



Indexed in NepJOL
JPPS Star-Rated Journal

Journal of NELTA Gandaki (JoNG)
(A Peer-Reviewed Open Access Research Journal)
ISSN: 2676-1041 [Print] E-ISSN 2822-1559 [Online]
Vol. VII Issue (1-2) October, 2024, pp. 67-76
eJournal site: www.nelta.org.np/page/gandaki

Post-Pandemic Possibilities in Mandel's *Station Eleven*

Prakash Sharma

Abstract

Article History:

Submitted: 26 March 2024

Reviewed: 5 July 2024

Accepted: 8 August 2024

Corresponding Author:

Prakash Sharma

Email:

sharmaprakash166@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5780-9909>

Article DOI: : <https://doi.org/10.3126/jong.v7i1-2.70186>

Copyright information:

Copyright 2024 Author/s and Nepal

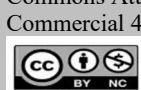
English Language Teachers'

Association, Gandaki Province

This work is licensed under a Creative

Commons Attribution- Non-

Commercial 4.0 International License



Publisher

Nepal English Language Teachers'

Association Gandaki Province,

Pokhara, Nepal

Email: neltagandaki2018@gmail.com

URL: www.nelta.org.np/page/gandaki

This paper explores how human self-centeredness and indifference to the ecological balance bring human existence into crisis inviting different apocalypses; and examines the post-pandemic possibilities in Emile St. John Mandel's novel *Station Eleven*. The text discusses the crisis caused by a pandemic killing ninety percent of the human population. This study concentrates on the hectic life of the characters before the pandemic, the critical life during the pandemic and the post-apocalyptic life freed from machines and material greed. It analyses how people's material greed and negligence on harmonious human-nonhuman relations result in the crisis. To bring the crisis of the pandemic into normality, the writer uses art in different forms. In other words, this study examines human experiences in the face of extreme loss and shows the importance of art in adversity. The focus of the study is to show how bleakness, pessimism and adversity dominate the narrative and simultaneously unfold certain events and situations that signal optimism in the novel. This research is based on the library study and uses data from both primary and secondary sources. The critical insights of Lawrence Buell and Val Plumwood about human self-centeredness and interdependence between the biotic and abiotic world are the theoretical ideas for textual analysis of

the primary text. It concludes that the presentation of the horrific situation in the novel is for creating eco-consciousness and the situations of possibilities are for the generation of hope in crisis. This research work promotes eco-consciousness and sustains hope even in critical situations.

Keywords: Destruction, harmony, pandemic, possibility, self-centeredness

Introduction

Environmental degradation is a major threat to modern human civilization and the ecosphere. We encounter direct and indirect impacts of such degradation. As a direct impact, we are facing problems like landslides, floods, desertification, uneven rain, pollution of many kinds etc. As indirect impact, human society is facing the problems of different diseases and pandemics. They are also the products of human insensitivity to the autonomy of nature. Among many of such pandemics, recent COVID-19 pandemic is the worst situation this generation faced. The novel *Station Eleven* by Emil St John Mandel talks about an imaginative pandemic caused by Georgia Flue. This paper incorporates both the devastating effects of the Georgia Flu and the post-pandemic possibilities that are represented

in the novel. The 'pandemic' that is the contagion affecting the whole world, creates such chaos where survival becomes challenging. Within such a bleak world, the writer presents certain events and situations that indicate positive possibilities. Art in the form like theatrical performance, music and comic books plays a crucial role for creating the situation of optimism. More than others, the town with the electric light and the idea of a sailing ship, that the writer presents in the last part of the novel, indicate the continuity of human civilization in the post-pandemic era.

Station Eleven presents the world devastated by a plague called Georgian Flue and conveys to the reader the full gravity of losing power and living like a pre-industrial age. Twenty years after the flu, many changes have taken place. For instance, the population of the world is massively reduced, and technological advancement has gone to dust. The accessories have become the materials of the collection. The whole world struggles in darkness in the absence of energy. The novel presents the experience of different characters before, during and after the outbreak of the disease. Multiple moments are presented in alternative ways: leading up to the outbreak, immediately following it and time twenty years later. The narrative moves among the past in Los Angeles, years zero in Toronto and years twenty in the Great Lake Region and Seven City Airport.

