

Title: Emily St. John Mandel

Publication Information

Known As: St. John Mandel, Emily; Mandel, Emily St. John

Canadian Novelist (1979 -)

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PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Born 1979, in Merville, British Columbia, Canada; married Kevin Mandel (a playwright and producer). **Education:** Attended School of Toronto Dance Theatre. **Avocational Interests:** Playing the piano, photography, "long walks through Brooklyn." **Addresses:** Home: Brooklyn, NY. Agent: Katherine Fausset, Curtis Brown, Ltd., 10 Astor Pl., New York, NY 10003. **E-mail:** estjmandel@gmail.com.

CAREER:

Writer. Formerly worked as an administrator for a university in New York, NY; staff writer for *The Millions*.

AWARDS:

Last Night in Montreal, *The Singer's Gun*, and *The Lola Quartet* were named Indie Next Picks; Prix Mystère de la Critique, 2014, for *The Singer's Gun*; National Book Award finalist, 2014, PEN/Faulkner fiction prize finalist, 2015, and Arthur C. Clarke Award, 2015, all for *Station Eleven*.

WORKS:

WRITINGS:

NOVELS

- *Last Night in Montreal*, Unbridled Books (Denver, CO), 2009.
- *The Singer's Gun*, Unbridled Books (Denver, CO), 2010.
- *The Lola Quartet*, Unbridled Books (Cave Creek, AZ), 2012.
- *Station Eleven*, Alfred A. Knopf (New York, NY), 2014.

Contributor to anthologies, including *The Best American Mystery Stories 2013*, edited by Otto Penzler, Mariner Books (New York, NY), 2013, and to periodicals.

Sidelights

Emily St. John Mandel was born in British Columbia, Canada, and studied dance at the School of Toronto Dance Theatre. She

FURTHER READINGS:**FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:****PERIODICALS**

- *Booklist*, May 15, 2009, Kristine Huntley, review of *Last Night in Montreal*, p. 20; May 1, 2012, Kristine Huntley, review of *The Lola Quartet*, p. 80; August 1, 2014, Kristine Huntley, review of *Station Eleven*, p. 35.
- *Guardian* (London, England), September 25, 2014, Justine Jordan, review of *Station Eleven*.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, July 1, 2014, review of *Station Eleven*.
- *Library Journal*, April 1, 2009, Eleanor J. Bader, review of *Last Night in Montreal*, p. 71; April 1, 2012, Susanne Wells, review of *The Lola Quartet*, p. 72.
- *New York Times Book Review*, October 30, 2014, Janet Maslin, review of *Station Eleven*.
- *Publishers Weekly*, April 6, 2009, review of *Last Night in Montreal*, p. 31; March 15, 2010, review of *The Singer's Gun*, p. 38; February 27, 2012, review of *The Lola Quartet*, p. 56; June 23, 2014, review of *Station Eleven*, p. 133.
- *Richmond Review*, January 7, 2010, Shelley Civkin, review of *Last Night in Montreal*, p. 17.
- *This*, November 16, 2014, Nico Mara-McKay, review of *Station Eleven*, p. 40.

ONLINE

- *Beatrice*, <http://beatrice.com/> (May 11, 2009), author interview.
- *BookPage*, <http://bookpage.com/> (May 1, 2010), review of *The Singer's Gun*.
- *Emily St. John Mandel Home Page*, <http://www.emilymandel.com> (December 31, 2014).
- *Herald de Paris*, <http://heralddeparis.com/> (July 25, 2009), Amy Steele, review of *Last Night in Montreal*.
- *Mystery Gazette*, <http://themysterygazette.blogspot.com/> (March 23, 2010), Harriet Klausner, review of *The Singer's Gun*.
- *National Book Foundation Web site*, <http://www.nationalbook.org/> (December 31, 2014), synopsis of *Station Eleven*.
- *PopMatters*, <http://www.popmatters.com/> (September 14, 2009), Diane Leach, review of *Last Night in Montreal*.
- *Three Guys One Book*, <http://threeguysonebook.com/> (May 30, 2010), review of *Last Night in Montreal* and author interview.
- *Tor.com*, <http://www.tor.com/> (September 12, 2014), Sarah McCarry, author interview.
- *Words to Mouth*, <http://wordstomouth.com/> (June 21, 2009), review of *Last Night in Montreal*.

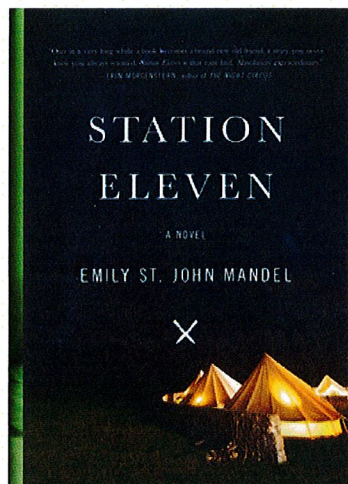
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Popularity: ★★★★★

Station Eleven (Sep 2014)

Author: Mandel, Emily St. John, 1979-

Adult Fiction 

Description:

An actor playing King Lear dies onstage just before a cataclysmic event changes the future of everyone on Earth. What will be valued and what will be discarded? Will art have a place in a world that has lost so much? What will make life worth living? These are just some of the issues explored in this beautifully written dystopian novel. Recommended for fans of David Mitchell, John Scalzi and Kate Atkinson. -- Janet Lockhart for LibraryReads.

