan lähitulevaisuudesta, jossa flunssaepidemia on tappanut valtaosan maailman väestöstä. Epidemiasta selvinneet pyrkivät säilyttämään ihmiskunnan kulttuuriperimää erilaisin tavoin: vaelteleva näyttelijäryhmä esittää Shakespearen teoksia, lentokentälle perustettuun Sivilisaation Museoon kootaan esille tarpeettomiksi käyneitä esineitä kuten korkokenkiä ja pelikonsoleita, ja lapsia opetetaan toimimaan lentokoneissa siitäkin huolimatta, ettei lentomatrustaminen enää ole mahdollista. Teos kuvaa länsimaisen yhteiskunnan nykyhetken menetettynä utopiana, johon tarinan päähenkilöt epätoivoisesti haluavat palata.

Tutkielmani teoreettisen kehikon muodostavat nostalgian kirjallisuustieteelliset, sosiologiset ja psykologiset määritelmät sekä postapokalyptisen genren temporaaliset ja yhteiskuntakriittiset lajipiirteet. Postapokalyptisen genren temporaalinen asetelma, jossa niin kirjailija kuin lukijakin samanaikaisesti joutuvat kuvittelemaan postapokalyptisen maailman ja muistelemaan maailmaa sellaisena kuin se on ollut, mutta myös edelleen on, luo nostalgialle erityiset olosuhteet. Postapokalyptisen fiktion kautta nykyhetkeä voidaan tarkastella menneisyyden fantasiana. Ongelmalliseksi postapokalyptisen nostalgian kuitenkin tekee genreen olennaisesti liittyvä yhteiskuntakriittinen näkökulma: postapokalyptinen fiktio pyrkii usein kritisoidaan nykymaailmaa kuvittelemalla, millainen tulevaisuus ihmiskuntaa odottaa, mikäli yhteiskunnallisia ongelmia ei kyetä korjaamaan. Nostalgian päinvastainen taipumus idealisoida menneisyyttä tekee postapokalyptisen fiktion ja nostalgian yhteiselosta jännitteistä ja monimutkaistaa postapokalyptisen fiktion tulkintaa.

Analyysini selvittää, miten Mandelin teoksen kerronta rakentaa ja ohjaa teoksen nostalgista tulkintaa ja käsitteellistää sen nostalgian kohdetta, amerikkalaista nyky-yhteiskuntaa. Lisäksi analyysini tarkastelee teoksen yhteiskuntakritiikkiä ja tutkii, miten teokseen rakennettu nostalgia toimii yhdessä teoksessa esitetyn kritiikin kanssa. Analyysini tuloksia peilaan niin post-apokalyptisen genren lajipiirteisiin kuin nostalgian poikkitieteellisiin määritelmiin. Tutkielmani osoittaa, että Mandelin romaanin postapokalyptinen nostalgia rakentaa idealisoidun ja näin ollen valheellisen kuvan nostalgiansa kohteesta vahingoittaen teoksen yhteiskuntakriittistä sanomaa ja lopulta toimien postapokalyptisen genren yhteiskuntakriittistä tarkoitusta vastaan.

Avainsanat: nostalgia, postapokalyptinen kirjallisuus, yhteiskuntakritiikki, Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven*

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Table of Contents

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	6
	2.1 On Nostalgia.....	7
	2.2 Nostalgia in the Narrative	16
	2.3 Post-apocalyptic Fiction as Context for Nostalgia.....	24
3	CONSTRUCTING NOSTALGIA	31
	3.1 The Nostalgic Narrative of <i>Station Eleven</i>	31
	3.2 The <i>Nostalgia</i> of <i>Station Eleven</i>	42
4	THE FALLACY OF NOSTALGIA.....	51
	4.1 <i>Station Eleven</i> 's Social Criticism.....	51
	4.2 The Problematics of Post-apocalyptic Nostalgia	59
5	CONCLUSION	73
	WORKS CITED.....	76

1 INTRODUCTION

*Memoria praeteritorum bonorum.
The past is always remembered in a good light.*

In the twenty-first century, the end of the world arrives often. Novels, films, and TV series hungrily imagine the irreversible end, incessantly feeding their readers and viewers the apocalypse and its aftermath. Climatic disasters, nuclear wars, and pandemics take turns in destroying the world as we know it, and among images of devastated cityscapes and descriptions of famine, disease, and death, the remains of our reality manifest as discolored Rubik's cubes, old TV guides, and memories of what used to be. Imagining the worst-case scenario is both terrifying and invigorating: through fictional imaginings, we can prepare ourselves for the what ifs. What if a climatic catastrophe were to destroy the world as we know it? What would be lost from the world? What would remain? Depictions of our future world, destroyed and desolate, often respond to the desires of the underprivileged and the frustrated: people hope for the apocalyptic end to arrive and serve mankind its ultimate judgment, or they wish to warn and to guide – to evince what awaits ahead if mankind chooses not to rectify the errors that are leading it toward a disaster. Embedded in post-apocalyptic fiction is always social criticism: the post-apocalyptic genre is “written by and for the discontented” (Rosen xii). Yet, while imaginings of our world after an apocalypse may work as warnings of what might lie ahead of us, post-apocalyptic fiction can also compel us by offering a “unique blend of the fear of death with *nostalgia* for the modern present” (Olson x; emphasis added). In fictional post-apocalyptic settings, we can view our contemporary society as a lost utopia; as halcyon days of video games, airplanes, and fast food companies.

This rather specific setting of nostalgia, which will be referred to as “post-apocalyptic nostalgia”, will be the focal point of this thesis. Although nostalgia as a concept can be multifaceted – its conceptualizations often depending on its use and the approach of examination – it is commonly

understood to mean a sentimental longing for a joyous time in the past. My thesis studies the ways in which nostalgia for the pre-apocalyptic past transpires in post-apocalyptic fiction through a literary analysis of Emily St. John Mandel's post-apocalyptic science fiction novel *Station Eleven* (2014). Specifically, my thesis analyzes the novel's nostalgic narrative mood as well as the novel's *nostalgia*, demonstrating that the novel uses the twenty-first-century modern American society as the object of its nostalgic longing and encourages the reader to respond to its representation nostalgically, and then considers what consequences this nostalgic strategy might have to the novel's social criticism and to the use of post-apocalyptic fiction as a means of addressing and resolving social issues. My personal motivation for studying post-apocalyptic nostalgia in *Station Eleven* descends from curiosity to see beyond the novel's mesmerizingly nostalgic narrative; to examine what aspects of the novel's pre-apocalyptic world that I recognize to resemble my own world, perhaps, be desperately yearned for, should my world end in an apocalypse.

Mandel's novel was selected as the research material of this study not only due to its post-apocalyptic, near-future setting, but also because of its nostalgic atmosphere. Described as a novel that is "not so much about apocalypse as about memory and loss, nostalgia and yearning" (Jordan) and that "holds our current world in a golden light" (Cameron), *Station Eleven* offers an abundance of material for a literary analysis on post-apocalyptic nostalgia. It tells the story of a society that has collapsed after an infectious disease, the Georgia Flu, has killed almost all its population. In the novel's post-apocalyptic world, where there is no electricity, no airplanes flying in the sky, and no orderly cooperation between groups of survivors, a travelling theater company wanders around the former North American area longing for the lost, modern world. Regarding our contemporary society as the lost past, the novel works to commemorate the beauty of modern time while imagining a future where the remains of humankind are desperately attempting to preserve its legacy. Other researchers have also noted the novel as exemplary of a nostalgic, post-apocalyptic phenomenon: Matthew Leggatt states that *Station Eleven* "seems to fit a general trend in post-apocalyptic fiction

whereby contemporary society is revalued in light of its absence, generating a sense of ‘nostalgia’ for the present through the evocation of loss” (2). Similar to *Station Eleven*, many other twenty-first-century post-apocalyptic and dystopian works rely on, for example, the display of contemporary cultural items to create a sense of familiarity and continuity to the readers’ and viewers’ reality, but also to evoke nostalgic sentiments. For instance, in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006), a post-apocalyptic novel about a father and a son’s journey across a hopeless wasteland, a discovery of a Coca-Cola can invites bittersweet reminiscence of a time when the iconic drink still existed (Donnelly 70). In the post-apocalyptic neo-western film, *The Book of Eli* (2010), the film’s protagonist listens to Al Green’s “How Can You Mend a Broken Heart” (1972) from an old iPod and then washes his body with KFC hand sanitizers while the song still accompanies the scene. In both narratives, the tragedy of the loss of modern society is distinct.

The phenomenon of post-apocalyptic nostalgia has not been extensively studied, but some discussion on the concept exists. For example, Christopher Todd Anderson has studied the relationship between garbage and nostalgia in the Disney/Pixar motion picture film *WALL-E* (2008), where, after mankind’s mass consumption has made the Earth uninhabitable, the garbage robot WALL-E cleans the planet from waste materials. While waste is presented as the primary cause behind humankind’s need to desert planet Earth, WALL-E is aesthetically attracted to specific pieces of garbage, most of them being popular cultural items from the twentieth century. According to Anderson, the film’s nostalgic approach to bubble wrap and garden gnomes among other material goods complicates the social criticism of mass consumption embedded in the film’s narrative (267), which, considering the film’s environmental message, seems highly problematic.

Previous studies on *Station Eleven* have explored the novel’s nostalgic, even utopian take on the twenty-first century from various standpoints. Leggatt’s study analyzes *Station Eleven*’s nostalgic and imaginative narratives, arguing that the novel “offers hope not through a rekindling of an exhausted past, but in a new imagined future in which the traditional lines and boundaries of rela-

tionships, ideals, identity, and community can be redrawn” (1). According to Leggatt, the nostalgic narrative of *Station Eleven* works to signpost a division between those who turn toward an idealized past and those who imagine a future in times of crisis (20). Mark West, on the other hand, reads *Station Eleven* through the concept of ‘salvagepunk’. West argues that Mandel’s novel “works to redeem the pre-apocalyptic world” and minimizes the capitalist apocalypse its characters were already living in the novel’s pre-pandemic world, which is “a way of avoiding having to come to terms with it and building a new – better – world” (21). Similarly, Diletta De Cristofaro is critical of the novel’s nostalgia, noting that the novel’s “refusal to paint the old world as worthy of a destruction . . . is not devoid of issues, as *Station Eleven* ends up unquestioningly celebrating the current [world-]system” (15). Nostalgia’s multifaceted conceptualizations seem to affect *Station Eleven*’s analyses and lead to various interpretations, which calls for its careful examination in this thesis, as well.

Therefore, Chapter 2 of this thesis is largely dedicated to nostalgia. Nostalgia, which was initially considered to be a medical condition and studied mainly by medicine and psychology, has gradually transformed to denote a universally recognized mood or emotional experience studied by scholars of anthropology, social studies, memory studies, and literary criticism among others. In the twenty-first century, nostalgia offers an abundance of material for scientific study as nostalgic music, films, cultural items, and lifestyle trends are produced and marketed copiously for a public infatuated with the bittersweet feeling of remembering, reliving, and imagining the past (Niemeyer 2). The eagerness to look back in time for commercialism, political decision-making, and lifestyle choices is all-encompassing, which amplifies the need for its academic study. In order to resolve some of the conceptual confusion surrounding nostalgia, Chapter 2 delves into nostalgia’s history and multidisciplinary conceptualizations and then examines the ways in which nostalgia is created in fictional narratives. Finally, the chapter discusses post-apocalyptic fiction as context for nostalgia.

Drawing from the previous chapter's theoretical discussion, Chapter 3 undertakes a literary analysis of post-apocalyptic nostalgia in *Station Eleven*. The chapter analyzes the novel's nostalgic narrative mood and then examines the novel's *nostalgia*, that is, the object of its nostalgic longing, investigating what aspects of the fictional pre-apocalyptic world the narrative deems meaningful and worthy of nostalgic attention. Chapter 4, then, examines *Station Eleven*'s post-apocalyptic narrative as context for its nostalgia: the chapter studies the novel's social criticism, analyzes its relationship to the novel's nostalgic narrative mood, and finally considers this relationship in relation to the post-apocalyptic genre's temporal disposition to allow the reader, in recognizing nostalgic yearning for the pre-apocalyptic fictional world, to simultaneously 'nostalgize' their reality, the reality that the fictional world is standing for.

I hope that my study sheds light on the complex effects that nostalgia may have in a post-apocalyptic narrative: because of nostalgia's inherent tendency to idealize the past it yearns for, its coexistence with a narrative that also contains social criticism may prove to be discordant. Because my thesis studies this particular interaction, it also participates in the broader academic discussion of nostalgia's functional value. My thesis will demonstrate that 'nostalgizing' narratives, especially within the post-apocalyptic genre, should be considered with appropriate caution and critique, as the repercussions of rosy retrospection reach further than the veneration of old video games.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Nostalgic reminiscing and post-apocalyptic fictional imaginings are connected through a similar premise: discontent in the present moment. Where nostalgia turns to the past to remember and linger in a more joyous but irretrievably lost time, post-apocalyptic fiction envisions a dystopian future where the shortcomings of the present moment can be expressed and resolved through the fictional narrative. Because post-apocalyptic fiction often expresses what has been lost from the world, it also creates space for nostalgia: as post-apocalyptic narratives recount the tragedies of the post-apocalyptic world, the lost pre-apocalyptic time becomes the object of their nostalgia (Olson x). The relationship between nostalgia and a post-apocalyptic narrative is not, however, uncomplicated: where post-apocalyptic narratives aim to condemn and criticize the drawbacks of the past, nostalgia tends to romanticize and idealize the past it reminisces and yearns for. The contradictions between nostalgia and the post-apocalyptic genre thus create ambiguities for the interpretations of nostalgic, post-apocalyptic narratives.

The question of what nostalgia essentially is remains without unanimous answer. Is it a feeling, an emotion, or a mood? Is it a memory-related practice that works to construct and maintain identity? Is it a social practice that fosters social connectedness? Or, is it a regressive form of reminiscence that prevents us from being content in our present moment by triggering us to rather yearn for a joyous past? Scholars from various fields of study have contemplated over nostalgia's essence for decades and, as a result, the concept has come to cover a spectrum of time- and memory-related discourses (Angé and Berliner 5-6). The definition, the premises, and the functions of nostalgia seem to shift, change, and depend on the context in which it is experienced and used and the perspective from which it is examined (Angé and Berliner 5-6).

Therefore, in order to conceptualize nostalgia as extensively as is possible for the purposes of this thesis, I have chosen to first approach nostalgia in Section 2.1 from a historical perspective,

briefly tracing its conceptual development and multidisciplinary conceptualizations from the seventeenth century to this day. A historical approach will elucidate some of the conceptual confusion surrounding nostalgia, although a comprehensive understanding of nostalgia seems to be unattainable due to the concept's multifunctionality and fluidity. Thereafter, I will address nostalgia's functions from multidisciplinary standpoints, discussing some of the ways in which nostalgia's potential functions and effects have been explained in research.

Section 2.2 will then examine nostalgic literature in more detail, reviewing the literary devices that make a literary text nostalgic. The section will begin with a general discussion of the interaction between literary nostalgia and readership, and then consider various nostalgic tropes and narrative and stylistic means that literary scholars have found to contribute to a nostalgic narrative mood. Finally, Section 2.3 will consider the contextual conditions that the post-apocalyptic genre places on nostalgia: mainly, the social criticism arguably inherent in post-apocalyptic fiction and the post-apocalyptic temporal lens where the pre-apocalyptic fictional past imitates the reader's present reality, creating space for nostalgia.

2.1 On Nostalgia

Nostalgia is commonly understood to mean a sentimental longing for the past. It is a "wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrevocable condition" (*Merriam-Webster.com*); a "regretful memory of a period of the past, esp. one in an individual's own lifetime" (*OED Online*); and "an affectionate feeling you have for the past, especially for a particularly happy time" (*Collins Dictionary*). What separates nostalgia from other forms of reminiscing and remembering is the desire to return to what has been lost. Nostalgia yearns for what is unattainable, what no longer exists in the present moment, and thus nostalgia is always bittersweet (Angé and Berliner 2). Furthermore, entwined in nostalgia is the idea that the Romans referred to as "*memoria praeteritorum bonorum*": the past is always well remembered; the past is remembered in

a good light (Burton). Nostalgic reminiscence is idealizing. It forgets the unpleasanties and the grievances of the past, bathing in the joyous and the beautiful. As Svetlana Boym notes, nostalgia “is a romance with one’s own fantasy” (*Nostalgia* 7) – the past sentimentalized is always partly imagined.

The word *nostalgia* itself is a compound of two Greek words: *nostos*, which means ‘to return home’, and *algia*, which can be translated in two separate yet adjacent ways: as ‘painful’ (Sal-mose 89) or as ‘longing’ (Niemeyer 7). The word was coined in 1688 by a physician, Johannes Hofer, who used it to describe a disease – homesickness – of Swiss mercenaries who had been separated from their home (Niemeyer 7). In Hofer’s diagnosis, longing for home caused several physical symptoms such as nausea, fever, and loss of appetite, but the people suffering from nostalgia also had phenomenal capacities for “remembering sensations, tastes, sounds, smells, the minutiae, and trivia of the lost paradise that those who remained home never noticed” (Boym, *The Future* 4). To a degree, Hofer’s latter observation still applies: inanimate objects and sensory experiences such as flavors and aromas often precipitate nostalgia because of past, concurrent emotional states that have been displaced onto them (Hirsch 390).