During the pre-apocalyptic stages, Mandel exposes the relentless pressure within modern society to use work-life success as a means of direction in life. In such a context, the disease destroys the normality of previous life and leads to a terrific situation. Characters do suicide with the fear of future crises. That apocalyptic event kills about ninety percent of the human population leading to the life of the pre-technological age. In such chaotic world of the narrative, this research work attempts to identify the elements that signal post-pandemic- possibilities. At the end of the novel, the characters see a town with electric light signaling the revival of previous human civilization. This evidence indicates the hope for a better future. For the analysis of the situation of optimism and pessimism presented in the novel, the critical ideas of Lawrence Buell and Val Plumwood are employed. Their ideas that emphasise the interdependence between the biotic and abiotic world are used for the interpretation of the primary text to expose how the novel creates eco-conscious and optimism in the readers.

Literature Review

The novel *Station Eleven* has the potentiality of multiple interpretations that have attracted numerous critics. The success of the novel to evoke both terror and empathy; is discussed by Gilbert (2014) in her book review. She praises, "Mandel displays the impressive skill of evoking both terror and empathy which I credit to her background as mystery author" (p. 1). This is the quality of post-apocalyptic fiction. In the novel, many of the events and situations generate both terror and empathy. Similarly, Hunter (2014) compliments the novel with the issue of advocating the value of art in times of crisis in her essay. Even in a crisis, the performers and singers are continuing their work to make the world better. Highlighting the value of art, she mentions, "In *Station Eleven* the plague reveals a world that still, despite its collapse, holds on to the importance of arts" (p. 2). Hunter is concerned with showing the value of art in critical situations. This study agrees with him and explores more about the value of art in the regenerating spirit of hope in critical moments.

Caracciolo (2018) argues that the novel presents both worlds: pre- and post-apocalyptic to create eagerness for the pre-apocalyptic world. He focuses on the use of negative strategies by the author in his interpretation, "The narrator's insistence on the monochromatic landscape is the main route through which negation operates in the novel: while *Station Eleven* focuses on the denial of objects, technologies, and practices of pre-world" (p. 231). Showing the absence of technological advancements in the pre-apocalyptic world in the post-apocalyptic world, the writer creates a longing

for that world. This research is not limited to the negative strategies for positive results, moreover explores the hidden positive aspects that generate hope in the readers.

De Cristofaro (2018) discusses the challenge that the novel poses to apocalyptic tradition, western modernity and its metanarratives. He states, “*Station Eleven* self-reflexively emphasizes this difference between traditional and contemporary apocalyptic imagination.” (p. 4). Cristofaro’s focus is to depict how contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction like this novel are different from theological tradition. Recent post-apocalyptic fiction is more contemporary problem oriented. This research agrees with him regarding his view on recent post-apocalyptic fiction and its contemporary problem orientation. It further explores the presentation of the dialectics of optimism and pessimism in the novel.

Bellamy (2021) discusses the novel as an energy apocalypse and shows how in the absence of energy the world becomes static. He asserts, “*Station Eleven* is a novel useful for thinking about energy precisely because it takes other stories as its less focus: the exploration of abandoned homes, the litany of lost experience, and the people who make a home out of an airport” (p. 189-90). This crisis makes even normal human activities impossible. Bellamy is right in his idea of the energy crisis, but his only concern is to highlight the problem of the loss. This study focuses on the positive aspects and their indication of better possibilities.