Book Appeal Terms: Definition of Appeal Terms

Genre:

Adult books for young adults; Apocalyptic fiction; Canadian fiction; Literary fiction; Multiple perspectives; Science fiction

Character: Complex; Flawed; Sympathetic

Storyline: Nonlinear

Tone: Haunting; Moving

Writing Style: Compelling; Lyrical; Stylistically complex

Persistent link to this record (Permalink):

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=noh&tg=UI&an=:>

Database:

NoveList

Booklist:

/ Starred Review */* Mandel's (The Lola Quartet, 2012) ambitious, magnificent fourth novel examines the collapse of civilization after a deadly flu wipes out most of the world's population. Moving gracefully from the first days of the plague to years before it and decades after, Mandel anchors the story to Arthur Leander, a famous actor who dies of a heart attack while playing King Lear on stage. We see glimpses of Arthur's life years before his passing: his doomed relationship with his first wife, the exploitation of an old friendship, his failings as a father. And then we follow characters whose lives Arthur touched in some way: the paramedic who tried to save him, his second ex-wife and their damaged son, the child actress who joins a traveling theater troupe-cum-orchestra. In this postpandemic time, people live in gas stations and motels, curate museums filled with cell phones and car engines, and treasure tabloids and comic books. One comic book gives the novel its title and encapsulates the longing felt by the survivors for the world they have lost. Mandel's vision is not only achingly beautiful but also startlingly plausible, exposing the fragile beauty of the world we inhabit. In the burgeoning postapocalyptic literary genre, Mandel's transcendent, haunting novel deserves a place alongside *The Road* (2006), *The Passage* (2010), and *The Dog Stars* (2012). --Huntley, Kristine (Reviewed 08-01-2014) (Booklist, vol 110, number 22, p35)

Publishers Weekly:

Few themes are as played-out as that of post-apocalypse, but St. John Mandel (*The Lola Quartet*) finds a unique point of departure from which to examine civilization's wreckage, beginning with a performance of *King Lear* cut short by the onstage death of its lead, Arthur Leander, from an apparent heart attack. On hand are an aspiring paramedic, Jeevan Chaudary, and a young actress, Kirsten Raymonde; Leander's is only the first death they will witness, as a pandemic, the so-called Georgia Flu, quickly wipes out all but a few pockets of civilization. Twenty years later, Kirsten, now a member of a musical theater troupe, travels through a wasteland inhabited by a dangerous prophet and his followers. Guided only by the graphic novel called *Station Eleven* given to her by Leander before his death, she sets off on an arduous journey toward the Museum of Civilization, which is housed in a disused airport terminal. Kirsten is not the only survivor with a curious link to the actor: the story explores Jeevan's past as an entertainment journalist and, in a series of flashbacks, his role in Leander's decline. Also joining the cast are Leander's first wife, Miranda, who is the artist behind *Station Eleven*, and his best friend, 70-year-old Clark Thompson, who tends to the terminal settlement Kirsten is seeking. With its wild fusion of celebrity gossip and grim future, this book shouldn't work nearly so well, but St. John Mandel's examination of the connections between individuals with disparate destinies makes a case for the worth of even a single life. (Sept.) --Staff (Reviewed June 23, 2014) (Publishers Weekly, vol 261, issue 25, p)

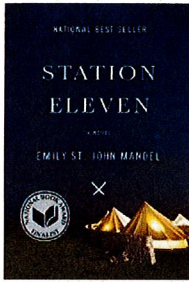
Library Journal:

/ Starred Review */* Onstage at a Toronto theater, an aging movie star drops dead while performing the title role in *King Lear*. As the other cast members share a drink at the lobby bar before heading into the snowy night, none can know what horrors await them: "Of all of them 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." The Shakespearean tragedy unfolds into a real-life calamity just before the entire world is overtaken by a catastrophic flu pandemic that will kill off the vast majority of the population. The narrative is organized around several figures present at the theater that night, and the tale travels back and forth in time, from the years before the pandemic through the following 20 years in a world without government, electricity, telecommunications, modern medicine, or transportation. In this lawless and dangerous new reality, a band of actors and musicians performs Shakespeare for the small communities that have come into existence in the otherwise abandoned landscape. In this unforgettable, haunting, and almost hallucinatory portrait of life at the edge, those who remain struggle to retain their basic humanity and make connections with the vanished world through art, memory, and remnants of popular culture. VERDICT This is a brilliantly constructed, highly literary, postapocalyptic page-turner, and should be a breakout novel for Mandel. [See Prepub Alert, 3/24/14.]—Lauren Gilbert, Sachem P.L., Holbrook, NY --Susan Moritz (Reviewed September 1, 2014) (Library Journal, vol 139, issue 14, p100)

