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Final

Death and survival are the linking factors between the narratives of all pandemic or apocalyptic novels that were read this semester. *Earth Abides*, *Into the Forest*, and *Station Eleven* are prime examples. Each novel has a different take on what it means to survive. When these differences are synthesized, the bigger picture of the pandemic is revealed: to survive, you must live because “survival is insufficient” (Mandel 58). George R. Stewart’s *Earth Abides* follows the life of Isherwood “Ish” Williams as he discovers that while he was holed up in his cabin, a virus had spread throughout the world and killed billions, leaving the survivors to fend for themselves by any means necessary. On his journey across America, Ish is joined by a beagle he names Princess and then settles back down in his hometown and marries Emma. It is here where most of the story takes place. More people join their little growing community, and soon, they are two generations into life after the pandemic.

In *Into the Forest*, written by Jean Hegland, the novel follows Nell and her family as they learn how to continue living in a world decimated by all kinds of diseases. Like *Earth Abides*, *Into the Forest* follows Nell’s journey as she lives in her small home with her older sister, Eva. When the story starts, her father and mother are already dead, but there are flashbacks to when they were alive and how they died. Their mother went first, dying of cancer, and then their father died bleeding out from a chainsaw wound in the forest. Like Ish, Nell and Eva are cut off from the rest of their town because of how far away they live; however, unlike Ish, they stay at the house until the very end, when they move into a hollowed-out tree trunk in the forest.

Unlike *Earth Abides* and *Into the Forest*, Emily St. John Mandel's novel *Station Eleven* follows many people and, like *Into the Forest*, jumps between the present and the past to inform the reader how the world got to where it is in the present. This novel follows Kristen Raymonde, Arthur Leander, Miranda Carroll, Jeevan Chaudhary, and Clark Thompson before and after the emergence of the Georgia Flu. Arthur and Miranda represent life before the pandemic, even though Miranda died because of the virus. Clark and Jeevan represent the generation that has now lived in two different times, life before and life after the Georgia Flu. Kirsten represents the first generation after the pandemic because she remembers very little about her childhood.

The authors of these novels employ narrative strategies such as characters and foreshadowing. Each novel consists of at least one character that fulfills each character type: educator, loner, and next generation. The educator wants to keep the past world alive with the next generation by teaching them history, English, and geography. The most prominent character to display this archetype in *Earth Abides* is Ish, who tries to teach his children about geography since that was what he studied before the pandemic. For *Into the Forest*, this role is filled by Nell, who continues to learn through the encyclopedias. However, she very rarely learns something that helps her in life. Her encyclopedia knowledge comes in handy in two instances: when she is helping her sister give birth and how to live off the forest. The educator in *Station Eleven* is Clark, who only enters the role when he starts the museum at the terminal. He is different from the other educators teaching the next generation out of obligation. However, he does it for fun and teaches anyone who wants to learn about the old world. While Ish, Nell, and Clark are the core character types of educators, all the characters try to keep hold of the past through a calendar-like system.

After each novel's pandemic hits, the characters try to keep track of the days. In *Earth Abides*, Ish and Em toss out the old calendar and start a new one where they do not keep track of the specific days but try to keep track of certain holidays, and when 365 days have come and gone which is when they will name the year that had just past. The pandemic in *Into the Forest* comes in the middle of the year. Hence, Nell and her family can keep track of the days, weeks, and months until the end of the year, when she starts to make a calendar for the new year, keeping the same days and months. This is the only novel in which characters try to hold on to the past's way of counting the days. The characters of *Station Eleven* do something like Ish and Em. When the pandemic hits, it is like everyone decided to restart time, and at the end of the first year with the flu, they call it Year One. When the next year ends, Year Two, and so on. The use of foreshadowing in each novel is not entirely similar. However, it is similar enough to be worked through and synthesized for the larger narrative.

Foreshadowing works in both *Station Eleven* and *Into the Forest* by jumping back and forth in time, giving the readers information that will help them figure out what will happen at specific points in the novels. In *Station Eleven*, for instance, in the before, Miranda is working on a comic where people are living on a moon-sized space station. There are two sets of people aboard: those who want to go back to Earth and those who want to stay in space. This foreshadows the conflict between people in the after who want to hold onto the past—representing the people who live in the “Undersea”—and those who want to learn how to survive in this new world—Dr. Eleven and his people. Dr. Eleven's friend, Captain Lonagan, tries to get him to understand: “You should try to understand them. [...] All they want is to see sunlight again. Can you blame them” (Mandel 83)? The people who have learned to live life in the after

do not understand this clash of wants. *Into the Forest*'s use of foreshadowing is less about the conflict of a before and after and more like Chekov's gun, but in Nell and Eva's case, it is gasoline. They find gasoline but argue about how it should be used. Eva wants to dance to music, but Nell wants to save it for a time when they must go into town. At the end of the novel, Eva finally uses the gas on the house because, as she says, "'It'd be too easy to come back. I want us to have no choice'" (Hegland 234). The use of foreshadowing is a crucial part of these two novels. However, since *Earth Abides* is a linear novel, the use of foreshadowing is different. The only practical use of foreshadowing is at the very beginning when The snake bites Ish. The poison from the snake represents the poison that has ravaged Earth, leaving it weak, like Ish is left weak.

The way these three novels weave together variations of the same themes is different yet similar enough to synthesize down to the core point, which is how death affects the survival of the survivors. Through the use of diverse characters and foreshadowing, readers can pick apart the themes of the novels and splice them together into one grand, cohesive narrative. The deaths of characters have forced the survivors to look at life differently. They are not meant to simply survive but to thrive in a world that has decided to spare them.

Works Cited

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Mandel, Emily St. John. *Station Eleven*. Vintage Books, 2015.

Stewart, George R. *Earth Abides*. Fawcett Crest, 1949. http://www.shotgunmilitia.com/files/earth_abides.pdf.