The above literature reviews indicate that the novel has been analyzed from multiple perspectives. Gilbert praises Mandel's skill to evoke both terror and empathy and Carcasio points out the reason for presenting both: pre and post-apocalyptic worlds. Hunter highlights the issue concerning the value of art in the time of crisis whereas Cristofero points out how the novel differs from traditional apocalyptic imagination as a modern one. Bellamy asserts its ability to show the critical situation in the absence of energy. However, these critics have paid less attention to the crisis caused by human self-centeredness as well as the negative consequences of human indifference to the autonomy of nature. Moreover, they have failed to pay serious attention to the indications of the post-pandemic possibilities of the human civilization's revival. This is the research gap this study aims to fulfil.

Methodology

This research work follows the qualitative research design and uses textual analysis method accessing data from both primary and secondary sources. Selected primary text *Station Eleven* by St, John Mandel is the primary data under scrutiny. Including this text, other books, academic journals and different internet sources have been used to support the claim. Textual data from the primary text are critically analyzed using critical insight into ecocriticism with a special focus on the critical ideas of Lawrence Buell and Val Plumwood.

Theoretical Modality

Environmental literature aims to generate the idea of intimacy and essentiality of the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. The essentiality of interconnectedness is expressed as, “The universe must be unified, interconnected and interpenetrated. Everything interconnects and affects everything else, which is why the notion of macrocosm and microcosm is so essential to cosmology” (Tucker, 1991, p. 62). Tucker is praised for his view that things of the world, whether living or nonliving, are interdependent to each other. Disturbance in one part affects the whole chain. But people disregard this web of interdependence, taking human beings as superior and masters of the world. Reorientation in our perspective is to look at the relationship between humans and nature. Buell (2011) argues, “I continue to believe that reorientation of human attention and value according to stronger ethics of care for the human environment would make the world a better place for humans and nonhumans” (6). If humans fail to care about the ecological balance, the world will not be an

appropriate place to live. Only mutual care of the whole ecology can make the world a better place to live.

Lawrence Buell, the leading thinker of the environmental apocalypse trend, presents the literary vision of environmental catastrophe in his essay, "Environmental Apocalypticism". Among the master metaphors he relates to the whole order of nature, the metaphor of the web is very crucial to talking about the interdependence of plants and animals. "Plants and animals are after all bound together; bodies and the world are caught in a network of dependence" (Buell, 1995, p. 283). To prophesy the unintended consequences of human interventions to nature and its worldwide disaster, Buell brings the reference of the two writers who have used web metaphors. He claims that Rachael Carson in *Silent Spring* and Leslie Marmon Silko in *Ceremony* present the disaster caused by the introduction of DDT in the food chain and the release of the atomic energy of uranium in bombs that collapsed the whole web of life.

Buell (1995) defines 'apocalypse' as a master metaphor that is haunting environmentalists. He states, "Apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal" (p. 285). This metaphor has become an important part of modern fiction. Though critics like Jem Bendell argue that environmental apocalypse never happens, it is still significant to warn people. Indicating the purpose of apocalyptic literature Buell (1995) argues, "We create an image of doom to avert doom" (p. 295). It means apocalyptic literature creates dystopian events to avert such events compelling people to think seriously.

Plumwood (2002) in her essay "The Blind Spots of Centrism and Human Self-Enclosure" sees problems in human rationality that denies ecological crisis. In her words, "Dominant policies of ecological denial add to the evidence that the ecological crisis is not just or even primarily a crisis of technology, but is rather a crisis of rationality, morality, and imagination" (p. 97). The more we deny the problem, the more it becomes critical. Because of that, the world faces unforeseen critical catastrophes. The better way is to accept the crisis, think seriously and make our behaviour eco-friendly. According to Plumwood rationalist culture has fostered a version of human-self enclosure and human-centeredness. This anthropocentrism promotes various damaging forms of epistemic remoteness that walls us off from nature in order to exploit it. Plumwood also talks about the techniques that rationalist culture uses to impose anthropocentrism up on nature. These techniques are otherization, homogenization, backgrounding, instrumentalization and incorporation.