The Swiss soldiers’ dire symptoms to homesickness can be explained by unprecedented temporal and spatial straining (Landwehr 258). The idea was first postulated by Immanuel Kant in the late eighteenth century, who argued that “the homesickness of the Swiss . . . is the result of a longing that is aroused by the recollection of a carefree life and neighborly company in their youth, a longing for the places where they enjoyed the very simple pleasures of life” (69). James Quinnell summarizes that “for Kant, the longing is for a past state rather than geographical entity: place and time are conflated” (9). When the Swiss mercenaries were exported throughout Europe and overseas to the new world, they were extorted from their careless lifestyles and forced to adapt to the tempos and time-models of militaries and metropolises (Landwehr 256; 258). However, when the soldiers returned to Switzerland, they found themselves disappointed (Kant 69). As Linda Hutcheon

notes, “they did not want to return to a *place*, but to a *time*. Time, unlike space, cannot be returned to – ever; time is irreversible” (19, original emphasis). Since Kant, nostalgia’s meaning has gradually diverted away from *homesickness*, which has a stronger connotation of a home that is geographically located; however, if we conceptualize *home* generally as a temporal, spatial, and communal entity a person feels that they belong to (see e.g. “Home.” [OED Online]), nostalgia can still be conceptualized as homesickness – the Swiss mercenaries’ homes were the times, places, and communities when, where, and to they belonged and longed for.

Achim Landwehr also points out the general “temporal reorientation” of the seventeenth century that manifested itself in various emerging and growing everyday life phenomena such as insurance policies and almanacs (262). He argues that the century’s propensity to steer people’s minds increasingly toward the future allowed for nostalgia to emerge as a notable pathological disease (262). Nostalgic sentiments were not, however, a new phenomenon. Marcos Natali argues that Hofer’s need to coin an entirely new word to describe his diagnosis “suggests that something new – a new way of feeling or a new way of thinking about an old feeling – was entering the world” (10). Natali’s latter theory – that an old feeling was perhaps being perceived in a new way – seems more probable than the emergence of an entirely new phenomenon, as several critics have noted that nostalgia was known in world languages and literature well before Hofer diagnosed it as a medical condition and coined a word for it. The Fall of Adam and Eve, the Israelites’ longing for Jerusalem during their exile in Psalm 137, and Odysseus’ determination to return home despite the thrills of his adventures in Homer’s *Odyssey* are all examples of nostalgic desire to return home (Batcho 166; Landwehr 260). Niklas Salmose argues that words describing nostalgic sentiments can also be found in most languages: *maladie du pays* in French, *hemlängtan* in Swedish, and even *toska* in Russian denote somewhat similar emotional states (89). Krystine Batcho even goes to argue that “prior to Hofer, homesickness was presumed to be the norm, even admirable or noble” (166), which

might, indeed, indicate that the century's temporal, spatial, and intellectual reformations caused for an old phenomenon to be conceptualized in a new way.

Due to refinements in medical classifications, nostalgia was transferred from the domain of physical illness to the field of mental illness during the eighteenth century and eventually lost its status as a disorder (Batcho 167). It was gradually toward the nineteenth century that nostalgia's concept matured to mean what we understand it to be today: "a longing for a lost place and, especially, a vanished time" (Angé and Berliner 2). The nineteenth century was troubled with a memory crisis – generated by, for example, the new industrial processes that cut the connections between entities and their production histories (Terdiman 12-13) – that produced "a sense of loss and distance from the past" (Angé and Berliner 3). In cities and urban salons, Boym argues, the memory boom of the nineteenth century led to a "ritual commemoration of lost youth, lost springs, lost dances, lost chances" (*The Future* 16). Furthermore, the innovations of modernity, even as trivial as the introduction of railroad schedules, fundamentally changed the representation of time and made people's understanding of the progress of time more acute (Boym, *The Future* 9; Salmose 107). Randall Stevenson notes that the railway transformed people's perceptions of time not only because of the change of pace it generated, but because of the new cognitive experiences it introduced (6). According to Stevenson, the railway "altered cognitive possibilities and transfixed fleeting scenes and images with new intensity in mind and memory" (6).

Tobias Becker claims that it was in the twentieth century that nostalgia formally "came to signify an obsessive yearning for the past, or at least it was then that the guardians of language – the editors of dictionaries – recognized nostalgia's new meaning" (237). That was also when, according to Becker, academics began to talk about a "wave of nostalgia" in America and Europe (237-38). Nostalgia became increasingly politicized and commercialized: cultural items of the past were used to defend political programs and make the past profitable, for example, by merchandizing historical locations for tourism (Niemeyer 5-6). The 1970s, in particular, was a decade of nostalgic sentiment-

tality, and that sentimentality was expressed first and foremost for the 1950s (Becker 242). Intellectuals were particularly perplexed by the nostalgic sentiments of the youth who, against expectations, were adopting and ‘nostalgizing’ their parents’ culture instead of rebelling against it (Becker 242). Varying explanations for the nostalgia wave were expressed by scholars of history, sociology, and anthropology: some claimed nostalgic expressions to be symptomatic of anxious and uncertain cultures that attempted to find stability in turning toward the past, while others considered nostalgia to have positive functions as part of constructing and reconstructing identities and processing change by reinforcing sociohistorical stability (Becker 244; see also Davis).

The end of the twentieth century saw an increase in imagining a technologically advanced future; yet, as Niemeyer notes, despite the enthusiasm to imagine new technologies and innovations, the start of the new millennium was flooded by nostalgic sentiments (1). The twenty-first century began as and has continued to be an era of nostalgic vogue: revivals, remakes, and reruns of past music, video games, TV shows, fashion styles, and other cultural products are produced with unprecedented eagerness (2). The recirculation of the past is enabled by the technologies of the twenty-first century: cultural products can be easily archived and then just as effortlessly recalled and replayed (Lizardi 38). Ryan Lizardi claims that the new nostalgic moment is possible overall because of the affordances of the digitalized media, as streaming services and other digitalized media portals allow people to browse their personal archived pasts, creating “individual libraries of nostalgia” (9; 38). Lizardi also points out that the twenty-first century has shortened the nostalgic window, that is, “the window between when something occurs and when it should be regarded with nostalgia” (13). According to Lizardi, this shrinking is palpably demonstrated by unremitting remakes of film sagas, the instant productization of on-going events into commemorative consumer products, and the documentation of everyday life in social media (13). The short window between when an item is produced and its eligibility for nostalgia perpetually fixates people’s minds on the past (Lizardi 13).

Landwehr argues that nostalgia, as all feelings, is profitable, which might explain the twentieth- and twenty-first-century nostalgic torrent (253). Studies show that nostalgia increases financial risk-taking, which makes it an efficient marketing strategy: according to Jannine Lasaleta et al., nostalgia inveigles consumers to part with their money more easily because it weakens people's desire for money by fostering social connectedness (724). Similarly, Ju et al. claim that nostalgia "permits individuals to travel back, connecting to who they are today to who they were in the past, connecting to a positive view of their younger self" and thus promotes self-continuity, bolstering brand loyalty and increasing purchase intent in the process (2064; 2079). Therefore, the excessive manufacturing of and the saturation of digitalized archives with nostalgic content in the new millennium may be, to some extent, explained by commercial pursuits.

Alike the nostalgic reactions of the Swiss soldiers, the twenty-first-century nostalgia could also be a sign of a temporal crisis. The temporalities of the modern globalized world are high-velocity: for example, the invention of the internet in the late twentieth century has allowed for people from across the world to communicate with one another without any delays in transmission – a development which has significantly accelerated the rapidity of communication and information-sharing (Poe 236-37). Niemeyer debates that the nostalgic expressions could be indicative of people's wishes to slow down in a culture of fast technologies, or they could be an escapist "wanderlust" in an attempt to cure the temporal crisis (2). A spatial crisis could also be considered, as the modern world has transformed people's experiences of space in various ways: virtual realities have created spaces independent of physical locations and limitations; urbanization and urban construction have increased the dimensions of people's living environments, garnering populations of millions to live in megacities characterized by skyscrapers and city blocks; and the global migration over national borders has challenged the nationalist tradition of allocating a geographically located space for a particular nation to inhabit (see e.g. Bærenholdt and Simonsen). These spatial transformations, along with the temporal changes, may well explain people's propensity for nostalgia in the

new millennium. Some critics, however, question the eagerness to consider nostalgia as characteristic to the twenty-first century – or any century, at that. Svetlana Boym, for example, notes that “outbreaks of nostalgia often follow revolutions” (*The Future* xvi), which would imply that nostalgia is a recurring reaction to societal change. Becker, on the other hand, criticizes the term’s extended use to cover phenomena it does not adequately explain (234). According to Becker, nostalgia critics fail to consider people’s other motivations for commemorating and engaging with the past, such as genuine historical interest (248). Becker does not deny the nostalgic narrative of the twenty-first century but calls for a clarification in the term’s usage (235).

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have also introduced a potential linguistic shift concerning nostalgia, complicating its already fluid applications. While the word ‘nostalgize’ does not yet exist according to English dictionaries, Niemeyer has found it used numerous times (10-11). Thus, nostalgia may no longer be something people experience or feel, but something they deliberately do. A pair of old sneakers or an old TV show can, as it were, be ‘nostalgized’ (Niemeyer 10-11). Online dictionaries such as *Wiktionary* explain the verb *nostalgize* as an act of treating something nostalgically or reveling in nostalgia, which supports Niemeyer’s argument. The linguistic shift brings forth the debate of nostalgia’s functions: why do we feel nostalgia? While the history of nostalgia portrays nostalgia as primarily a negative phenomenon, first as a medical disease and then as an emotional experience responding to anxieties and discontents of the current moment with a regressive yearning toward an idealized past, the desire to ‘nostalgize’ implies that nostalgic sentimentalizing is also an act that people pursue and enjoy.

The main argument for the value of nostalgia as a vital and beneficial human experience is based on the understanding that nostalgia serves crucial existential functions: in allowing people to reminisce the joyous times of the past, nostalgia brings warmth, comfort, and continuity to the present moment and thus helps cope with existential dilemmas and anxieties. Because nostalgia has an idealizing effect on the past state that is reminisced, nostalgia can infuse its experiencer with a sense

of self-worth as the present self is reinforced with an ideal past self (Sedikides et al., *Conceptual Issues* 206-7). Thus, as Sedikides et al. argue, although nostalgia is considered to be often provoked by threatening triggers (e.g. death, illness, economic troubles) or aversive psychological states (e.g. sadness, anxiety, loneliness), it ultimately deflects distressing thoughts and augments reassurance and security, making it a positive affective experience (*Conceptual Issues* 210). In a similar manner, Vanessa May acknowledges nostalgia's reputation as a "failure to cope with change, a defeatist attitude to the present and future, and a kind of retreat into an idealized past" but argues for its role as a defense mechanism in situations of change and displacement and its potential to criticize and question present conditions and ideologies (404).

However, nostalgia may not be beneficial for everyone. While Sedikides et al. primarily argue for nostalgia's advantageous aspects, they do note that the contrast between the idealized past and the present may make the present moment appear "particularly bleak by comparison" when the person engaging in nostalgia is unhappy (*Nostalgia as Enabler* 234). Habitual worriers can begin to feel anxious and depressed when experiencing nostalgia because their "chronic state of anxiety contrasts with nostalgic memories of a carefree past", causing further distress (Verplanken 285; 288). Furthermore, nostalgia's tendency to refer only to an idealized version of the past while excluding its unpleasantness can generate moral and ideological distortions, which may lead to larger societal issues. This argument is supported by Michael Maly et al.'s research of white people living in racially changing neighborhoods in Chicago between 1960 and 1980. Maly et al. analyzed white people's nostalgic recollections of their old neighborhoods (named as *nostalgia narratives*) and found that the study's informants perceived their idyllic, secure, and homogeneously white neighborhoods as being disrupted by racial change (758; 764). The informants' nostalgic reminiscing of their old neighborhoods allowed for them to consider themselves as innocent victims of racial change and blame black people for the disturbances of their neighborhoods, even though they remembered their own aggression and the institutional discrimination toward the blacks (774). In the case of the

study, nostalgia worked to maintain positive (white) identity, but it also neutralized contradictions, validated white dominance, and normalized racial segregation (774).

It is also worth considering whether the medium provoking nostalgic experiences has significance in determining nostalgia's functional value. Lizardi argues that contemporary mass media has amplified nostalgic modality by perpetually fixating its consumers to the past (6). Not only has the return to the past been made unprecedentedly effortless through the rise of digitalized media archives, filled with vintage content, but the gaze backwards has become a cultural mentality (45). Lizardi laments that consumers of contemporary media have been driven to pursue a recurrent re-experience of the (media-defined) past through remakes, reruns, and re-imaginings – however, the continuous altering and remaking of past content may lead to a myopic and uncritical perspective of history (126-27). Lizardi summarizes:

What the contemporary media consumer is left with is the drive to recreate a version of history that is comprised of their playlist past, a collection of altered, contemporized, and idealized texts that have come to define them and their individual history. Gone is the collective conception of eras and times lost, and replacing it is the idea that to truly understand who I am as a person and how I got here, all you have to do is look at my constellation of cross-media texts I loved as a child. (130)

Thus, in Lizardi's view, nostalgia would seem to have more disadvantages than advantages, as mediated nostalgia distorts the past by continually reimagining and abridging it. Furthermore, collective narratives of history and community are forgotten: “when reruns are all we know of our history, what is lost is the common ground that binds us together as a society, a culture, and humanity” (Lizardi 126). While nostalgic sentimentalizing of one's past through reruns of TV shows and remakes of films and video games might be a positive affective experience, its effects on one's historical worldview, social belonging, and ability to reflect on the present moment might be harmful.

While many researchers do consider nostalgia to be a positive experience, a useful practice contributing to identity-construction, cultural belonging, and social connectedness, others remark its disadvantages: the potential to cause depression, buttress morally troubling ideology, and produce a unilateral and uncritical view of history. Whether nostalgia is, ultimately, a favorable or an adverse phenomenon, remains without unanimous answer. Therefore, in order to understand what nostalgia is “good for”, further academic research on nostalgia is indisputably required. As my thesis aims to resolve how nostalgia affects the interpretation of a post-apocalyptic narrative, it also participates in the wider discussion of determining nostalgia’s functional value. Before proceeding to the actual analysis, I will discuss the relationship between nostalgia and literature and the post-apocalyptic genre as context for nostalgia in the following sections.

2.2 Nostalgia in the Narrative

What do we mean when we say that a literary text is nostalgic? According to Salmose, a narrative about nostalgia does not necessarily make a literary text *nostalgic* – what is required in addition and/or instead is the appropriate use of tropes and narrative and stylistic choices that create a nostalgic narrative mood; a mood that conveys the text’s nostalgia and potentially provokes nostalgic feelings in the reader, as well (11). Few literary scholars have studied the literary strategies that contribute to nostalgia: while, for example, Santesso’s *A Careful Longing: The Poetics and Problems of Nostalgia* analyzes the eighteenth-century nostalgia poem, and Jaroslav Stetkevych’s *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasib* examines nostalgia in classical Arabic poetry, Salmose’s *Towards a Poetics of Nostalgia* is the only study that works to construct a poetics of nostalgia applicable for analyses of modern fiction in general. Consequently, the lion’s share of literary study discussed throughout this section leans on Salmose’s research. However, while Salmose’s research carefully considers the entire nostalgic fictive experience, discussing reader-response theories and theory behind nostalgic experiences at length, here the theoretical dis-

cussion will have to be considerably abridged. It should also be noted that the devices discussed here, or in Salmose's research, do not construct an exhaustive template for analysis but rather provide examples for analyzing varying textual solutions that contribute to a nostalgic narrative mood.

The universal recognizability of nostalgia benefits literature: a reader who has never experienced, for example, an idyllic childhood in the countryside can still experience nostalgia when reading about one (Santesso 16). The past yearned for does not necessarily have to be personal: a phenomenon Salmose refers to as *external nostalgia* enables people to feel nostalgia for times and places outside their autobiographical memories (126). A(n external) pseudo-memorial nostalgic experience, for example, is a phenomenon where a person might begin to feel nostalgia when reading about an idyllic Christmas in a novel (Salmose 137). The Christmas portrayed in the novel would not be a personal memory, it would not even be a "real" past but a constructed one; yet, according to Salmose's research, it could still evoke nostalgic sentiments by convincing the person reading about it of its "realness" (137-38). Salmose explains that a pseudo-memorial nostalgic experience "has the capacity of inflicting itself together with a true personal memory" and that idealization is fundamental to pseudo-memorial experience, since "it has to both convince the nostalgee that this is almost an experienced memory and reinforce the marketing values included in its commercial use" (138). External nostalgic reactions are, however, dependent on shared historical and cultural frameworks (Salmose 127). A Christmas portrayal is unlikely to provoke nostalgia in people who do not celebrate Christmas but can be expected to appeal to readers who do.