This dystopian situation is the result of anthropocentrism that denies the interspecies justice principle that stresses the equal rights of other species on the earth. As marked by Plumwood (2002), "Distributive injustice to non-human fostered by the Othering framework includes the use of so much of the earth for exclusively human purposes that non-human cannot survive or reproduce their kind" (p. 117). Such injustice to nonhuman existence leads to the exploitation of nature and the extinction of species. The outcome of such evil deeds is the apocalypses that threaten the human world and ecosphere

The above-discussed theoretical insights are the analytical tools for the critical analysis of the primary text to see how it presents both pandemic destruction and post-pandemic possibilities. The analysis tries to link the chaos caused by the pandemic as the outcome of human negligence of the symbiotic relation between the biotic and abiotic world.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study in three themes. They are chaotic situations: outcomes of human self-centeredness, electric light and sailing ship: milestones for future possibilities, and art in different forms: mediums to generate hope in crisis.

Chaotic Situation: Outcome of Human Self-centeredness

Loneliness, emptiness and silence characterize the post-apocalyptic world of the novel *Station Eleven*. The most contagious and highly killing Georgia flu creates a situation of horror and terror among people. They fear to come out of their houses and meet anyone else. Human beings are social animals but the same habit of living in a group becomes a danger for survival. Because of the pandemic, every individual feel fear of being exposed to another suspected contamination. The flu spreads so fast that the whole world suffers in a short time. The writer compares its speed with the explosion of the neutron bomb, “There was the flu that exploded like a neutron bomb over the surface of the earth and the shock of the collapse that followed, the first unspeakable years when everyone was travelling, everyone caught on that there was no place they could walk” (Mandel, p. 37). The highly contagious disease affects the world so quickly that all the human systems collapse. It collapses the government, economic and social structures, and the complete human network.

The big towns turn into deserted places. No vehicle, no crowd but just deadly silence and emptiness dominate the world. The writer presents the post-pandemic world, as Jeevan perceives it:

The world had emptied since he'd seen it. There was no movement on the plaza or the street, or the distant expressway. A smell of smoke in the air, with a chemical tinge that smokes a burning office and house fire. But most striking was the absolute absence of electric light. Every sound might mean the end of everything; every shadow could be hiding someone with a gun who wanted his backpack. (Mandel, p. 90)

In addition to silence, the smell of fire burning with a chemical tinge exposes the next step of destruction. Both silence and sound torture people: silence with loneliness and sound with the threat of killing. They are compelled to live under the shadow of death and robbery. The situation becomes so critical that characters like Frank do suicide frightened to face the terrible future.

The cause of the disease proves to be the anthropocentric behaviour of people and their material greed. The people are so selfish that they take marriage just as very simple matter as if it is done for divorce. Arthur's name and fame-seeking tendency have made him like a machine. He never attempts to realize the emotions of his wife and children. No expectation of proper dealing with the abiotic world from such emotionless people. Jeevan is another character who is totally guided by the material ambition in the beginning. However, his change is remarkable. Their interference in the natural course invites many ecological problems. Unplanned industrialization, unnecessary attachment with name, fame, power and property; and carelessness to nature are the parts of the modern world that are responsible for the disaster. They cause different problems in public health. Highlighting industrial pollution and its consequences Carson (1964) in *Silent Spring* explains, “As the tide of chemicals born of the industrial age has arisen to engulf our environment, a drastic change has come about like the most public health problem” (p. 186). The acts of human beings altering natural course for benefit have invited different devastations.

Different types of pollution are causes of the diseases and pandemics in modern times. The Georgia flu cannot be out of these causes. It must be the outcome of human interference in the web of interdependence. In association with this issue Buell (1995) states, “Human intervention into the natural system unintentionally makes a point about the unintended consequences” (p. 382). The consequence is the pandemic affecting the whole of humanity. Our realization of the value of ecological balance and eco-friendly behaviours only can protect us from such devastating consequences.

In the anthropocentric present world, human encroachment is seen everywhere. The natural world is limited to the reservations and national parks. In the words of Shiva (1997) expressed in *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*, “The land, the forest, the river, the ocean and the atmosphere have all been colonised, eroded and polluted” (p. 45). The great problem of the modern world is the exploitation of natural resources. The crisis that is presented in the novel is the result of the over exploitation of nature for greed guided capitalistic motive. The benefit motive is so strong that it neglects the autonomy of the natural world and leads to overexploitation. This ultimately invites the apocalypses that threaten human civilization.

Art in Different Forms: Medium to Generate Hope in Crisis

Concerning the issue of generating positive possibilities in the bleak world of *Station Eleven*, the writer presents the vital role of art in different forms. The stage performance of the travelling symphony with the musicians is an important part of the novel. Their slogan ‘just survival is insufficient’ (Mandel, p. 119) creates a positive situation to regenerate optimism among the survivors. The role of the comic book *Dr. Eleven* is very crucial to provide an outlet of the pain and suffering of the characters and enhance the positive possibility of human civilization in a post-pandemic world. Miranda transforms her life's pain into something beautiful and sustained art. It becomes the token of the pre-pandemic world to the post-pandemic world. Hunter (2017) highlights this aspect in “Seeing the Hopeful Sides of Post-Apocalyptic Fictions” and explains this novel as an example to show the value of art in critical situations. He mentions, “As ever, dystopian and utopian visions are closer together than we might imagine: in *Station Eleven* the plague reveals a world that still depicts its collapse and holds on to the importance of art” (p. 2). Hunter reveals that even in the nearly collapsed world, the writer presents the importance of art. Different forms of art play roles in making the post-pandemic world worthy of living.

Travelling symphony aims to encourage the surviving communities. It is a group of actors and musicians, who travel from place to place performing Shakespeare’s plays and music. They help to reduce the stress of the pandemic and entertain survivors, imparting the message that there is still beauty in the world despite the loss. Mandel writes, “Twenty years after the end of air travel, the caravans of the Travelling Symphony moved slowly under a white-hot sky” (Mandel, p. 35). They travel all the times, as they are sure that only their movement is valuable. “Keep walking. Keep walking. Keep walking” (Mandel, p. 194). The suffering caused by the pandemic is extreme, and unbearable in a normal way. The combination of strong friendship and art makes life worth living. They do not limit this medicine of the pandemic crisis within them but share it with other living human communities. “But what made it bearable were the friendship, of course, the camaraderie and the music and the Shakespeare, the moment of transcendental beauty and joy” (Mandel, p. 47). Their performance and music give the idea of love, loss and human struggle. The post-apocalyptic world is bleak and desolate. In such a world of suffering, the role of art is very crucial; it helps to create beauty and joy. Scholars Abdull et al. (2021) reflect on the value of art to ease the suffering of the pandemic. They write, “Art is a highly engaging tool that promotes positive well-being and increases community engagement and participation” (p. 1). This idea of the value of art really interacts with the performance of the Travelling Symphony and their attempts to bring joy in the world devastated by the Georgian Flu.

Art cannot fulfil the physical needs of the people; it has its value. It teaches people about the way of solving problems. More than this, it prepares them psychologically with the thought that pain and pleasure both are parts of human life. Even in trouble, it encourages struggle. The theatrical activities and music remind us that these experiences are universal and enduring. These performances

are important for the members of the travelling symphony to create self-satisfaction. “Sometimes the travelling symphony thought that what they were doing was noble. There were moments around the campfire when someone would say something invigorating about the importance of art and everyone would find it easier to sleep that night” (Mandel, p. 119). The members of the travelling symphony become happy when they hear that they are doing a noble job in a world full of evil deeds.