To resolve this conflict in this thesis, I wish to draw from literary theory about the reader as an ideal recipient. The term *implied reader*, originally introduced by Wolfgang Iser, conceptualizes a text's reader as an abstract recipient "who understands the work in a way that optimally matches its structure and adopts the interpretive position and aesthetic standpoint put forward by the work" (Schmid). The concept of an ideal recipient does not deny the reader's subjective interpretation, but in arguing that the reader is, to an extent, manipulated by the text to experience it in a particular

way, reduces the scope of these interpretations (Salmose 76). Therefore, my study assumes that *Station Eleven*'s ideal recipient – the hypothetical reader whose thoughts, values, and schemata recognize and correspond to those of the narrative – is one that identifies the novel's nostalgia and responds to it in a manner that the text guides them to. As my study explores the relationship between post-apocalyptic fiction, nostalgia, and the reader's reality, but has no access to the subjective experiences of actual readers, it is the experience of this ideal recipient that this study hypothesizes, as well as the wider societal context of that reader.

The mechanisms of external nostalgia raise questions about the relationship between readership, ideology, and commercialism, stirring queries of whether content providers are producing carefully crafted, nostalgic content for distinct target audiences to attain their own ideological and economic gains. Nostalgia's propensity to make people spend more money already proves its efficiency as a commercial strategy, and nostalgia can be argued to have been successfully utilized in politics, as well. For example, President Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign motto "Make America Great Again" proposed adopting the political and cultural customs of the past and appealed to a public longing for the great American era of the 1950s (Landwehr 264; Mariani). Trump's political and social nostalgia were not a novel concept: both Trump's slogan and the ideology attached to it were loaned from President Ronald Reagan, whose presidency in the 1980s was characterized by nostalgia for the mid-twentieth century (Marcus 37). The potential consequences of external nostalgic reactions provoked by literature and other fictional and non-fictional works should, therefore, be regarded with appropriate caution and consideration: portrayals of seemingly innocuous, nostalgic Christmas pasts might work to reinforce and benefit particular ideologies and political and commercial objectives, even without obscured intention or agenda.

Aaron Santesso argues that nostalgia was already experimented with as a literary device by eighteenth-century poets (15). Although the eighteenth-century conception of nostalgia was still widely dictated by medical connotations, Santesso claims that poets such as John Dryden, Alexan-

der Pope, and Thomas Gray were experimenting with elegiac and pastoral conventions in ways that led to nostalgia becoming a genre and a tropic [sic] entity on its own and ultimately determined the modern understanding of nostalgia (25-26). According to Santesso, the eighteenth-century poets were purposefully searching for universally recognizable tropes that would be innately nostalgic (19). These nostalgic tropes – that is, imagery, metaphors, motifs – would have the capacity to evoke nostalgia in a reader by activating emotions or sensations through their nostalgic allusions, symbolism, or prose (Salmose 241-42). The tropes that emerged over the eighteenth century included children, villages, ruins, and schooldays – ideas that we recognize to be nostalgic even today (Santesso 19). While Santesso notes that modern nostalgic tropes may now differ from romantic tropes and be “white picket fences rather than village squares”, the romantic nostalgia tropes persist (188). This is also why they are useful in creating a nostalgic narrative mood.

According to Salmose, the reason for the romantic nostalgia tropes’ longevity is their vagueness, which allows for a wide readership to recognize them (247). Salmose explains that “the representative quality of nostalgic imagery, like the romantic tropes, arises out of universal experiences of nature, landscapes, potentially romantic situations, and symbols that evoke the idea of time, the passing of time, and the repetition of time such as seasons” (249). Time, therefore, is crucial to nostalgia: time is the element that causes the nostalgic melancholia, the pain that results from acknowledging the finality of one’s own time, which makes it a common nostalgic trope and an idea that most nostalgic tropes fundamentally rely on (Salmose 252). Thus, time markers that remind of the irreversibility of time, and the impending death and decay caused by the passing of time, are common in nostalgic narratives (Salmose 253). Salmose demonstrates the impact of time markers in his analysis of William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* (1965). He claims that Quentin, the neurotic student’s narrative is pervaded by regular time markers that produce a sense of a clock ticking and emphasize Quentin’s adult clock time (341). As Quentin’s narrative “becomes more and more confused and thrown into the phantoms of the past”, these time markers stop

occurring (Salmose 341). Salmose notes that the absence of time is even noticed by Quentin himself: “. . . I could hear my watch and the train dying away, as though it were running through another month or another summer somewhere’ (101)” (342). Time’s vanishing in Quentin’s past narrative time, especially when contrasted to his clock-ticking present time, creates “an eerie feeling as well as a sense of freedom” that stirs nostalgic yearning (Salmose 342).

Time is also crucial to Benjy, the youngest child’s narrative, but in his case, time is accentuated by repetitions of images that Benjy has seen, often with the same exact wordings (Salmose 338-39). According to Salmose, these repetitions emphasize Benjy’s narrative of childhood temporality and simplicity (338). Salmose notes that when readers are engaging with his childlike narrative, they are also guided back to their own childhoods (337). As the novel proceeds from Benjy to Quentin’s narrative, the childhood temporality is “changed into the adult clock time, and thus we are also as readers forcefully aware of the loss not only of the Benjy narrative, but also our own timeless childhood” (Salmose 341). Consequently, childhood is also a prevalent nostalgic trope (Salmose 246). Because all people have memories of childhood, using childhood imagery such as children and children’s toys in literature is effective in rousing nostalgic reader associations (Santesso 71; Salmose 246). As one of his examples, Salmose discusses the Ferris wheel in Malcolm Lowry’s *Under the Volcano* (1947):

A Ferris wheel is something that we associate mainly with childhood or a childhood experience of awe and fascination. It is not only the actual image of the Ferris wheel that comes to mind, but also other senses associated with it such as the blinking lights, the noise of the people in it, and perhaps a melody being played. In a wider sense it has become the main staple of the amusement park with all those associations. It carries both the fascination for our own past childhood and the magic we have lost with it. (276)

Thus, nostalgic narratives refer to childhood in various ways: imagery evoking the idea of childhood and syntactic strategies creating a childlike atmosphere work in distinctive ways but conjure up similar ideas and emotions.

Debbie Olson notes that the figure of the child is also common in post-apocalyptic cinema: according to Olson, the image of the innocent, angelic child in post-apocalyptic film is often “tethered to notions of an idealized past as well as hope and optimism for a future” (x). This is well-exemplified by, for example, Boy’s character in *The Road* (2009), a motion picture adaptation of Cormac McCarthy’s novel from 2006. According to Jennifer Brown, Boy’s character is “the remnant of innocence and purity in a grey, cruel, dog-eat-dog post-apocalyptic world” (35). Boy’s nostalgic potential is distinct when Man offers him a can of Coca-Cola, which Boy relishes with childlike content and then offers back to Man. Man, who would rather have Boy enjoy the whole drink, accepts the can after Boy’s insists, smiling fondly as Boy announces: “It’s bubbly!” Sharing the lemonade with the curious and enthusiastic Boy arouses Man’s nostalgia for the pre-apocalyptic past where the fizzy drink was a daily delight instead of a heartrending rarity.

Boy and Man’s journey in *The Road* utilizes another nostalgic trope: voyaging. Voyaging, according to Salmose, represents change and movement and can be used for expressing nostalgic times and spaces (266). Salmose notes that travelling incorporates different temporalities and worlds, as it designates moving from one place and time to another. This makes voyaging fertile ground for nostalgia: when travelling, we leave something behind, or perhaps attempt to return to something we have left behind before. According to Salmose, voyages “function both as an escape from the present and a longing for something as well as a metaphor of the passage of time, changes, and memories” (270). Moving trains have also been used as nostalgic spaces by many authors of modern literature: Randall Stevenson notes that “views from a train . . . could be transfixed or ‘isolated in eternity’ simply because they instantaneously appeared so vivid and significant, yet vanished utterly again in a flash” (4-5). As was already noted in Section 2.1, trains have influenced

experiences of nostalgia not only by being the manifestations of modernity's rapid changes of pace and, as such, sources of temporal anxiety, but also by introducing the experience of transient images to people's mind and memory (Stevenson 6). In analogy, the same could be argued of airplanes, as flight has introduced yet another new temporality as well as a way of experiencing and seeing the world to people's consciousness.

Landwehr also discusses the steam locomotive as a central image of nostalgia, noting that, despite the steam train being a cause of anxiety and fear in the Victorian era (see e.g. Milne-Smith), steam trains are now common triggers of nostalgic feelings (252). Salmose presents anti-modernity as a common nostalgic trope, arguing that nostalgia is "really nostalgia for the natural state of existence" and that juxtapositions of natural and modern elements – for example, of idyllic and pastoral landscapes and industrial machinery – can invite the reader to yearn back to a natural past (270). According to Salmose, natural elements "convey romantic lyrical spaces as well as symbolize the passage of time and the universality of situations" (256). However, if steam locomotives – and similar types of old machinery such as vintage cars or phonograph records – are common triggers of nostalgia, nostalgia's relationship to modernity might not be as clear-cut. Landwehr wonders if "this is characteristic of nostalgic phenomena: What once was responsible for negative emotions, if not for sorrow, can be transformed – with the appropriate time interval – into an object of longing" (252). Stevenson, on the other hand, emphasizes the experience of loss as the essence of nostalgic feelings for modern machinery, stating that "constant innovations in technology and transport during the last two centuries have repeatedly consigned to the past what were once everyday habits, lifestyles and experiences" (2). The nostalgic power of juxtaposing the natural and the modern might not be due to people's desire to return to a *natural* state of existence, but simply to return to something familiar that has been lost.

A nostalgic narrative mood is also created on the level of syntax and stylistics: tense, sentence structure, and numerous other narrative choices can contribute to a nostalgic narrative mood.

Salmose writes that “since nostalgia, in most cases, is a retrospective movement, it might be appropriate to think of the past tense as the standard nostalgic mode” (183). However, as Salmose notes, changes in tense can generate a nostalgic narrative mood in various ways (184). The past progressive, for example, is a particularly fitting tense for delivering a nostalgic mood, since it is ambiguous in its temporal signal – “it does not completely belong to a past event, but it is not entirely a present activity either” (Salmose 185). The past progressive, Salmose argues, “makes scenes more visual, actualizing a feeling that it *is* happening before us” (185). Therefore, James Joyce’s original sentence “His soul was swooning into some new world” from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914-1915) conveys the “feeling of something ongoing, something accentuated, important, unique, and almost ‘dreamlike’”, thus creating a nostalgic atmosphere – were the sentence written in the simple past, the nostalgic effect would not be the same (Salmose 186).

In a similar manner, asyndeton (connecting clauses with a comma) and polysyndeton (connecting clauses with the word *and*) are literary devices that can have a nostalgic effect in a text (Salmose 188). Salmose uses polysyndeton as his example, arguing that it carries nostalgic value because the repetitive use of *and* has a connotation of pathos and expansive emotions (Salmose 189). Salmose argues that the use of polysyndeton in the sentence “the air is alive with chatter and laughter and casual innuendo and instructions forgotten on the spot and enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other’s names” (Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* 44) creates a feeling of breathlessness and an eager, childlike tone that generates a nostalgic atmosphere (188-190). Salmose only discusses asyndeton briefly but notes that it “increases the sense of speed and energy by disregarding normal punctuation, and this can be valuable if one attempts to convey motion, tumult, and vigour as part of an exceptional memory” (189).

Several other narrative and stylistic choices can influence a text’s nostalgic narrative mood: Salmose discusses strategies such as anachrony (the discrepancies between story and narrative), proximate and non-proximate words, and narrative voice among others. Prolepsis, for example, can

be used to summon nostalgia: according to Salmose, anticipations (or flashforwards) examine an event from a future perspective, leading to “a spotlighting of the present event as something forever past/lost” (195). He argues that “small insertions of proleptic truths about the passage of time” characterize the nostalgic narrative mood of Stephen King’s “The Body” (1982), which is indicated in his exemplary sentence from King’s novella: “‘It took me a long time after that summer to realize that most of the tears I cried were for my mom and dad’ (299)” (197). The sentence’s nostalgia is also affected by the mention of summer, seasons being another nostalgic trope that Salmose discusses in his study (264).

As Salmose and the other researchers discussed throughout this chapter demonstrate, the building material for a nostalgic narrative mood lies within the text, even if nostalgic yearning or the word *nostalgia* are never explicitly uttered. The devices discussed here provide but an exemplary discussion of literary strategies with nostalgic potential; however, as was established earlier in this section, most nostalgic literary tactics fundamentally lean on the ideas of time and the passing of time. The next section will now address post-apocalyptic fiction as context for nostalgia.

2.3 Post-apocalyptic Fiction as Context for Nostalgia

As context for nostalgia, the post-apocalyptic genre introduces particular narrative conditions and possibilities that must be considered when analyzing nostalgia in post-apocalyptic fiction. As a sub-genre of all apocalyptic or disaster fiction, post-apocalyptic fiction explores “the/a world after the/an apocalypse” (Skult 4). Although post-apocalyptic fiction is dependent on an apocalypse, the “end” is rarely as significant in post-apocalyptic writing as what happens after said end: as James Berger notes, “something is left over, and the world after the world, the *post-apocalypse*, is usually the true object of the apocalyptic writer’s concern” (6). Accordingly, the whole study of post-apocalyptic representation is interested in “what disappears and what remains, and how the remainder has been transformed” (Berger 7). Often, the fictional pre-apocalyptic world is modelled after

the writer and reader's factual contemporary reality: the post-apocalyptic genre explores the end of the world as we know it. This future perfect perspective of what will have been, what will have happened places both the writer and the reader of post-apocalyptic fiction in a curious temporal vortex. Berger writes: "Temporal sequence becomes confused. Apocalyptic writing takes us after the end, shows the signs prefiguring the end, the moment of obliteration, and the aftermath. The writer and reader must be both places at once, imagining the post-apocalyptic world and then paradoxically 'remembering' the world as it was, as it is" (6). This temporal disposition of post-apocalyptic fiction, as well as the bridging between the post-apocalyptic world and the reader's reality, creates a space, as Olson argues, for the reader to regard their current reality as a lost utopia (x).

Perceiving one's contemporary world as a past paradise in a post-apocalyptic narrative becomes a curious phenomenon when mirrored against the social criticism arguably inherent in post-apocalyptic writing. Elizabeth Rosen states that post-apocalyptic writing is "a vehicle of social criticism, and has always been so" (xii). The genre's origins are in the Book of Revelation, where apocalypse refers to the revelation received by St. John of God's ultimate judgment (Rosen xii). Throughout time, apocalyptic thinking and imagery has been accrued with devastations other than Doomsday, and the modern (secular) apocalypse, as Rosen notes, has diverged from its biblical antecedent to explore a wider apocalyptic array (xiv). The End-time destruction represented in post-apocalyptic fiction has grown to echo the threats and anxieties of the moment of its publication: Hyong-jun Moon notes that "more than any other genre, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives gravitate toward the exploration of the major dilemmas of the present" (9). The fear of nuclear war dominated the post-apocalyptic genre from the Second World War until the end of the twentieth century, and gradually, as these threats have emerged in history, incurable viruses, pandemics, climate change, and technological destructions have surfaced in post-apocalyptic writing (see "Charting Trends in Apocalyptic and Post-apocalyptic Fiction"). Post-apocalyptic fiction, then, critiques

the social order that allows for these threats to exist, but it also works to resolve those fears and anxieties. As Moon states, “apocalypse can function as a conceptual tool that projects an imaginative catastrophic event onto a reality, through which questions of political, economic, social, and cultural problems of the present era can be raised, thought, and answered” (4).