The performance of the plays and music are not just professional activities for the characters. They are the unavoidable parts of their life. The characters’ names are from the musical instruments. There are names of the characters like Six Guitarist, Viola etc. who have abandoned their former names and taken new ones. “I’m glad to get out of that field”, Viola said. She had a different name when she was younger but had taken on the name of her instrument after the collapse” (Mandel, p. 129). This act of taking names from musical instruments indicates the role of art to give meaning and solace to the people in critical situations. Their identities are linked with the musical instruments that they play. Even after the collapse of many things, art remains with them. The value of art exposed by Carley (2020) matches with the situation of this novel. She claims, “Art allows us to examine what it means to be human, to avoid and express, and to bring people and ideas together” (p. 3). The value of art is high in times of crisis since it gives meaning to human beings, avoids stress and brings people and ideas together. The names of the characters from musical instruments indicate that music gives meaning to life.

The comic book *Dr. Eleven* is another source of hope and inspiration for many of the characters in the novel and readers. The comic book tells the story of a physicist Dr. Eleven who lives in a highly advanced space station. He travels through parallel universes in search of a cure for a deadly virus. This journey resembles the journey of the characters in the novel who are travelling from place to place. They are performing plays and music to cure the loneliness, stress and frustration of the survivors. The comic book offers a sense of possibility and hope with the message that there is a way out of the current critical situation. The heroic character Dr. Eleven in the dystopian world with his pursuit of justice and kindness does an inspirational function. Sometimes Dr. Eleven expresses his nostalgia for life on the earth. “I stood looking over my damaged home and tried to forget the sweetness of life on Earth” (Mandel, p. 42). This nostalgia reminds the nostalgia of the people in the post-apocalyptic world of the novel. Especially those people who suffer much from the nostalgia, who lived in the pre-apocalyptic world and remember the sweetness of life. Chaudhary (2013) warns us about the same situation in the modern world. She writes, “If we fail to take decisive action, if we fail to bring about fundamental change in our way of thinking and doing politics we just might sink and drown” (p. 267). Then what remains with us is nostalgia. This association of the comic book with the reality of life creates a sense of attachment to the fictional world. This helps to empower confidence in the spirit of the characters and readers. At the same time, it gives the message of protecting our ecology in time.

The fictional work functions as a medium to express the emotions of the writer Miranda Carroll and a source of inspiration for the reader Kristen Raymond. Miranda’s relationship with Arthur as first wife does not last long. As Miranda grieves the loss of the world she builds with Arthur, her characters mourn the loss of life on the earth. The problematic relation with her husband is pacified with her deeper involvement in the world of the comic. Her expression in the comic book gives way to her suffering in real life. She reflects on the distance between herself and her husband in the comic book, shifting her focus to the normal people from the hero. “For years Dr. Eleven had been the hero of the narrative, but lately he’d begun to annoy her, and she’d become more interested in the Undersea. These people live out their lives in the underwater fallout shelters, clinging to the hope that the world

they remembered could be restored” (Mandel, p. 213). Her shift in focus is her special way of handling the trouble in her relationship with her husband. Her characters in the comic book are hopeful of restoring the post-apocalyptic world. The relationship between Miranda and the comic book *Dr. Eleven* and its role in generating hope in critical situations resembles the ideas expressed by Noyes (2020) in “Great Works of Art from Trouble Times”. The writer stresses the value of art in times of great trouble, “As the world seems to shift and change around us in new and frightening ways every day, many of us seek solace in the arts. From great music to television, movies and the fine arts can be a distraction and balm in troubled times” (p. 4). Art’s role becomes that of balm in times of trouble. That is why *Dr. Eleven* generates hope in other characters and the readers of the novel. Kirsten’s attachment to the comic book gives her a purpose. Her reading inspires her and increases her confidence in critical situations. That is why she takes the book as a token of the pre-apocalyptic world and wants to protect it.

Focusing on the value of the comic book, Caracciolo (2018) writes, “The comic book connects all the major characters without them becoming fully aware of one another’s lives; only the reader has a complete picture of the comic book’s history” (p. 230). Knowingly or unknowingly, it connects the major characters of the novel. That is why Kirsten wants to protect it at all costs. Before beginning her journey to the new land, she gives one volume of the comic book to Clark to keep in the Museum of Civilization for the new generation. Thus, the graphic novel *Dr. Eleven* illustrates that art is a way to deal with painful emotions and a tremendous loss for both the creator and the readers/audiences. Similarly, Northover (2016) also highlights the value of literature concerning post-apocalyptic horror. He points out, “Literature may help to end the threat and hopefully forestall its unimaginable trauma” (p. 89). Northover focuses on the value of a literary text to decrease the trauma of certain pandemics. In the novel, the comic book proves to be the means to avert the traumatic effect of the pandemic.

Overall, the performances of ‘travelling symphony’ and the comic book *Dr. Eleven* as art forms are powerful symbols of hope, resilience, and the human capacity for creativity and imagination. They exemplify the idea that even in the face of disaster, we can still find beauty and meaning in the world. They clarify that different forms of art can provide a vital lifeline in times of crisis.

Electric Light and Sailing Ship: Milestones for Future Possibilities

The town with the electric light and the possibility of sailing ships are the two most important indicators that signal optimism in the post-apocalyptic world of *Station Eleven*. Clark identifies a human settlement with electric light in the distance from the Severn City Airport. He shows this extraordinary thing to Kirsten and other members of the travelling symphony. In the beginning, they do not believe but the reality convinces them. The travelling symphony makes the same place their next destination. “In the distance, pinpricks of light arranged into a grid. There, plainly visible on the side of a hill some miles distant: a town, or a village, whose streets were lit up with electricity” (Mandel, p. 311). Electric light symbolically stands for the progress of human civilization. It is not just a place with electric light but indicates the possibility of progress and continuity of human civilization nearly collapsed by the Georgia flu. It shows the possibility of conducting machines and bringing means of communication into use. It also gives a sense of normalcy in human society. In the last paragraph of the novel, the writer presents many more possibilities. Clark reflects:

Is it possible that somewhere ships are 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 armed with maps and knowledge of

stars, driven by need or perhaps simply by curiosity: whatever became of the countries on the other side? If nothing else, it is pleasant to consider the possibility. He likes the thought of ships moving over the water, towards another world just out of sight. (Mandel, p. 333)

The concluding paragraph of the novel opens the possibility of different activities that were impossible in the last twenty years. Concerning electricity, symphonies and newspapers Clark assumes the possibility of sailing ships somewhere on the other side of the earth. The idea of moving ships provided extreme joy to Clark because the sailing ship is one of the most influential inventions of human history. It finally imparts a strong message of the continuity of human civilization in the new world.

Cristofaro (2018) observes the sense of optimism in the final passage of the novel. He argues, “On the other hand, the key element of the novel’s final passage is the sense of possibility” (p. 17). For him, a sense of possibility is the essence of the final passage. Similarly, Diamond (2008) talks about the possibility of a better future, despite the degraded present. His faith is in the capability of human beings to learn from past mistakes. He points out, “My main hope for my son’s generation is that we may choose to learn from the fates of the collapsed societies” (p. 259). Learning from the mistakes, all should follow an ecofriendly path. The greed-guided activities are making the ecosphere sick. Its wellness counts much for human survival and regeneration. Only in our true endeavour to keep the ecosphere well, the survival of the world depends.

Conclusion and Implications

The discussion of the novel *Station Eleven* analyzing both the horrible and hopeful situations indicates the interplay of optimism and pessimism. Overall situation of the novel is bleak, dark and static caused by the pandemic. However, our scrutiny of the plot reveals the events and situations that signal optimism. Different art forms like theatrical performances, music, comic books, and the town with electric light and the sailing ship are the indications that signal post-pandemic possibilities of the revival of human civilization. The words of the character Elizabeth give the essence of our discussion, “All these moments when everyone must have thought the world was ending, but all those moments, they were all temporary. It always passes” (Mandel, p. 248). Even if human civilization is near collapse, there are many signals of its revival. Surpassing the crisis will surely turn into normality.