Post-apocalyptic thinking as social criticism and discussion can become problematic if and when the post-apocalyptic narrative simultaneously mourns the loss of the pre-apocalyptic past – the object of its nostalgia, but also of its criticism. Berger notes that “even the Book of Revelation, in its overwhelming hatred for the world, uncovers in its double-edged ‘lament’ for Babylon a moment of nostalgia for what will be lost” (9). Still, the phenomenon has not been extensively academically studied, and most of the existing discussion on the peculiar relationship between nostalgia and post-apocalyptic fiction concentrates on film rather than literature. Christopher Todd Anderson delves into the problematics between nostalgia and social criticism in his article on how the Disney/Pixar motion picture film *WALL-E* (2008) attempts to criticize and ‘nostalgize’ the twentieth and twenty-first-century consumerism and popular culture in chorus: even as the film is warning against the possible outcomes of consumerism and pollution, it is also cherishing and glorifying past cultural conventions and items that were produced specifically for mass consumption.¹ Anderson notes that the robot WALL-E is “a romantic who is nostalgic for the culture of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries” and lives in a “waste container decked out as a post-apocalyptic bachelor pad filled with objects gleaned from the garbage he compresses” (269). In WALL-E’s home we see, as Anderson remarks, a Rubik’s cube, garden gnomes, rubber duckies, an iPod, and an Atari video game (269). He argues that “the foreboding towers of waste thus face into the back-

¹ Although *WALL-E* does not distinctly represent the post-apocalyptic genre in that the film portrays a gradual deterioration and destruction of the Earth rather than an urgently devastating apocalyptic event, the film can be regarded as post-apocalyptic (justifying its inclusion in the discussion here) in the sense that it explores the future of humankind after Earth has been devastated and reduced to a hopeless wasteland due to human avarice and indolence.

ground when WALL-E's collection of familiar, cheery, nostalgia-infused objects take center stage" (270). Even though the film condemns the value of wealth and the Western lifestyle by, for example, showing WALL-E run over money and presenting the humans of the future as obese, lazy, and negligent, Anderson claims that the cherish and nostalgia for the twentieth- and twenty-first-century items in *WALL-E* "complicates the film's powerful if heavy-handed warnings about consumerism and environmental pollution" (267). Anderson states that "the aura of nostalgia veils the fact that most of what we buy is garbage-to-be, despite the significant financial and environmental costs of those goods" (272).

David Whitley draws the same conclusion as Anderson, stating that "in selective ways that effectively mask their full significance, *WALL-E* is in fact in love with the consumer culture that it so effectively critiques" (153). As was established in Section 2.1, nostalgia's role in contemporary consumerism is significant. Nostalgia, Whitley argues, "forms a substantial part of the layered identity that we imaginatively construct for ourselves when we buy or possess things" (153). He, too, notes that the bric-a-brac WALL-E is attracted to are mostly mid-twentieth-century manufactures such as plastic toys and kitchen utensils, which call up an illusion of a more authentic past and play "to the audience's psychological yearning for reconnection in the same way as advertisers use retro styling and the aura of the past to sell their products" (154). *WALL-E*'s ambiguous standpoint on consumerism becomes particularly evident under extra-textual scrutiny: the film's franchising in "toy production, product branding, and game and theme park development with a market-orientated efficiency that matches the rest of Disney's enterprises . . . shows no trace of ironic consciousness in relation to this particular film's inherent values" (Whitley 152-53).

Robin Murray and Joseph Heumann, on the other hand, consider *WALL-E* to be "the most powerful environmental statement made by either Disney or Pixar studios" (211) and emphasize nostalgia's significance in the film's environmental narrative. According to Murray and Heumann, nostalgia actually works to support the film's environmental rhetoric by aligning with nature; by

pointing to “images of nature as both individual and collective eco-memories” (212). These nostalgic eco-memories are the force that bring humankind back to Earth: when WALL-E brings a living plant to Axiom, the space craft the surviving humankind inhabits, it is “the nostalgia for human artifacts and culture, an eco-memory [which] drives the captain of a cruise ship to return to Earth, leaving the artificial world of the Axiom behind” (226). Murray and Heumann see nostalgia as academically “recovered” (212), stating that “nostalgia may itself prove not only a way to learn from the past but to recuperate real community” (214). In *WALL-E*, they argue, it is nostalgia that builds a community “that turns the hell Earth has become into a home” (215). In other words, nostalgia for the Earth’s nature and communal possibilities are what initiate humankind’s journey back home, and that justifies nostalgia’s role in the film’s narrative.

Another defense of nostalgia in post-apocalyptic fiction is Berger’s analysis of Thomas Pynchon’s *Vineland* (1990) – a novel that, in Berger’s words, seems “to veer toward an almost Reaganesque nostalgia” and that “has been criticized precisely for its nostalgia” (171). He acknowledges nostalgia’s bad reputation, noting its criticism of entailing “an addiction to falsified, idealized images of the past”, but then defends the nostalgia of *Vineland* by designating it as a form of resolving historical trauma through timeless moments of “light, liberation, and possibility” (170; 185-86). Berger notes that while *Vineland* has “these more conventional processes of nostalgia, the ways in which specific traumatic and political memories are obscured by memories of fashion and by universal laments about ‘the world,’ ‘the business,’ and human nature”, the novel’s revised nostalgia does not yearn for a traumatic past but “for possibilities of social harmony glimpsed at crucial moments in the past” which become evident in the novel’s utopian moments (171; 186). Thus, in Berger’s view, Pynchon’s nostalgia is actually nostalgia for an unrealized future, for alternative forms of life (186). Examining contemporary Anglophone fiction more broadly, John J. Su considers nostalgia to facilitate “an exploration of ethical ideals in the face of disappointing circumstances”, that is, to be a tool for addressing the failures of the present moment and articulating visions of what

could have been in terms of social relations (4), which seems to adjoin with Berger's ideas about post-apocalyptic nostalgia in *Vineland*. Su acknowledges nostalgia's drawbacks, stating that nostalgic narratives can be dangerous if they only offer "the illusion of utopian idealism without providing knowledge of legitimate alternatives to present circumstances" (8); however, he then defends nostalgia by arguing that even though nostalgia may not provide solutions to individuals' needs and disappointing circumstances, it does help "register the needs themselves" (175). Conclusively, Su argues that nostalgic narratives are not so much beneficial for their "potential to provide a blueprint for a better or more utopian world than for their potential to offer hope that alternatives continue to exist" (176).

Some researchers have also considered the nostalgia of *Station Eleven*. Leggatt, for example, argues that *Station Eleven* "privileges imagination over remembrance and facilitates the emergence of a utopian sensibility" (3), which resembles Berger's conception about nostalgia in Pynchon's *Vineland*. According to Leggatt, the novel searches for rediscovery rather than restoration, creating a "division between those who, in the face of adversity, retreat into memory and the past, and those who instead choose to imagine radical alternatives and generate new perspectives or ways of seeing the world" (20). He bases his conclusion on the social criticism involved in *Station Eleven*'s narrative, arguing that the fact that the novel shows the object of its nostalgic longing as flawed indicates that the narrative ultimately resists the regressive and romanticizing effects of nostalgia. Leggatt's views will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

This chapter has explored the concept of nostalgia and discussed the relationship between nostalgia and fictional narratives, demonstrating the ways in which various narrative and stylistic choices can make a narrative appear nostalgic. The chapter has also considered how nostalgia relates to particular features of the post-apocalyptic genre, primarily the temporal perspective that forces the reader to simultaneously imagine and remember the past "as it was, as it is" and the so-

cial criticism emblematic to post-apocalyptic writing. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 will now explore the phenomenon of post-apocalyptic nostalgia further in a literary analysis of *Station Eleven*.

3 CONSTRUCTING NOSTALGIA

The inside cover of *Station Eleven*'s Picador edition, as well as the paperback's first three pages, introduce Mandel's novel through a series of review snippets that describe it as "a haunting, original novel that makes you consider what's truly valuable in life"; "a book to make its reader mourn the life we still lead and the privileges we still enjoy"; a story "not so much about apocalypse as about memory and loss, nostalgia and yearning"; and as a novel that "makes you desperately glad for the world we live in". The novel's nostalgic take on our modern world, according to the reviews, is compelling, gratifying, and thought-provoking, prodding the novel's reader to ponder what they would miss from the old world, were their life interrupted by an apocalypse. The back cover of the Picador edition poses the question directly: "If civilization was lost, what would you preserve?"

This chapter delves into the nostalgia of *Station Eleven*, studying how the nostalgic mood is constructed in the novel's narrative, and then analyzing the object of that nostalgia, that is, what precisely is 'nostalgized' in the novel; what the novel itself would preserve. For clarity and reader-friendliness, I have chosen to use Salmose's term *nostalgia*, emphasized with italics, in my analysis, which will refer to the place and/or time that is the object of nostalgic longing (118). *Station Eleven* holds several *nostalgias* that range from the characters' individual pasts to secondary, imagined ones; however, the primary object of nostalgic longing, the novel's fundamental *nostalgia* and the home that the novel's characters feel a belonging and a longing for, is a representation of the twenty-first-century American society.

3.1 The Nostalgic Narrative of *Station Eleven*

Station Eleven begins at a theater, with a production of Shakespeare's *King Lear* being performed on stage on a winter night in Toronto. The king, Arthur Leander, who "was fifty-one years old" and had "flowers in his hair", stumbles, skips back twelve lines, and runs "out of time" (3). The novel's

first chapter describes Arthur collapsing on stage mid-performance, a paparazzo sitting in the audience jumping to the stage to resuscitate him, artificial snow falling, an eight-year-old child actress staring at the body, and the paramedics covering Arthur's face with an oxygen mask to prevent his family from being "notified of his death via the evening news" (7). Arthur's eerie death, dressed as King Lear, under the plastic snow "shimmering in blue-white light" (4), sets the tone for the novel's dreamy atmosphere that is characterized by elegiac reflections on the passing of time and the division between a *before* and an *after*, by scenic descriptions of artificial light, and by detailed observations of people and the modern world.

As Arthur Leander dies on stage, Georgia Flu touches ground in North America. The novel then proceeds to follow Arthur's acquaintance, paparazzo Jeevan Chaudhary, as he walks home from Elgin Theatre (original spelling) and receives a call from his friend informing him of the quickly-spreading disease; to describe the child actress, Kirsten Raymonde's life twenty years into the future as she performs Shakespeare's plays with a group of performers called The Traveling Symphony (original spelling); to tell how Arthur's old friend Clark founds a Museum of Civilization in the Skymiles Lounge of a stranded airport; and to recount Arthur and his ex-wife Miranda's lives decades to the apocalypse. The novel's narration unfolds in a non-chronological order, jumping from one character to another, from the past to the eve of the apocalypse and to Year Twenty, Day One, Year Four, and so on. Joining all characters and their lives' events to one another is Arthur – Arthur as an ex-husband, as an old friend, and as a character in paper clips and old celebrity-gossip magazines through which Kirsten Raymonde attempts to assemble her past.

As was established in Section 2.2, references to time and the passing of time are crucial to nostalgic narratives, and the nostalgic narrative strategy of *Station Eleven* is no exception. The novel's narrative relies on time markers regularly: as the novel's non-chronological storyline jumps from one temporal frame to another without a consistent pattern, the time markers provided by the narrator – "A year before the Georgia Flu" (110), "Two weeks later, just before the old world end-

ed” (217), “By the end of Year Fifteen” (258), and so on – make the novel’s narrative progress more reader-friendly. However, while the temporal anchorage of the novel’s time markers is the Georgia Flu, the time markers often work to emphasize the losses that the apocalyptic event generates, which the following example demonstrates: “This was during the final month of the era when it was possible to press a series of buttons on a telephone and speak with someone on the far side of the earth” (30). *Station Eleven*’s time markers, then, often draw attention to the finalities: the last month people could dial a phone call, the day when “the Internet blinked out” (177), “the days before the end of television” (193). Thus, by regularly recalling the irreversibility of time and the losses it has instigated, the time markers are a constant source of nostalgia in the novel’s narrative mood. The tragedy of these losses is also emphasized in the temporal awareness of the novel’s characters:

He’d known for a long time by then that the world’s changes wouldn’t be reversed, but still, the realization cast his memories a sharper light. The last time I ate an ice-cream cone in a park in the sunlight. The last time I danced in a club. The last time I saw a moving bus. The last time I boarded an airplane that hadn’t been repurposed as living quarters, an airplane that actually took off. The last time I ate an orange. (231)

Clark’s nostalgia in the excerpt above is fixated on trivial everyday actions – practices that, before the apocalypse, would not have received such sentimental attention. The losses also reach into the future, as Clark wonders about his partner Robert and the future they are about to lose to the flu wreaking havoc around the globe: “Clark was thinking ahead to a time when he’d sit with Robert in a restaurant in New York or London and they’d raise a glass of wine to their tremendous good fortune at having made it through” (240). Clark’s thoughts become tragically nostalgic for the lost future as he discusses with “imaginary Robert” (240), the trepidation of his partner’s likely death sidling in the back of his mind, and eventually he realizes that Robert now “probably existed in the

past tense” (254). Thus, the nostalgic narrative not only seizes the lost past, but also the unrealized future.

Station Eleven’s time markers also regularly anticipate death in proleptic remarks. The devastation of the Georgia Flu is first voiced by the novel’s heterodiegetic narrator in the end of Chapter 2, which describes the theater staff discussing Arthur Leander’s life and death in a bar in the theater lobby: “Of all of them there at the bar that night, the bartender was the one who survived the longest. He died three weeks later on the road out of the city” (15). Such proleptic statements recur throughout the novel, interrupting the storyline in eerie flashes of death. To the novel’s plot, the anticipations of these deaths are mostly irrelevant: the characters whose passing the narrator reveals are rarely significant, often unnamed, which is the case of a man playing Edgar in *King Lear*, who “in four days, . . . would be dead of flu” (328), and the child actresses playing *King Lear*’s daughters as children: “Two of them would die of flu on Tuesday of next week, one in the morning and one in the late afternoon” (329). These anticipations and the particularity of their detail forces an impression of the chance of death and thus contribute to the novel’s nostalgic narrative mood by creating a sinister atmosphere of melancholic awareness of the transience of life.

A notable trope evoking the idea of time is the number eleven, which recurs in various instances in the novel, including its title. The number appears in the name of a comic book hero, Dr. Eleven, and the space station he pilots, Station Eleven; and it recurs as a time of day, a number of months or years between events, the age of a child, and so on. The repeating number insinuates the idiom, *the eleventh hour*, the last moment before something is too late. Hence, it maintains a sense of ominous tension in the novel, especially in storylines transpiring around Arthur Leander’s death and, concurrently, the eve of the end of the world. On the night the Georgia Flu arrives in North America, the novel’s narration follows Jeevan as he walks home from Elgin Theatre. While the narration otherwise rarely marks specific hours or minutes, the passing minutes after eleven p.m. shadow Jeevan’s preparation for survival: “It was eleven twenty” (22); “It was already almost eleven

fifty, there wasn't time for this" (23); "It was eleven fifty-five" (24). In the vein of the novel's other time markers, the idea of the eleventh hour draws attention to the irreversibility of time and augments it with temporal trepidation, all the while maintaining the apt mindset for nostalgia.

Arthur's death sparks melancholic nostalgia in Jeevan, who thinks of him on the night of his death and then many years later, fifteen years after the apocalypse:

The sadness of it, memories of photographing Arthur in Hollywood all those years ago. He was thinking of the little girl, Kirsten Raymonde, bright in her stage makeup; the cardiologist kneeling in his grey suit; the lines of Arthur's face, his last words – "The wren..." – and this made him think of birds, Frank with his binoculars, the few times they'd been bird-watching together, Laura's favourite summer dress, which was blue with a storm of yellow parrots, Laura, what would become of them? (16)

He was thinking of Toronto, of walking through snow. Thoughts of Toronto led inevitably back to thoughts of his brother, a tower by the lake, ghost city crumbling, the Elgin Theatre still displaying the posters for King Lear, the memory of that night at the beginning and the end of everything when Arthur died. (275)

Jeevan's thoughts in the examples above exemplify another nostalgic strategy *Station Eleven* frequently utilizes: the characters' carefully detailed recollections of memories and contemplations about the future that awaits are regularly recounted by the third-person omniscient narrator. The nostalgic mood of Jeevan's stream of consciousness is strengthened using asyndeton, by connecting the clauses with commas and semicolons, which, as was established in Section 2.2, can have the effect of making a sentence seem tumultuous. In the first excerpt, in particular, Jeevan seems to be breathless, as though he was being uncontrollably overwhelmed by his nostalgia. The excerpt is also filled with imagery that evokes nostalgia, leaning on various nostalgic ideas such as photographs, summers, and the finality of death in Arthur's last words. The latter excerpt, too, utilizes asyndeton,

but the imagery of the passage makes it appear more melancholic and tranquil: images of snow, a ghost city, and night-time give the impression of a calmer, elegiac nostalgia.

The omniscient narrator's ability to know the characters' pasts and see the characters' inner musings allows for the reader to reach into their personal biographies and the details of those autobiographical pasts, as indicated in the following excerpts:

August always gazed longingly at televisions. . . . He'd spent an enormous amount of time before the collapse watching television, playing the violin, or sometimes doing both simultaneously, and Kirsten could picture this: August at nine, at ten, at eleven, pale and scrawny with dark hair falling in his eyes and a serious, somewhat fixed expression, playing a child-size violin in a wash of electric-blue light. When they broke into houses now, August searched for issues of *TV Guide*. . . . He liked to flip through them later at quiet moments. (39-40)

Incredible in retrospect, all of it, but especially the parts having to do with travel and communications. This was how he arrived in this airport: he'd boarded a machine that transported him at high speed a mile above the surface of the earth. This was how he'd told Miranda Carroll of her ex-husband's death: he'd pressed a series of buttons on a device that had connected him within seconds to an instrument on the other side of the world, and Miranda – barefoot on a white sand beach with a shipping fleet before her in the dark – had pressed a button that had connected via satellite to New York. These taken-for-granted miracles that had persisted all around them. (232-33)

The underlying nostalgia of the passages above is distinct in phrases such as “gaze longingly” and “incredible in retrospect”, but the amount of detail and careful literary strategy in Mandel's writing would allow for the nostalgic narrative mood to persist even without explicit nostalgic phrasing. In the former excerpt, the nostalgic narrative is constructed upon layers of timeframes and the images those timeframes encase: it is created in the description of August's childhood, written in the past

perfect in the midst of the narrative mostly unfolding in the past tense; it emerges in Kirsten now being able to imagine “August at nine, at ten, at eleven”, envisioning her friend as a child; and it is reinforced by the comparison between August’s past and his present, his habit of searching for cultural ephemerae that his *nostalgia* is attached onto.

Similarly, the latter excerpt leans on the use of tense and detail as the building materials for its nostalgic tone. While the former excerpt employs ideas of childhood, music, and sentimental memorabilia to support its nostalgic narrative mood, the latter describes the process of flying in an airplane and dialing a phone call from a distanced perspective, detailing these actions as though their former banality is now, in the present of the narration, something unbelievable and beautiful. Although Clark, whose thoughts the excerpt recounts, has no knowledge of what his old friend Arthur’s ex-wife Miranda might have looked like when she answered his call, the beauty of phone calls is reinforced by the narrator’s visual remark of Miranda answering the phone barefoot on a beach – a setting where the idea of modern technology does not conveniently fit, but which, in a careful literary tactic, juxtaposes the elements of the natural and the technological, and then underpins the idea that these “taken-for-granted miracles” truly had once been “all around them”.

Station Eleven’s central character Kirsten remembers very little from the time of the apocalypse or her life before that. She has no memory of “her street address, her mother’s face, the TV shows that August never stopped talking about” (40) – but she does remember Arthur Leander. Therefore, when Kirsten breaks into houses with August, twenty years after the pandemic, she searches for celebrity-gossip magazines and newspaper articles of Arthur: “She liked to look through the clippings sometimes, a steadying habit. These images from the shadow world, the time before the Georgia Flu, indistinct in the moonlight but she’d memorized the details of every one” (66). The significance of a tangible sense of the continuity of life is patent in Kirsten’s fixation on Arthur and, despite having no autobiographical memories of her own, the clippings she collects are just as much nostalgic relics as the *TV Guides* August cherishes.

Kirsten's nostalgia can be considered secondary, a form of external nostalgia, where other people's experiences and descriptions of the old world become her nostalgic experiences of it, which makes her storyline's nostalgia seem imperative to her identity. "Remind me," Kirsten asks August, who then proceeds to describe *Star Trek: The Voyager* to her, and "while he talked she allowed herself to imagine that she remembered it" (120). Alike Clark's passage above, Kirsten's imaginings describe the former world in a venerating wonder:

. . . sometimes when she looked at her collection of pictures she tried to imagine and place herself in that other, shadow life. You walk into a room and flip a switch and the room fills with light. You leave your garbage bags on the curb, and a truck comes and transports it to some invisible place. When you're in danger, you call for the police. Hot water pours from faucets. Lift a receiver or press a button on a telephone, and you can speak to anyone. All of the information in the world is on the Internet, and the Internet is all around you, drifting through the air like pollen on a summer breeze. There is money, slips of paper that can be traded for anything, houses, boats, perfect teeth. There are dentists. She tried to imagine this life playing out somewhere at the present moment. Some parallel Kirsten in an air-conditioned room, waking from an unsettling dream of walking through an empty landscape. (201-2)

The nostalgic narrative mood here is emphasized by the use of generic *you* and the change of tense from the past tense to the present, which not only reinforces Kirsten's idea of the "shadow life" as a dreamlike parallel universe, but makes it appear authentic, as though both Kirsten and the reader are stepping into that faraway parallel life and flipping on a light switch. The generic *you*, although commonly used to express general practice or action, here also seems to draw attention to the reader: the repetitive *you* gives the impression that the narrative is, in fact, ambiguously addressing the reader and pointedly bringing attention to all the everyday conveniences that the reader has that Kirsten's post-apocalyptic reality does not. By bringing attention to this contrast, the passage

evokes empathy for Kirsten's situation and urges rejoicing the modern-day conveniences that have not yet been lost. The paragraph of Kirsten's detailed imagination of the past, modern world is also abruptly interrupted by the notion of "waking from an unsettling dream of walking through an empty landscape", which ends the passage to the haunting emptiness of the post-apocalyptic world, and the devastating loss of modernity.

Furthermore, Kirsten is one of the few characters in the novel who are portrayed both as children and as adults. Eight-year-old Kirsten is present in the eve of Arthur's death and the ascending apocalypse, which falls under the post-apocalyptic genre's employment of child characters as emblems of innocence, but her character draws from the nostalgic trope of childhood even when she is an adult. Kirsten's idea of the Internet, which holds "all of the information in the world" and drifts "through the air like pollen on a summer breeze" is another instance of placing technology alongside nature and tying them together in a dreamy image, but it is also a childlike conception that summons amusement and affection. Kirsten is described as carrying a child-size backpack, "red canvas with a cracked and faded image of Spider-Man" (66), which holds various gear for surviving such as a rag to tie over her face and a wire for picking locks, but also her tabloid collection and *Dr. Eleven* comics. Although the twenty-eight-year-old Kirsten is a grown woman who cheats on her boyfriend and has tattoos of knives on her arm that signify the amount of people she has killed, her Spider-Man backpack and comics collection carry with them an element of childhood, contrasting Kirsten's childlike wonder for the old world and her stark adult reality.

Kirsten's company, The Traveling Symphony, draws from another common nostalgic trope, voyaging. The company is introduced to the reader with a contrast: "Twenty years after the end of air travel, the caravans of the Traveling Symphony moved slowly under a white-hot sky" (35). The introduction juxtaposes the realities of travel between the pre- and the post-apocalyptic worlds: where the modern method of moving from one place to another had been airborne and highspeed, it has now taken several steps backwards and returned on land and the pace of horse-drawn trek. The

Symphony's lead caravan "had once been an extended-bed Ford pickup truck" (137) and carries a line of text: "*Because survival is insufficient*" (58) – a quotation from *Star Trek: The Voyager*. The American TV series, which aired between years 1995 and 2001, follows the adventures of a starship crew as they attempt to find their way back home from a distant galaxy (Angelle 15) – the intertextual reference implying that The Traveling Symphony, too, is on their way home. Their home, however, no longer exists, which further fortifies their nostalgia-ridden journey.

The airplane is another significant nostalgic trope that *Station Eleven* employs. The airplane's nostalgic connotation becomes evident in, for example, Kirsten and Dieter's late-night discussion after a long day's walk:

"I dreamt last night I saw an airplane. . . . I used to watch for it. . . . 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."

"Was it a good dream?"

"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 and then I woke up." (133-34)

The airplane is the symbol of hope – and of the past home – and Dieter's decision to resign looking at the sky for airplanes designates a distinct nostalgic moment: the tragic realization of loss that is at the heart of nostalgia. Throughout the novel, this loss is reinforced by descriptions of airplanes in the post-apocalyptic world: "They stood dormant on runways and in hangars. They collected snow on their wings" (31). The picture is bleak, conjuring up impressions of silence, stillness, and death. The airplane does, however, unify the post-apocalyptic survivors: Severn City Airport becomes the center of human culture where a Museum of Civilization celebrates the memorabilia of the old world; where the caravans of The Traveling Symphony arrive; and where Kirsten Raymonde looks through a telescope and sees "a town, or a village, whose streets were lit up with electricity" (311).

This implies that, for the storyline of *Station Eleven*, the airplane as a nostalgic trope also works to promote a progressive conception of nostalgia that understands nostalgia as a bittersweet but ultimately beneficial strategy in times of struggle. This conception will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 4.

The final nostalgic strategy I wish to accentuate here is the use of light as a nostalgic trope. Alike number eleven, which the novel employs to invoke the grave urgency of the eleventh hour, *Station Eleven* uses light metaphorically to recall the collapse of civilization and the losses it generates. The dichotomy of light and dark is an archetypal metaphor, conjuring up the ideas of good and bad, survival and death (Osborn 117). Michael Osborn argues that “with light and sight one is informed of his environment, can escape its dangers, can take advantage of its rewards”, while darkness brings “fear of the unknown”, making one “reduced to a helpless state, no longer able to control the world about him” (117). As Osborn notes, darkness invokes the idea of death (117). In Mandel’s *Station Eleven*, when the lights go out, so does human culture. The “absolute absence of electric light” (190) clouds Jeevan as the most striking element about the new world. In the dark weeks that follow the apocalypse, Jeevan stands “near the front door, flipping the light switches. On/off, on/off” (178), to which his brother Frank calmly states: “The only remarkable thing is that the lights stayed on as long as they did” (178). Arthur’s second wife Elizabeth has more faith: “The lights will come back on someday,” she insists, “and then we’ll all finally get to go home” (251). Osborn states that the light-dark metaphors are “rooted in a fixed chronological process, the movement of day into night and night into day. Therefore, symbolic conceptions of the past as dark and the present as light or the present as dark and the future as light always carry with them a latent element of determinism” (118). Frank, whose name also reflects his forthright and blunt mindset, seems to be cynically accepting of this procession, and Elizabeth has religious faith in the night turning back into day, but Jeevan’s attempts to turn the lights back on tell of devastated disbelief and grief, stressing the frightening loss of light – and of life.

Furthermore, *Station Eleven* uses light to create a magical, luminous tone around its descriptions of the lost world. The beauty of humanity, of human culture, is illuminated, for example, in passages where the novel describes a lit-up shipping fleet as “supernatural” and “otherworldly” (218), or where Kirsten harbors “visions of a lamp with a pink shade on a side table, a nightlight shaped like a puffy half-moon, a chandelier in a dining room, a brilliant stage” (39). All these visions portray the modern world as dreamlike and miraculous. The modern, lit world is also a world where electric light guards the people from darkness: half-moon-shaped nightlights offer comfort and safety when the light turns into dark. Even the novel’s hopeful ending, The Traveling Symphony leaving the airport to walk toward the electrically lit town, concludes the narrative with a metaphor of flickering light: after darkness, humanity begins to glimmer in the distance.

In summary, the literary strategies of *Station Eleven* that create the novel’s nostalgic narrative mood (and, in those moments, when the narrative is not overtly nostalgic, uphold a narrative mood that is apt for nostalgia) are various types of time markers, syntactical choices, the omniscient narrator’s ability to see and relate the characters’ inner thoughts and autobiographies, various nostalgic tropes, and descriptions of light that create a magical, nostalgic halo around the former world of electricity. Due to the scope of this thesis, my analysis of the nostalgic narrative strategies of *Station Eleven* is concise and more nostalgic literary devices could be identified and analyzed from the novel. However, as the research interest of my thesis is to examine the interplay of nostalgia and post-apocalyptic genre conventions, the past that these literary strategies work to ‘nostalgize’ must also be considered. Thus, the remainder of this chapter is dedicated to deciphering the novel’s *nostalgia*.

3.2 The Nostalgia of *Station Eleven*

The *nostalgia*, as was established in the beginning of this chapter, refers to the object of the nostalgic longing. The nostalgic narrative devices that *Station Eleven* utilizes work to make the reader feel

nostalgic, and it is the *nostalgia* where those nostalgic feelings first attach onto. Considering the explicit cultural references of *Station Eleven*, such as August's love for *Star Trek: The Voyager* and the various mentions of retail stores and restaurant chains such as Walmart and McDonald's, a conclusion can already be drawn that the novel's *nostalgia* is a representation of the twenty-first-century American society and culture. What requires particular attention, however, is what aspects of this society the narrative deems worthy of nostalgic devotion.

An abundant source for deciphering the *nostalgia* of *Station Eleven* is chapter six, a stand-alone chapter that, in a repetitive, anaphoric listing, reports the aspects of the old world that no longer exist. The chapter, which begins with the words "An incomplete list", lists that there are, among other things, "no more trains running under the surface of cities on the dazzling power of the electric third rail"; "no more screens shining in the half-light as people raise their phones above the ground to take photographs of concert stages"; "no more towns glimpsed from the sky through airplane windows"; "no more countries, all borders unmanned"; "no more fire departments, no more police" (31). While the two-page chapter works to support the storyline of the novel, describing the type of world the novel's characters inhabit by expressing the deficiencies of the post-apocalyptic reality, it also reveals many aspects of the *nostalgia* it considers meaningful.

One significant symbol of the *nostalgia* is flight; the act of being on a flying aircraft, and all the actions it includes and facilitates. As Section 3.1 already established, the airplane has significant value for the novel's nostalgic narrative as a nostalgic trope, and chapter six strengthens its relationship to the *nostalgia*. The chapter reveals that there is "no more flight" and "no more requests to put your tray table in its upright and locked position" (31), that aviation gas has been repurposed for generators wherever there are people who know how to use them, and that airplanes are now rusting food storages. The temporal and spatial possibilities enabled by the airplane – that is, for example, watching the world beneath from airplane windows as the aircraft moves at the speed of hundreds of kilometers per hour – are emphasized as essential to the *nostalgia*. Furthermore, there are also no

more spacecrafts “burning paths through the atmosphere into space” (32). The emphasis on aviation portrays *Station Eleven’s* *nostalgia* as a time of spatial freedom and discovery. Flying has enabled humankind to not only travel around the globe, but to discover the universe beyond its atmosphere. Furthermore, flight has allowed for humankind to assume control over the world: with the loss of flight, the world can no longer be observed and ruled from above. The intensity with which *Station Eleven* includes these phenomena as part of its *nostalgia* argues for their significance also in relation to the extratextual reality the *nostalgia* is based on.

Another implication that can be deduced from the chapter’s listing of ‘no mores’ is that the *nostalgia* of *Station Eleven* is patently urban and modern. Chapter six mourns the loss of towns and cities, paying little attention to rural environments. Instead, it elevates the electric grid: the “dazzling power” of electricity, the sight of towns through airplane windows. Later in the novel, this particular sight is described as “clusters and pinpoints of light in the darkness, scattered constellations linked by roads or alone” (135), which relates the scenery to a dark night-time sky and the patterns of constellations. Considering the significance that constellations have had in human history as maps and patterns with which to not only navigate but also to transmit cultural beliefs and mythology, the association seems to gain a profound meaning: the arrangement of urban lights as seen through airplane windows carries with it the legacy of human culture similar to the constellations in the sky. Thus, as the novel seems to express, the loss of the electric grid is a distressing tragedy to the history of human existence.

In yearning for the urban electric network, the novel also laments the loss of urban pastimes and technological culture. Cameras, phones, electric lights, and other technological devices are emphasized throughout the novel, as well as the acts that are related to them. With the loss of technology, *Station Eleven’s* post-apocalyptic world has lost the ability to take pictures, to talk on the phone, and to watch television series. Thus, it has also lost the ability to communicate despite long distances and record human history in a relatively effortless manner. Compared to, for example, the

loss of authoritative security forces such as the police, the loss of social media has a particularly heavy emphasis in the losses detailed in chapter six:

No more Internet. No more social media, no more scrolling through litanies of dreams and nervous hopes and photographs of lunches, cries for help and expressions of contentment and relationship-status updates with heart icons whole or broken, plans to meet up later, pleas, complaints, desires, pictures of babies dressed as bears or peppers for Halloween. No more reading and commenting on the lives of others, and in doing so, feeling slightly less alone in the room. No more avatars. (32)

The Internet and, especially, social media, seems to hold within the spectrum of human communication and communality. From photographs of lunches to plans to meet up later, social media is portrayed as the center stage of human culture in the twenty-first century. Thus, social media is also a site of belonging: it is a communal space for the globalized twenty-first-century civilization that connects with one another online over time-zones and distances. “No more social media” designates the loss of that community – the loss of an online home.