In sum up, human inclination toward name, fame and material achievement makes them indifferent to other aspects of life. They neglect family, society and the ecology. Moreover, they interfere with the course of nature which invites apocalyptic events like the Georgia Flu causing great devastation. The dystopian events in the novel aim to inform people about the consequences of anthropocentric intervention in the system of nature and warn them to make their behaviours eco-friendly. At the same time, the novel includes certain hopeful events to signal positive possibilities. Similarly, there is a clear indication of the value of art in crisis for generating optimism in the readers. The value of this research work resides in its success to create eco-consciousness in the readers and inspire struggling spirits in crises.

References

- Abdullahi, I., Chand, K. C., Zenone, M., & Ardiles, P. (2021). Art during tough times: Reflection from an art-based health promotion initiative during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Global Health Promotion: SAGE Journals*.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757975921998638>

- Bellamy, B. R. (2021). *Reminder of the American century: Post-apocalyptic novels in the age of US decline*. Wesleyan University Press.
- Buell, L. (1995). *The environmental imagination: Thoreau, nature writing and formation of American culture*. Harvard University Press.
- Buell, L. (2011). Ecocriticism: Some emerging trends. *Quai Parle*, vol. 19 (2), 87-115.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5250/quaiparle.19.2.0087>
- Caracciolo, M. (2018). Negative strategies and world disruption in post-apocalyptic fiction. *Style*, 52 (3), 222-241. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/105325> Style. 52.3.0222
- Carley, K. (2020). Why we need arts in times of crisis. *Art Work Archive*.
<https://artworkarchive.com/why-we-need-art-in-time-of-crisis>
- Carson, R. (1994). *Silent spring*. Fawcett Crest Books, 1964.
- Chaudhary, A. (2013). How sane are we? In Nissani, M. and Subedi, S. (Ed.), *Flax golden tales: An interdisciplinary approach to learning English (167-75)*. Ekta Books.
- De Cristofaro, D. (2018). Critical temporalities: Station eleven and the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel. *Open Library of Humanities*, 4(2), 1-26.
 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.206>
- Diamond, J. (2008). Adaptive failure: Easter's end. In Nissani, M. and Lohani, S. (Ed.). *Flax golden tales (246-259)*. Ekta Books.
- Gilbert, T. (2014). What was best about the world? *Los Angeles Review of Books*.
[Lareviewofbooks.org/article/best-world/](http://lareviewofbooks.org/article/best-world/)
- Glotfelty, C. and Harold F. (1996). *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology*. The University of Georgia Press.
- Hunter, M. (2017). Seeing the hopeful side of post-apocalyptic fiction. *LITERATURE HUB*.
Lithub.com.
- Mandel, E. St. J. (2022). *Station eleven (2nd ed.)*. Picador.
- Northover, R. A. (2016). Ecological apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's MaddAdam trilogy. *Studia Neophilologica*, 88(1), 88-95.
- Noyes, C. (2020). Great works of art from troubled times. *Arts and Objects*.
[Artsandobject.com/great-work-art-trouble times](http://Artsandobject.com/great-work-art-trouble-times).
- Plumwood, V. (2002). The blindspots of centrism and human self-enclosure. *Environmental culture: The ecological crisis of reason* (pp. 97-122). Routledge.
- Shiva, V. (1997). *Biopiracy: The plunder of nature and knowledge*. South End Press, 1997.
- Taflinger, R. F. (1996). The sociological basis of greed. *Taking Advantage*.
Public.wsu.edu/~taflinger/socgreed.html
- Tucker, E. M. (1991). The reverence of Chinese neo-Confucianism for the reverence of nature. *Environmental History Review*, 15(2), 55-59.
- White L. Jr. (2008). The historical root of our ecological crisis. *Ecocriticism: The essential reader* (pp. 40-46). Routledge.

Author's Bio

Prakash Sharma is a lecturer at the Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Dhawalagiri Multiple Campus, Baglung, Nepal. His areas of interest are cultural studies and environmental studies. He has contributed to the publication of mini-research and research articles in national and international journals in these fields. At present, he is pursuing his PhD at TU, under the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in the environmental studies area.