Furthermore, in underlining social media as well as the activities it associates with technology, the novel celebrates leisure: it yearns for the possibility of scrolling aimlessly through an endless hypertext, of taking pictures of babies dressed up as peppers for the sake of fun. The activities the novel longs for are unnecessary in terms of survival but, according to the novel, essential for enjoying life. This is also the idea that *The Traveling Symphony* incorporates in its pursuit of carrying on the legacy of performing arts after Georgia Flu: they perform Shakespeare’s plays and Beethoven’s symphonies to people inhabiting old Walmart stores because “survival is insufficient” (58). William Shakespeare, in particular, has a significant role in what the novel promotes as “what was best about the world” (38). Shakespeare’s plays are not part of *Station Eleven*’s *nostalgia* in the sense that they are not lost – they are, after all, still performed by *The Traveling Symphony* – but their emphasis in the novel does imply that, out of all the works of art in the world, Shakespeare’s

plays are the ones that should (and would) persist through an apocalypse. The Traveling Symphony is revealed as having performed modern plays “in the first few years, but what was startling, what no one would have anticipated, was that audiences seemed to prefer Shakespeare” (38). Apart from the recollections of old TV shows, modern art is not part of the novel’s *nostalgia*; not ‘nostalgized’ nor considered significant. The novel does not further indulge in speculating why Shakespeare’s plays appeal to audiences of the post-apocalypse, but the narrative seems to imply that Shakespeare’s plays resist time, expressing something that is not contextual but elementary to humanity, thus captivating the people performing and watching those plays throughout centuries and changing times. Only one character in *Station Eleven* challenges the post-apocalyptic population’s fascination with Shakespeare: the novel reveals that “the clarinet hated Shakespeare” and thought his plays were not sufficient to address the post-apocalyptic age, for “in Shakespeare’s time the wonders of technology were still ahead, not behind them, and far less had been lost” (288). However, despite her determination, the clarinet never succeeds in writing a play that would address the challenges of their time more adequately – the only sentence she manages to write is “Dear friends, I find myself immeasurably weary and have gone to rest in the forest” (141), which is later mistaken for a suicide note. Furthermore, Shakespeare’s plays and the acts of performing them are referenced as cultural products and actions that persist over particularly trying times:

Lines of a play written in 1594, the year London’s theatres reopened after two seasons of plague. Or written possibly a year later, in 1595, a year before the death of Shakespeare’s only son. . . . Plague closed the theatres again and again, death flickering over the landscape. And now in a twilight once more lit by candles, the age of electricity having come and gone, Titania turns to face her fairy king. (57)

In paralleling Georgia Flu to the plague that tormented London theaters, *Station Eleven* offers consolation and relief to those anxious over tragedies and adversities: despite hardships, theaters will reopen, Titania will quarrel with Oberon, humanity will persevere. In other words, Shakespeare

offers *The Traveling Symphony* a symbol of tradition, stability, and permanence. Modern art, the novel appears to express, does not relay this solace in quite the same way.

In *Severn City Airport*, Clark founds a museum to display the past inventions made obsolete by the Georgia Flu, and thus the Museum of Civilization is another copious storyline that reveals what aspects of the world are worthy of preserving in retrospect. The museum is started with Clark placing “his useless iPhone on the top shelf” (254), then adding an American Express card and a driver’s license. In placing these items on display, Clark metaphorically shelves modern technology and the communicational possibilities associated with it, the world of currency and the effortless-ness of commerce, and the freedom of travel enabled by cars and other mechanical vehicles. Later, the Museum of Civilization is expanded with other artifacts from the old world: “the laptops, the iPhones, the radio from an administrative desk, the electric toaster from an airport-staff lounge, the turntable and vinyl records . . . and of course the context, the pre-pandemic world” (232). The museum displays “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” (258). The items placed on the shelves of the museum are mostly technological devices, once again underlining the loss of electricity, the Internet, the time of high-velocity worldwide communication, but items such as stilettos, “beautiful and strange”, also bring attention to the past as a time where beauty could be valued over practicality. The luxurious vanity of high heels and the leisurely pastimes spent with video game consoles are placed on the shelves of the Museum of Civilization as essential attributes of the past.

The placement of the American Express credit card also has significant meaning, as the ease of money as well as the capitalist market system are later recalled in a description of a newspaper published in Year Fifteen, which has a “column for bartering: a local man was seeking new shoes in exchange for milk and eggs; someone else had a pair of reading glasses that she was hoping to trade

for a pair of jeans, size 6” (262). Thus, the *nostalgia* of *Station Eleven* is also transparently capitalist; it is a time when size 6 jeans could be purchased at a store with plastic money, and, compared to the post-apocalyptic reality of trading milk for shoes, the ease of pre-pandemic procurement is worth a display in the Museum of Civilization. Furthermore, the novel’s *nostalgia* is a world of corporates. McDonald’s, IHOP, American Express, and Walmart are among the companies that are explicitly mentioned in the novel. As Kirsten encounters a McDonald’s sign, she thinks it “was possible to look up at the McDonald’s sign and fleetingly imagine . . . that this was still the former world and she could stop in for a burger” (49). The explicit naming of corporates such as McDonald’s and IHOP not only emphasizes the novel’s nostalgia for the capitalist market system but for brands and the familiar consumer desires associated with those brands: for example, the desire for a burger when encountering a McDonald’s sign.

In relation to *Station Eleven*’s nostalgia for capitalism, the novel also admires the beauty of international trade, elevating not only the affluence of the free market system but the assortment of material goods and experiences that are available for people in the novel’s *nostalgia*. The novel venerates the beauty of production chains and all the wondrous and vital things those chains allow for people to experience: if the post-pandemic world is now a world without the taste of a burger, it also lacks the taste of oranges and cappuccinos and ice cream cones. The post-pandemic world also lacks pharmaceuticals, the repercussions of which become evident, for example, in chapter six’s statement of “no more certainty of surviving a scratch on one’s hand, a cut on a finger while chopping vegetables for dinner, a dog bite” (31). The lack of available medicine becomes even more tragic when an eighteen-year-old girl in Severn City Airport suffers from antidepressant withdrawal: “the girl lay across a bench, shivering and drenched in sweat, and she said her head sparked with electricity every time she moved” (242). Later the novel reveals that “the girl who needed Effexor slipped out through an entrance on the other side of the airport and walked away into the trees. . . . The girl who needed Effexor had left her suitcase and all of her belongings behind” (245).

The structure of the system behind these goods and necessities – oranges, cappuccinos, antidepressants – still exists. The cities, the factories, the shipping fleets, the conveyor belts are still there in the post-pandemic world, but the people who inhabit those cities or pilot the cargo ships are gone. Thus, an essential aspect of the novel's *nostalgia* are people. "The Georgia Flu was so efficient that there was almost no one left" (192) states the disastrous magnitude of the apocalypse. The mortality rate of the flu is reported as "99 percent" (253). The narrative of *Station Eleven* expresses the world's emptiness of people partly in metaphor: the narrator reveals that, at first, countries begin "to go dark, city by city – no news out of Moscow, then no news out of Beijing, then Sydney, London, Paris" and then the Georgia Flu silences the "perpetual hum of the city" (177). Curiously, however, the novel's characters rarely express longing for their dead loved ones, and the reader learns very little about the characters' families or friends that were lost in the collapse. Rather, the novel emphasizes masses – the human infrastructure – that construct the modern society like ants in an anthill, as is the case in Jeevan's thoughts below:

We bemoaned the impersonality of the modern world, but that was a lie, it seemed to him; it had never been impersonal at all. There had always been a massive delicate infrastructure of people, all of them working unnoticed around us, and when people stop going to work, the entire operation grinds to a halt. No one delivers fuel to the gas stations or the airports. Cars are stranded. Airplanes cannot fly. Trucks remain at their points of origin. Food never reaches the cities; grocery stores close. Businesses are locked and then looted. No one comes to work at the power plants or the substations, no one removes fallen trees from electrical lines. (178)

The lack of people after the devastation of Georgia Flu is related to the halting of the processes running society. The novel's *nostalgia*, therefore, is a place and time where all these processes are running, operated by a substructure of people. The excerpt's note about the impersonality of the modern world is, however, contradictory in that the passage actually emphasizes collectivity over indi-

viduality, impersonality over personality, and comes to portray the processes it mentions as highly depersonalized. Thus, *Station Eleven's nostalgia* is, indisputably, a world filled with people but – despite what the passage seems to want to express – the value of those people is to keep the societal conveyor belt in operation. This contradiction will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

The narrative of *Station Eleven* portrays the novel's object of nostalgic longing as a representation of a modern, American, capitalist society. The *nostalgia* is an urban environment run by electricity; it is a world where flight allows for temporal and spatial freedom; and it is a time of leisure: of social media, concerts, and video games. Communication in the *nostalgia* is easier and faster than ever before, and the massive production chain operated by a hierarchy of human enterprise provides for an array of necessary and entertaining products and services from fast food to antidepressants. However, as the mention of antidepressants already indicates, the *nostalgia* is also flawed: it is a world where antidepressants such as Effexor are necessary to treat people's anxiety, panic attacks, and depression. Considering, for example, the history of the U.S.-Mexico border (see e.g. St. John), which *Station Eleven* also references by mentioning a girl in Malibu who "came here illegally from Mexico, crossed the border lying under a load of chili peppers in the back of a truck when she was ten" (75), chapter six's "No more nations, all borders unmanned" (31) also seems to be rather a utopian than a nostalgic idea, implying that not all parts of the past are necessarily missed. The social criticism toward the novel's pre-apocalyptic past – and, in analogy, toward the novel's extratextual social context – will be further explored in the next chapter.

4 THE FALLACY OF NOSTALGIA

Although *Station Eleven* has been categorized in literary genres other than post-apocalyptic fiction, the novel itself seems to inform the reader of its own genre. “The television newscasters weren’t exactly saying that it was the end of the world, per se, but the word *apocalypse* was beginning to appear,” the narrator states (243), and the Georgia Flu translates as the apocalypse also in the minds of the characters, who reminisce (or try not to reminisce) all the post-apocalyptic films they have seen as they prepare for survival. “The end is here,” reads a spray-painted text on the wall of an abandoned school (129). While Chapter 3 focused on the nostalgia of *Station Eleven*, first analyzing the novel’s nostalgic narrative and then deciphering the novel’s *nostalgia*, this chapter will bring into discussion the novel’s post-apocalyptic genre: drawing from the theory on post-apocalyptic fiction in Section 2.3, this section will consider the novel’s social criticism as well as the post-apocalyptic temporal lens. Thus, Section 4.1 works to discover what aspects of the contemporary society the novel criticizes, and how this social criticism relates to the novel’s nostalgic narrative. Thereafter, Section 4.2 discusses this relationship from a critical standpoint, considering nostalgia’s multidisciplinary conceptualizations and the potential interpretive and social consequences the interaction of social criticism and nostalgia in a post-apocalyptic narrative might have.

4.1 *Station Eleven*’s Social Criticism

Section 3.2 ended with chapter six’s rather utopian idea of “No more countries, all borders unmanned”, which reveals the critical tone emerging beneath the novel’s nostalgic storyline. Later in the novel, the idea of a world consisting of nation-states is explored when the children born after the Georgia Flu have difficulty understanding maps: “The children understood dots on maps – *here* – but even the teenagers were confused by the lines. There had been countries, and borders. It was hard to explain” (262). Alongside portraying the twenty-first-century world as a lost utopia, *Station*

Eleven reveals it as flawed: it is a world of artificial lines drawn on maps, a social system of manned borders that separate nationalities, ethnicities, and people of different origins apart. “It was hard to explain” discloses the narrative’s judgment on the matter: a world system functioning on the basis of common national identities is hard to explain because such differentiation between people cannot be justified in the novel’s post-apocalyptic world, where survivors have been forced to unite with whomever they can to survive. The people of Severn City Airport, for example, learn each other’s languages, while The Traveling Symphony are described as a “collection of petty jealousies, neuroses, undiagnosed PTSD cases, and simmering resentments” – a group of very different people that still live, travel, and perform together, united by “the friendships, of course, the camaraderie and the music and the Shakespeare” (47).

While *Station Eleven* does not explore the social issues produced by the twenty-first-century world-system any further than the brief mention of the girl in Malibu, and neither does it place direct blame for the devastation of the apocalypse, it does imply that the spreading of the disease had been partially enabled by poor foreign policy and miscommunication between countries. The disease first surfaces in the Republic of Georgia, whose details about the flu’s mortality rate and death toll are reported to have been “sketchy” (17). “There were suggestions”, the novel reveals, “that Georgian and Russian officials had been somewhat less than transparent about the severity of the crisis there” (21). The disapproval of the behavior of Georgian and Russian officials seems to be a reference to the foreign relations between the USA and Russia, the history of which has been plagued by animosity and distrust (see e.g. Mankoff). Furthermore, the spreading of the fictional Georgia Flu is reminiscent of, for example, the outbreak of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) in China and Hong Kong in early 2003. According to Yongnian Zheng and Liang Fook Lye, “SARS was able to spread from China to other countries . . . because the local media was not allowed to report on it and as a result, other foreign governments were not forewarned and could not put up safeguard measures in time to stop its import” (49). This was partly due to the Chinese polit-

ical context, characterized by political correctness and non-transparency, partly due to timing: when the illness broke out, China was preparing for its political high season and attempted to ensure “minimal disruption” to the season’s events, and thus the Chinese government’s response to the outbreak was deficient and delayed (Zheng and Lye 49-50). While *Station Eleven* does not disclose the events that take place in the Republic of Georgia and Russia in the first days of the pandemic, the novel seems to criticize the political and strategical managing of such crises, where domestic policy is valued over global safety. The criticism becomes particularly pungent considering the communicational possibilities enabled by the twenty-first-century technologies, on which the novel places heavy emphasis.

Station Eleven also places criticism on the media culture of the twenty-first century, which is already evident in the aftermath of Arthur’s death: the paramedics cover Arthur’s face to mask his death to avoid the news of his passing reaching his family via the evening news. The twenty-first-century high-speed media, as well as the commercialization of people’s lives reinforced by celebrity culture, are also addressed directly by the narrator: “There was a moment on Earth, improbable in retrospect and actually briefer than a moment in the span of human history, more like the blink of an eye, when it was possible to make a living solely by photographing and interviewing famous people” (167). The passage is both highly nostalgic and pungently critical: it sentimentalizes a time when such an occupation was enabled by the overall welfare of society, but it ridicules it at the same time. The wretched effect of such media culture is explored through Arthur’s first wife, Miranda, who, after having realized she is being cheated on by Arthur, walks outside to talk with the paparazzo smoking in front of her house every night. Miranda, distraught and vulnerable, asks Jeevan not to take her picture, but is photographed nonetheless: “In the morning her picture will appear in a gossip website: TROUBLE IN PARADISE? AMID RUMOURS OF ARTHUR’S INFIDELITY, MIRANDA WANDERS THE STREETS OF HOLLYWOOD AT FOUR A.M., CRYING AND SMOKING” (103). Miranda, desperate to find a human connection in a time of crisis, is

betrayed for the sake of profits and ridiculed for entertainment, her distress bared in a degrading tabloid headline familiar to the twenty-first-century entertainment media.

The entire working world is given an equally critical treatment: although *Station Eleven's* *nostalgia* is a time of flourishing business, the novel also reveals it as a world of “corporate clichés, seared horribly into memory” (278) and “corporate respectability” (249) that makes Clark feel unlike himself. “It’s like the corporate world’s full of ghosts,” a character states and continues, “let me revise that, my parents are in academia so I’ve had front-row tickets for *that* horror show, I know academia’s no different, so maybe a fairer way of putting this would be to say that adulthood’s full of ghosts” (163). The remark implies that the twenty-first-century working life is a stage of meaningless work and unsatisfactory commitment; a cemetery of “high-functioning sleepwalkers” (164), as the character then describes working people. The downsides of the demanding and strenuous working life of the twenty-first century are also depicted through the tragic character of Gary Heller, Arthur Leander’s entertainment lawyer: “Clark was beginning to imagine Heller as a sort of bat, some kind of sinister night-living vampire lawyer who slept by day and worked by night. . . . A crack in Heller’s voice, sadness or exhaustion, and Clark revised his mental image from hanging-upside-down bat lawyer to sad, pale, caffeine-addicted man with chronic insomnia” (219-21). Earlier in the novel, Heller is described as a “workaholic” and having “trained himself to subsist on twenty-minute power naps” (27). “There are rumors that he doesn’t sleep at night,” the novel states (96), emphasizing further the perception people have of him as a paranormal, unsettling figure not even restrained by basic human needs. Thus, Heller’s character poignantly conveys the demands of working life that *Station Eleven* craftily condemns: his dedication to his work is not only detrimental to his health, but to his social relations and to the way he is perceived as a human being.

Station Eleven is also critical of modern technology. Before the apocalypse, Clark is annoyed at “iPhone zombies, people half his age who wandered in a dream with their eyes fixed on their screens” (160), while Jeevan is “looking at something on his phone, distracted” (103) when the

distressed Miranda speaks with him. The blue-light screen is portrayed as an invisible dome that deprives people of their awareness and prevents them from observing and participating in the world around them. Here, we might also return to chapter six's emphasis on social media: "No more reading and commenting on the lives of others, and in doing so, feeling slightly less alone in the room" (32) implies a sense of disconnection from other people, an attempt to find human connection through social media in a time when people are "minimally present in this world" (164). "No more avatars" (32), on the other hand, unveils another phenomenon facilitated by the internet: the possibility of creating an online alter ego. The remark is both nostalgic and critical: it yearns for the possibility of self-expression, of participating in online communities, and exploring the freedom enabled by the anonymity, but it also rids the culture of trolling and using the online platform for bullying, shaming, and spreading hate speech. Thus, although the novel's perspective on modern technology is highly nostalgic, it is also, at times, cuttngly critical.

The most pressing social criticism that *Station Eleven* poses, however, is not directed toward the customs, conventions, or structures of the contemporary society, but the people. Particularly, the novel takes a strong stand against people's indifference, conceit, and egotism; that is, the vices that prevent sincere human connections and allow for the existence of the social problems mentioned above. This criticism is conveyed most distinctly through Arthur's storyline, and it is no coincidence that Mandel has Arthur Leander perform the role of Shakespeare's King Lear, as Arthur's life in many ways resembles that of Lear's. Both Arthur and Lear are characters who value appearance over reality: Lear values her eldest daughters' embellished declarations of love over her youngest daughter Cordelia's unconditional love, while Arthur seeks for praise and admiration from people in his life to the extent that he begins to treat them only as sounding boards for his own self-satisfaction. "Arthur wasn't having dinner with a friend," Clark is told to realize in disgust, "so much as having dinner with an audience" (112), which exemplifies Arthur's defect of performing his life rather than authentically engaging with his companions.

Arthur's storyline is characterized by feelings of uncertainty and disengagement. Arthur, who comes from a small island where children "go barefoot all summer and wear feathers in their hair" (73) and who finds himself in Hollywood not because of passion and genuine interest in acting but because "some girl in his Commerce 101 class told him he should be an actor" (74), compares his life on the island to his life in Toronto, then in Los Angeles, and cannot seem to grasp the correlation between these lives. Miranda, who comes from the same island, seems to interest Arthur mainly because of their common background: "She'll know where I'm from. Arthur lives in a permanent state of disorientation like a low-grade fever, the question hanging over everything being How did I get from there to here?" (77). Arthur and Miranda lose touch – "In the years that follow, he's often successful at putting her out of his mind. She is far away and very young" (78) – but Arthur reaches out to her, years later, once again in a moment of disorientation: "Once in the room he sits on the bed, relieved to be alone and unlooked-at, but feeling as he always does in these moments a little disoriented, obscurely deflated, a bit at a loss, and then all at once he knows what to do" (79).

What Arthur seeks in Miranda is reassurance: he believes that, because of their mutual background, Miranda will understand him, know him and assure him in the ways that he needs to be known and assured. Miranda, however, is entirely different from her husband: unlike Arthur, Miranda is an introverted artist who prefers the friendship of their Pomeranian over the company of other people, who draws her comic, *Dr. Eleven*, for her own enjoyment rather than for the sake of publishing it, and thus her private dedication to her own art, and to Arthur, remains insufficient, quite like Cordelia's wordless love is to Lear. Harriet Dye writes on Lear: "Lear has confused effusive declaration for love itself. He asks only for the illusion of love. . . . He does not conceive of love as a fulfillment of responsibility and duty with its accompanying full satisfaction of conscience" (514-15). This similarity between Lear and Arthur's conception of love becomes evident in Arthur's treatment of Miranda and his two other wives. Miranda is cast aside on the night of their

third wedding anniversary, during a dinner party to which Arthur has invited his colleagues, including his mistress, Elizabeth. Elizabeth takes Miranda's place then but is later replaced by Arthur's third wife, Lydia. Still married to Lydia, Arthur begins a relationship with his stage assistant, Tanya, and all the while he is writing unanswered letters to his childhood friend, Victoria. It seems that Arthur never quite finds in his wives and mistresses the assurance and support he is looking for – perhaps because, like Lear's, his conception of a sincere social bond is false and conceited.

Alike Lear, Arthur realizes his shortcomings when it is already too late. Just weeks before his death, Arthur learns of the passing of his father and of the publishing of an upcoming exposé, a collection of his letters to Victoria, which jolt him awake from his lifetime of egoistic indifference. On the days nearing his death, Arthur makes amends: he admits to Miranda having 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” (211); he pays for Tanya's student loans; and he “runs through a secret list of everything that was good” (327) – a nostalgic directory of precious memories and joyous moments. Arthur finds himself a man who repents the lost social ties of his life:

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? (327)

The tragedy of Arthur's repent is that it is too late and, because of his sudden death and the devastation then followed by the Georgia Flu, ultimately meaningless. This makes Arthur's storyline's criticism toward people's disconnections from one another the most significant critical point *Station Eleven* works to signpost and resolve. Before anything else, *Station Eleven* promotes the appreciation of authentic social connections: the narrative aims to jolt awake the “sleepwalkers”, to encour-

age authentic engagement with the surrounding world before it is too late. In this way, Arthur's storyline becomes a metaphor for the twenty-first-century society that *Station Eleven* wants to avoid: through Arthur, Mandel explores the tragedy of a life wasted in the pursuit of fundamentally insignificant matters. Arthur's narrative then relates to all the critical points discussed earlier in that all these social issues are founded on such nearsighted and narrow-minded pursuits: nations choose their own advantage over the common good, the working world suppresses people to lead unsatisfactory lives for the benefit of a system that separates them from one another, and people's lives are ruthlessly sacrificed for the sake of entertainment.

What signals this narrative of indifference and disconnection between people the novel's most critical point is, in fact, the novel's nostalgic narrative, which I argue acts as Mandel's solution to resolving this social issue: to jolt the twenty-first-century sleepwalkers awake, *Station Eleven's* nostalgic narrative manipulates its readers into sentimentalizing the contemporary society and appreciating "the taken-for-granted miracles" (233) that, for example, enable answering a phone call almost anywhere in the world, and "the human enterprise" (255) that each aspect of the modern world requires. Clark's character seems to be exemplary of such awakening, and it is Clark's focalization with which the novel also ends, which supports his role as representative of the gratified awareness that the novel's nostalgic narrative advocates. Clark, who, in the pre-apocalyptic world, works as an organizational psychologist – "I specialize in the repair and maintenance of faulty executives," he explains at Arthur and Miranda's anniversary dinner party (93) – is jolted awake by the realization that he, too, has been "moving half-asleep through the motions of his life" (164). His post-apocalyptic storyline portrays his character as strongly reflective of his past life:

And not just to have seen the remembered splendours of the former world, the space shuttles and the electrical grid and the amplified guitars, the computers that could be held in the palm of a hand and the high-speed trains between cities, but to have lived among those wonders

for so long. . . . “I was there,” and the thought pierced him through with an admixture of sadness and exhilaration. (231-32)

To the reader, then, Clark’s nostalgic insight is supposed to become realized in the present tense – “I am here” – which then, ideally, transforms the reader’s nostalgia for the lost world to an appreciative sense of belonging in their present one. In this way, *Station Eleven* as a post-apocalyptic novel not only expresses its social discontent, but also aims to repair it in a careful rhetoric strategy designed to influence the novel’s implied reader. The strategies which the novel uses to construct its nostalgic narrative mood were discussed in Section 3.1, and the directed object of longing, the *nostalgia*, was examined in Section 3.2. The following section now takes this strategy under critical discussion, considering the novel’s nostalgic narrative as a means for resolving social indifference from various perspectives on nostalgia and post-apocalyptic fiction.

4.2 The Problematics of Post-apocalyptic Nostalgia

As has now been established, the nostalgic narrative of *Station Eleven* has a distinct purpose: it is a rhetorical strategy constructed to influence the novel’s reader in a particular manner. The narrative mood works to evoke nostalgic sentiments in the reader, and the *nostalgia* constructed in the novel is a means of first directing those stimulated sentiments toward the representation of the contemporary society constructed in the novel, and then toward the reader’s actual reality. This process is what the post-apocalyptic genre together with nostalgia enables *Station Eleven* to achieve. As was discussed in Section 3.2, the temporal lens of post-apocalyptic fiction allows for the reader to examine their reality as if it were in the past. Section 2.2 determined that external nostalgia enables the reader to experience nostalgia for times and places outside their autobiographical memories and, thus, fictional representations can act as nostalgic objects. In the case of post-apocalyptic fiction, where the *nostalgia* relates to the reader’s actual memories and experiences through a pseudo-

memorial nostalgic experience, that is, by convincing the reader of its realness (of its connection to the reader's reality), the reader's nostalgic experience can become authentic.

What consequences might there be for such a nostalgic experience generated by a nostalgic narrative mood and a *nostalgia*? As Section 2.1 established, the functions of nostalgia are still under academic debate: some scholars find nostalgia to be a regressive form of romanticizing yearning, while others believe it to be a psychological strategy that arises in moments of anxiety and reinforces its experiencer with a positive sense of self and security. Thus, in the case of *Station Eleven*, the reader's nostalgic experience provoked by the nostalgic narrative could also be justified and criticized in various ways. As Section 2.3 established, some researchers consider post-apocalyptic nostalgia to have advantageous properties. Berger, as was discussed, defends the nostalgic narrative of Pynchon's *Vineland*, arguing that, contrary to criticism, the novel's nostalgia yearns for unrealized alternatives of social order rather than an idealized representation of the past, making it a beneficial literary strategy. If we consider *Station Eleven*'s post-apocalyptic nostalgia in line with Berger's analysis of *Vineland*, Mandel's novel's nostalgia might have similar positive outcomes in allowing the reader to imagine alternatives and address past and present failures. Leggatt's study does indeed that, concluding that *Station Eleven*'s nostalgic narrative distinguishes between regressive and progressive forms of nostalgia, encouraging the latter, and promotes utopian imagination (20). Leggatt writes on *Station Eleven* that

Whereas the objects and beliefs of the past consistently draw the various characters of the novel back into a nostalgic appreciation for a life that can never be recaptured, by placing an emphasis on the imaginary and utopian possibilities that might accompany a global catastrophe the author opens up a space for hope and, in so doing, offers the reader a way to reinvent themselves in the present. (3)

However, while Leggatt's interpretation of *Station Eleven*'s utopian possibilities is promising, it fails to consider the heavy emphasis the novel places on its nostalgic narrative mood and its *nostal-*

gia. These imaginary possibilities that Leggatt analyzes are, contrary to his arguments, not at the narrative's forefront, and thus those alternatives may not be conveyed to the reader in the extent he proposes. This becomes apparent when we consider, for example, chapter six. The chapter's 'no mores' which can be interpreted as the novel's post-apocalyptic utopian possibilities are limited compared to the 'no mores' that are predominantly nostalgic: "No more countries, all borders unmanned" (31) and "No more Internet" (32) are but two utopian ideas in a one-and-a-half-page nostalgic lament otherwise bemoaning the world that was lost in the apocalypse. The novel's post-apocalyptic world also lacks creators and innovators: apart from minor innovations such as turning airplane trays into tombstones or sewing gloves from hotel sheets, the survivors of the Georgia Flu create surprisingly little. The artists of *The Traveling Symphony*, for example, do not compose any new plays or symphonies, and the only conversation in the novel that considers the idea of moving on, of letting go of the past for the sake of the children who get anxious over its superiority, ends with Jeevan's sudden rebuff: "I don't want to let go" (270). Thus, the novel's division between those who "retreat into memory and the past, and those who instead choose to imagine radical alternatives and generate new perspective or ways of seeing the world" (Leggatt 20) or its emphasis on the latter are not as distinctive as Leggatt claims.

Leggatt also discusses *Station Eleven's* "metafictional subtext", the *Dr. Eleven* comics, and argues that the comics work to criticize regressive nostalgia and the inertia that accompanies it (2; 6). The *Dr. Eleven* comics, illustrated by Miranda, tell a dystopian story about a space station that has escaped to deep space after a hostile civilization has taken over Earth. The space station, which looks like a planet and is in perpetual twilight due to its damaged artificial sky, has fallen into a conflict: the people of the Undersea are a group of resentful rebels who desperately want to return to Earth, while the station's pilots, Dr. Eleven and his colleagues, keep the ship drifting through space, away from Earth. The subtext, according to Leggatt, "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” (6). Even Miranda, who identifies as Dr. Eleven, feels pity for the rebels yearning to return home: she calls the Undersea “limbo” and refers to the rebels as “people living out their lives in underwater fallout shelters, clinging to the hope that the world they remembered could be restored” (213). Yet, *Station Eleven*’s subtext is not as straightforward as Leggatt proposes. Upon the assassination of Captain Lonagan, Miranda draws Dr. Eleven as contemplative of the Undersea and his own relationship to the Earth:

A new image to go before this one, a close-up of a note left on Captain Lonagan’s body by an Undersea assassin: “We were not meant for this world. Let us go home.”

In the next image, Dr. Eleven holds the note in his hand. . . . His thoughts: The first sentence of the assassin’s note rang true: we were not meant for this world. I returned to my city, to my shattered life and damaged home, to my loneliness, and tried to forget the sweetness of life on Earth. (105)

His mentor’s death arouses a sense of melancholic yearning in Dr. Eleven, who begins to empathize with the desperate homesickness of the Undersea people. Their home, Dr. Eleven understands, cannot be restored, but he can now fathom their yearning. Miranda’s fascination with illustrating the Undersea also rather reflects Miranda’s personal disengagement from the world around her and her desire to reconnect, to feel a sense of belonging to a home. Miranda’s storyline is, indeed, a lonely one: she finds herself disconnected from her art school peers, Arthur, her work colleagues. “You’re always half on Station Eleven,” her ex-boyfriend Pablo tells her (87), which signifies her detachment from other people. Miranda dies alone on a beach on the coast of Malaysia, “the seascape bleeding into confused visions of Station Eleven” (228). Although Leggatt interprets the *Dr. Eleven* comics as the novel’s way of inferring “the importance and primacy of imagination over remembrance in the wastelands of the future” (3), I believe the conflict between Dr. Eleven and the Undersea rebels as well as Miranda’s fascination with the Undersea rather convey the importance of sites of belonging, such as nostalgic recollections. Although the *Dr. Eleven* comics end abruptly due to

Miranda's passing, the comic seems to end in the discovery of a social connection; Dr. Eleven and the Undersea rebels finding common ground in their homesickness for the lost home. Thus, even in the subtext, the nostalgic narrative is prioritized over the imaginative, which implies that rather than promoting nostalgia as a tool for exploring utopian alternatives, the novel embraces it for its ability to foster social connections.

Nostalgia is also a significant site of social belonging for the main narrative's characters, of which the Museum of Civilization is a good example. The Museum of Civilization, founded almost by accident in the Skymiles Lounge of Severn City Airport, becomes an actual museum where history is preserved and explained, but it also becomes a place where people seem to gravitate toward – a site of social belonging, a connection to home:

In Year Fifteen people came to the museum to look at the past after their long days of work. A few of the original First-Class lounge armchairs were still here, and it was possible to sit and read the final newspapers, fifteen years old, turning brittle pages in gloves that Clark had sewn inexpertly from a hotel sheet. What happened here was something like prayer. James, the first man who'd walked in, came to the museum almost every day to look at the motorcycle. He'd found it in Severn City in Year Two, and had used it until the automobile gas went stale and the aviation gas ran out. He missed it very much. Emmanuelle, the first child born in the airport, came in often to look at the phones. (261-62)

The museum becoming a place where the people of Severn City Airport gather after a long day signposts it as a communal space where people not only preserve, share, and reminisce their collective and individual histories and memories, but where they find connections to each other. Emmanuelle and many other young people are fascinated by the pre-pandemic world, which Clark attempts to elucidate to them: “‘It's hard to explain,’ he caught himself saying sometimes to young people who came into his museum. . . . But he took his role as curator seriously and he'd decided years ago that ‘It's hard to explain’ isn't good enough, so he always tried to explain it all anyway” (232). The

Museum of Civilization, then, weaves the pre- and post-pandemic generations together: in the museum, people not only get to share their mutual history, but transmit it forward and learn about it. Furthermore, the museum becomes a place of spirituality and communality: “What happened here was something like prayer” implies that people’s gathering in the Museum of Civilization is similar to people’s congregating in a church. Visiting the museum is religious: it offers people faith, hope, and the safety that can be found in spiritual rituals. Going to the museum every day, for example, to read the old newspapers, provides people with a comforting routine that reinforces stability and permanence, which are both significant factors for feeling at home. The deity prayed to in the Museum of Civilization, however, is not God but the human culture, which reinforces the novel’s adoration of human enterprise and suggests the idea of the human being as the supreme creator.

The museum also provides Clark with a purpose in life, and a coping strategy for resolving the loss of his past and the unrealized future. As more and more people make their home in Severn City Airport, Clark concentrates on his vocation as a curator: “In former times, when the airport had had fewer people, Clark had worked all day at the details of survival. . . . But there were many more people now, and Clark was older, and no one seemed to mind if he cared for the museum all day” (258). It is in the museum that Clark finds a purpose as a historian, as a preserver and conveyor of human culture, but he also finds a place where he belongs: “He’d been spending more time in the past lately. He liked to close his eyes and let his memories overtake him” (278-79). For Clark, nostalgia brings warmth and comfort to the present moment – a constructive function of nostalgia that Sedikides et al. postulated in their studies. Quite tellingly, Clark is also the person who shows Kirsten the electrically lit town in the dark horizon; the sign of home.

Kirsten, as Section 3.1 established, struggles with not remembering the old world. Kirsten’s hardship of only remembering impressions of the past leads her to endlessly search for traces of the old world and try to place herself in it. “My memories from the collapse seem like dreams now,” Kirsten confesses in a newspaper interview, and then asks the interviewer if refrigerators truly had

had light inside; that she had not just been imagining it (195). Kirsten's positioning in between those who remember and those who do not also leads her to wonder if those who remember the most, suffer the most, too. Yet, when Kirsten arrives at the Museum of Civilization, she finds herself tranquil in Clark's company as he leads her to the air traffic control tower to look through a telescope: "It was peaceful, climbing the stairs with him. . . . A slow ascent between shadowed stairs and moonlit landings" (310). Five weeks later, Kirsten is "beside herself with impatience to see the far southern town with the electrical grid" (331). Clark, as it were, shows Kirsten the way home; however, for Clark, nostalgia seems to be enough to provide the belonging he longs for, as he – and many others at Severn City Airport – choose to stay.

Similar to Clark and Kirsten, *Station Eleven's* nostalgic narrative and *nostalgia* could be sources of reassurance and belonging for the novel's contemporary reader. If the twenty-first-century nostalgic surge discussed in Section 2.1 can be taken as indicative of contemporary temporal and spatial crises and, perhaps, a symptom of social disconnection, the reader of *Station Eleven* might already be subjected to temporal and spatial anxiety and disengagement from their wider social communities. The nostalgia evoked by the nostalgic narrative of *Station Eleven* could, therefore, be a tool for resolving this threefold anxiety. The novel's nostalgic narrative is not, however, without problems. Although the novel promotes nostalgia as a solution to restoring social belonging, the nostalgic narrative and the novel's *nostalgia*, which acts as a waypoint to the reader's reality, do not consistently support this idea but, at times, present issues that might actually work against it. As Section 3.2 concluded, the *nostalgia* of *Station Eleven* is a representation of the twenty-first-century American society, and it is a representation that emphasizes particular aspects of that society: for example, the urban environments, the temporal and spatial freedom enabled by electricity, the leisurely pastimes enjoyed by people with access to those pastimes, and the capitalist economic system that facilitates many of these aspects. The problem with the novel's *nostalgia* is that it is, as is the case of all *nostalgias*, idealized: the reality against which the *nostalgia* is compared is not a

reality where all environments are urban, where all people have the same temporal and spatial freedom, or where capitalism benefits the entire population, allowing everyone the same opportunities and experiences. The nostalgic narrative of *Station Eleven* manipulates the reader to sentimentalize a reality based on a *nostalgia* that is false and, potentially, detrimental.

One of the particularly problematic passages concerning the *nostalgia* of *Station Eleven* is Clark's nostalgic contemplation about the production chain of a snow globe:

Clark had always been fond of beautiful objects, and in his present state of mind, all objects were beautiful. He stood by the case and found himself moved by every object he saw there, by the human enterprise each object had required. Consider the snow globe. 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 sailor's dreams of land and women, these men for whom the ocean was a grey-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 centre, the secret hopes of the UPS man carrying boxes of snow globes from there to the Severn City Airport. Clark shook the globe and held it up to the light. When he looked through it, the planes were warped and caught in whirling snow. (255)

Clark's contemplation describes a capitalist production chain that ultimately allows him to examine the post-apocalyptic airport through the warped glass of a snow globe; a mass manufacture product produced mainly for visual attraction. The passage laments the loss of this complex process of manufacture and logistics, encouraging the reader to consider all the human fates in the different stages of that process: the factory worker, the sailor, the UPS driver all deserve to be commemorated for their individual efforts in the journey of the snow globe. What makes Clark's nostalgic remembrance problematic is the fact that, in celebrating the production process behind the snow globe, it simultaneously validates it. The shortcomings of the system are comfortably ignored while stereotypes and potentially oppressive ideologies are reinforced. The nostalgic passage, for example, validates the mass manufacture of consumer products in lower-income countries for Western distribution: the sentence "the assembly-line worker who watched the globe glide past on a conveyer belt somewhere in China" conjures up the phrase "MADE IN CHINA", familiar to the Western population from various mass manufacture products such as toys, electronics, and other utility goods. The process behind the production and the distribution of a snow globe – an item that has very little functional value other than its visual attractiveness – is extremely complicated, and admittedly beautiful in its intricacy, but the inequality generated by the capitalist production system hierarchy, the overconsumption of natural resources, and the waste and emissions produced by international distribution are just few of the issues the process contains, and all those issues are disregarded. Here, The Traveling Symphony's motto, "*Because survival is insufficient*" (58), also becomes questionable, as it seems to justify the existence of such processes for the sake of being able to enjoy the visual attractiveness of an otherwise useless mass manufacture product. Entertainment, leisure, and beauty seem to prevail over system-induced problems. Alike the Disney/Pixar motion picture film *WALL-E*, *Station Eleven* seems to be in love with mass consumer culture – with the exception that *Station Eleven* does not even attempt to criticize it. Rather, it validates it, celebrates it, and even contributes to it: the novel's nostalgic narrative has the potential to boost the sales of the twenty-

first-century cultural products it venerates, and the novel itself has been translated, distributed, and marketed for worldwide selling.²

The passage also consents to gender stereotypes: the person who places the snow globes into boxes is a white-gloved woman – the act of placing a glass item into a box seems to require the stereotypically gentle and delicate hands of a woman – while the sailors that ship these boxes are men that smoke cigarettes and play cards below decks – seafaring is rough, and so are the men who brave it. The excerpt does point out the individuality of those people: by mentioning the “cadences of a half dozen languages”, the “signature unlike any other on earth”, and “the secret hopes of the UPS man”, the passage reminds the reader of all these people’s individual lives, thoughts, and handprints on the production system. These individualistic details, however, divert the reader’s focus from the capitalist production system celebrated in the passage, which only works if those individuals execute their tasks accordingly on all levels of production from factory work in China to delivery in North America. The passage’s emphasis on the individuals hides the callousness of the capitalist market system, and the narrative once again brings forth the idea that people are only valuable when posted in the hierarchy of a production chain, which reduces the white-gloved woman, the sailors, and the UPS driver with his secret hopes to cogwheels in a machine. Those cogwheels may have individual features, but they are cogwheels nonetheless.

The Museum of Civilization is also problematic in that it becomes a mediated museum of culture, compiled on the foundation of nostalgic yearning, which calls to mind Lizardi’s concerns about the digitalized media archives of the twenty-first century, filled with nostalgic content. The items chosen to display in the museum are, as Section 3.2 established, mainly items that are characterizing the modern technological society: smartphones, credit cards, driver’s licenses, and so on. Thus, the perspective that the museum provides into the pre-apocalyptic era is inevitably narrow.

² *Station Eleven* has been translated into 31 languages (“Station Eleven”). The novel is also being adapted into a ten-episode TV series, expected to launch in 2020 (Otterson).

Especially for the children born after the Georgia Flu, who have no knowledge of the world outside of Severn City Airport, the Museum of Civilization offers a unilateral view of history: one that implies that the entire pre-apocalyptic world had been a world of electricity, economic welfare, and temporal and spatial freedom. The museum's exhibition becomes even more problematic when joined with the lessons the children of Severn City Airport are being taught in school:

Like educated children everywhere, the children in the airport school memorized abstractions: the airplanes outside once flew through the air. You could use an airplane to travel to the other side of the world, but – the schoolteacher was a man who'd had frequent-flyer status on two airlines – when you were on an airplane you had to turn off your electronic devices before takeoff and landing, devices such as the tiny flat machines . . . and these machines were the portals into a worldwide network. . . . They were told about the Internet, how it was everywhere and connected everything, how it was us. (262)

The schoolchildren are, quite reasonably, being taught the pre-apocalyptic history, but the lessons reveal their education as looking backward rather than forward. The children are being made to memorize abstractions of the former world, but the concepts and skills they are being taught have no practical use to them in the post-apocalyptic world where airplanes stand dormant on the ground. Their lessons seem to be founded on the nostalgic accounts of the schoolteacher's past rather than on a doctrine catering to their needs in the new world. The history of the pre-apocalyptic world being taught is also warped by nostalgic retrospect. "They were told about the Internet, how it was everywhere and connected everything, how it was us" portrays the pre-pandemic civilization as somehow borderless and united, amalgamated into one entity with the affordances of the digital network. The sentence disregards the pre-apocalyptic nation-state reality and distorts the idea of the Internet by illustrating it as a globally available space for a unified online community, accessible to everyone and enabling access everywhere. While the Internet does, for instance, allow for worldwide online communities to develop, those communities are still constrained by technological inac-

cessibility, linguistic boundaries, and even state censorship, making the excerpt's idea of the Internet false and idealized.

In a final defense of *Station Eleven's* post-apocalyptic nostalgia, one might consider the novel's hopeful ending. The novel ends with the possibility of restoration – the discovery of the electrically lit town in the dark horizon, toward which The Traveling Symphony leaves from Severn City Airport, “carrying their Shakespeare and their weapons and music” (331). Yet, considering the passage about the production chain of the snow globe above, the novel's ending becomes more uncomfortable than encouraging. The novel's final pages have Clark dusting “his beloved objects in the Museum of Civilization” (331) and looking over at the airplanes on the tarmac:

What became of Miranda? He hasn't thought of her in so long. All these ghosts. She went into shipping, he remembers. He has no expectation of seeing an airplane rise again in his lifetime, but is it possible that somewhere there are ships setting out? If there are again towns with streetlights, if there are symphonies and newspapers, then what else might this awakening world contain? Perhaps vessels are setting out even now, travelling towards or away from him, steered by sailors with maps and knowledge of the stars, driven by need or perhaps simply by curiosity: whatever became of the countries on the other side? If nothing else, it's pleasant to consider the possibility. He likes the thought of ships moving over the water, towards another world just out of sight. (332-33)

The novel's final paragraphs are written in the present tense, which seemingly reinforces the narrative's message about a hopeful new beginning. However, the development of human civilization seems to be making a circle backwards rather than moving forward to a brand-new future: it has been desperately holding on to the remains of the old world and instantly embraces the opportunity of restoring it. The reference to “sailors with maps and knowledge of the stars, driven by need or perhaps simply by curiosity” is a romantic one, evoking the impression of the expeditions, the idea that humankind now has a chance to rediscover Earth and rebuild it. Even Miranda is recalled in

relation to her occupation in shipping, and the reference reminds the reader of Miranda in the coast of Malaysia, admiring the otherworldly beauty of the lit container ships. Light, however, can also be blinding, and the “blaze of light on the horizon both filled with mystery and impossibly distant, a fairy-tale kingdom” (29) that Miranda admires dilutes the destructive societal consequences of the economic collapse that had made those container ships dormant. Similarly, the “awakening world” is a hopeful metaphor for the world of *Station Eleven* waking up to a new day, but that awakening remains, due to the narrative’s backward gaze, a mistaken belief. As West argues, *Station Eleven* becomes “tantalizingly close to recognizing the apocalyptic nature of 21st-century Western culture before minimizing it in comparison to the apocalypse brought by the Georgia Flu” (14).

The novel’s ending seems to be hopeful only in the way that, even after an apocalypse, humankind will find a way to the restoration of the past home. The shortcomings of that past are ignored as the conception that the novel has of its *nostalgia* is embraced to the very end. Thus, *Station Eleven*’s nostalgic narrative risks the possibility of the phenomena Maly et al. discussed in their research: the possibility of reinforcing problematic ideologies, of neutralizing social issues, and of promoting a biased worldview. All these issues, then, might actually work against *Station Eleven*’s narrative objective of restoring and rebuilding social connections. If the reader embraces their modern world in the way that the characters of *Station Eleven* embrace their past, they might begin to see only that mediated, romanticized version of it. Nostalgia’s conceptual progress – the desire to ‘nostalgize’ – and the twenty-first-century cultural mentality unremittingly encouraging nostalgic sentimentalizing only make the reader’s nostalgic reaction to post-apocalyptic nostalgia more feasible, buttressing its unfavorable effects. “‘We long only to go home. . . . We long only for the world we were born into,’” an adversary from the Undersea tells Dr. Eleven (302), proclaiming that the return home is their sole desire – and no other alternative is worthwhile. The Undersea people never get to return to Earth, but The Traveling Symphony voyages toward the electrically lit town, which calls to mind Elizabeth’s religious insistence: “The lights will come back on someday. . . . And then

we'll all finally get to go home" (251). Yet, if the reader of nostalgic, post-apocalyptic fiction is lulled into the nostalgic comfort of their idealized contemporary home, lit by blinding bright lights, that home will always remain just that – a fallacious *nostalgia*.

5 CONCLUSION

Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* is representative of a wider phenomenon of post-apocalyptic fiction, where the lost pre-apocalyptic world is reminisced through the nostalgic lens of post-apocalyptic retrospect. The aim of this thesis was to examine the novel's post-apocalyptic nostalgia: the thesis analyzed the novel's nostalgic narrative mood and the object of its nostalgic longing, and then considered them in relation to the novel's genre conventions and nostalgia's multidisciplinary conceptualizations. Post-apocalyptic fiction as a genre explores the end of the world as we know it and imagines a post-apocalyptic future. The reader of post-apocalyptic fiction must simultaneously imagine the post-apocalyptic future and remember the pre-apocalyptic world as it was, but as it still is. This temporal feature of post-apocalyptic fiction allows for the reader to examine their contemporary world as a lost utopia, which creates an immediate nostalgic window into their present moment.

As this thesis established, the studies on *Station Eleven* and other post-apocalyptic fictional works' post-apocalyptic nostalgia are various in their conclusions, which may be due to nostalgia's complex conceptual history and the continuing academic debate over its functions. Some researchers conceptualize nostalgia as a psychological strategy that helps resolve anxiety and temporal displacement by reinforcing feelings of comfort and reassurance, and their studies reflect this perspective by, for example, considering post-apocalyptic nostalgia as a means of resolving discontent in the present moment and imagining utopian possibilities. Other researchers, however, are more skeptical, arguing that nostalgia is a regressive form of yearning that provides the nostalgist with a representation of a counterfeit past with no blueprint for alternatives. This thesis leans toward treating nostalgia as a universal human experience that is and can be used for various functional purposes, but that must also be considered with critical caution due to its idealizing effect.

The premise of post-apocalyptic fiction is social discontent, and thus post-apocalyptic fiction is always inherently critical of social issues. The primary social issues Mandel's novel works to resolve are the indifference and egotism of the people of modern society, which stand in the way of authentic social bonds. The novel criticizes the high-functioning sleepwalkers of the modern world, blaming them for not appreciating the miraculous beauty of modernity and for leading a shallow performance of life rather than authentically living it. Through careful literary strategy, the novel constructs a nostalgic narrative mood, which portrays the reader's reality as a lost past and works to evoke nostalgic sentiments in the reader. The reader's nostalgia is aroused using various metaphorical, syntactical, and stylistic literary devices that invoke the idea of the irreversibility of time, which is at the heart of nostalgia, and create a magical, melancholic atmosphere in the novel. The reader's nostalgic sentiments are directed toward the novel's *nostalgia*, which works as a waypoint to the reader's actual reality. *Station Eleven's nostalgia*, as this thesis demonstrated, is a representation of the twenty-first-century American society, and the *nostalgia* expresses what aspects of that society would be worthy of preservation and commemoration after an apocalyptic event. The *nostalgia* of *Station Eleven* values the modern technologies and communicational possibilities, the temporal and spatial freedom, and the capitalist economic system of the twenty-first century, which the narrative's emphases on mobile phones, airplanes, and international trade reveal. Thus, the reader of the novel is also guided to appreciate these aspects of their contemporary world.

Post-apocalyptic nostalgia, however, becomes problematic when considered against nostalgia's venerating tendencies. Due to nostalgia's idealizing nature, the *nostalgias* are always romanticized. Therefore, the *nostalgia* of post-apocalyptic fiction is also a fallacy: the reality the *nostalgia* is based on is not constructed in the way the *nostalgia* proposes. This fallacy risks the chance of various potentially detrimental phenomena: the idealized *nostalgia* might, for example, work to reinforce problematic ideologies such as unsustainable economic market systems, or promote myopic worldviews such as the idea of the contemporary American society as a unified civilization of

equal opportunities and experiences in life. In the case of *Station Eleven*, post-apocalyptic nostalgia might succeed in its narrative goal of making the reader feel nostalgic for the modern world, but it simultaneously encourages ‘nostalgizing’ a world where “survival is insufficient”; where mass manufacturing of consumer products is justified for the simple joy of the visual attraction they provide, where plastic money can buy almost anything in seemingly effortless transactions, and where oranges should be available at all corners of the world – despite the global issues that all these matters might generate. Thus, the novel’s nostalgic narrative may, ultimately, turn against its own purpose.

Considering the nostalgic cultural mindset of the twenty-first century, the contemporary readers of *Station Eleven* might already be surrounded by a nostalgic torrent and inclined to nostalgic sentiments. If nostalgic post-apocalyptic narratives then allow for and guide those readers to ‘nostalgize’ their present reality, the consequence might be a readership fallaciously content with the world they inhabit; if the present moment is as miraculous as the *nostalgia* portrays it to be, there should be no reason to ever change it. Thus, the phenomenon of post-apocalyptic nostalgia should be studied and analyzed vis-à-vis nostalgia’s complex definitions, tendencies, and uses. While its aftereffects are still widely unknown, post-apocalyptic nostalgia seems to be working for the advantage of specific ideologies and commercial pursuits and promote a misrepresented view of the world. Even if the past is always remembered in a good light, it may not be favorable to remember the present in one.

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