Kirkus:

/ Starred Review */* Survivors and victims of a pandemic populate this quietly ambitious take on a post-apocalyptic world where some strive to preserve art, culture and kindness. In her fourth novel, Mandel (*The Lola Quartet*, 2012, etc.) moves away from the literary thriller form of her previous books but keeps much of the intrigue. The story concerns the before and after of a catastrophic virus called the Georgia Flu that wipes out most of the world's population. On one side of the timeline are the survivors, mainly a traveling troupe of musicians and actors and a stationary group stuck for years in an airport. On the other is

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Station Eleven

Emily St. John Mandel, 2014

Knopf Doubleday

352 pp.

ISBN-13: 9780385353304

Summary

An audacious, darkly glittering novel set in the eerie days of civilization's collapse, *Station Eleven* tells the spellbinding story of a Hollywood star, his would-be savior, and a nomadic group of actors roaming the scattered outposts of the Great Lakes region, risking everything for art and humanity.

One snowy night Arthur Leander, a famous actor, has a heart attack onstage during a production of *King Lear*. Jeevan Chaudhary, a paparazzo-turned-EMT, is in the audience and leaps to his aid. A child actress named Kirsten Raymonde watches in horror as Jeevan performs CPR, pumping Arthur's chest as the curtain drops, but Arthur is dead.

That same night, as Jeevan walks home from the theater, a terrible flu begins to spread. Hospitals are flooded and Jeevan and his brother barricade themselves inside an apartment, watching out the window as cars clog the highways, gunshots ring out, and life disintegrates around them.

Fifteen years later, Kirsten is an actress with the Traveling Symphony. Together, this small troupe moves between the settlements of an altered world, performing Shakespeare and music for scattered communities of survivors. Written on their caravan, and tattooed on Kirsten's arm is a line from *Star Trek*: "Because survival is insufficient." But when they arrive in St. Deborah by the Water, they encounter a violent prophet who digs graves for anyone who dares to leave.

Spanning decades, moving back and forth in time, and vividly depicting life before and after the pandemic, this suspenseful, elegiac novel is rife with beauty. As Arthur falls in and out of love, as Jeevan watches the newscasters say their final good-byes, and as Kirsten finds herself caught in the crosshairs of the prophet, we see the strange twists of fate that connect them all.

A novel of art, memory, and ambition, *Station Eleven* tells a story about the relationships that sustain us, the ephemeral nature of fame, and the beauty of the world as we know it. (*From the publisher.*)

Author Bio

- Birth—ca. 1979-80
- Where—Comox, British Columbia, Canada
- Education—Toronto Dance Theater.
- Awards—Prix Mystere de la Critique (France)
- Currently—lives in New York City, New York, USA

"St. John's my middle name. The books go under M."

Emily St. John Mandel was born and raised on the west coast of British Columbia, Canada. She studied contemporary dance at the School of Toronto Dance Theatre and lived briefly in Montreal before relocating to New York.

Her fourth novel, *Station Eleven*, published in 2014 was long listed for the National Book Award. All three of her previous novels—*Last Night in Montreal*, *The Singer's Gun*, and *The Lola Quartet*—were Indie Next Picks, and *The Singer's Gun* was the 2014 winner of the Prix Mystere de la Critique in France. Her short fiction and essays have been anthologized in numerous collections, including Best American Mystery Stories 2013. She is a staff writer for The Millions. She lives in New York City with her husband. (*From the [author's website](http://www.emilymandel.com) (<http://www.emilymandel.com>) .*)

Book Reviews

Mandel is an able and exuberant storyteller, and many readers will be won over by her nimble interweaving of her characters' lives and fates...*Station Eleven* is as much a mystery as it is a post-apocalyptic tale, and Mandel is especially good at planting clues and raising the kind of plot-thickening questions that keep the reader turning pages...If *Station Eleven* reveals little insight into the effects of extreme terror and misery on humanity, it offers comfort and hope to those who believe, or want to believe, that doomsday can be survived, that in spite of everything people will remain good at heart, and that when they start building a new world they will want what was best about the old.

Sigrid Nunez - New York Times Book Review

In *Station Eleven*, by Emily St. John Mandel, the Georgia Flu becomes airborne the night Arthur Leander dies during his performance as King Lear. Within months, all airplanes are grounded, cars run out of gas and electricity flickers out as most of the world's population dies. The details of Arthur's life before the flu and what happens afterward to his friends, wives and lovers create a surprisingly beautiful story of human relationships amid such devastation. Among the survivors are Kirsten, a child actor at the time of Arthur's death who lives with no memory of what happened to her the first year after the flu.... A gorgeous retelling of Lear unfolds through Arthur's flashbacks and Kirsten's attempt to stay alive.

Nancy Hightower - Washington Post

Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* sensitively explores the dynamics of....a theater troupe called the Traveling Symphony whose musicians and actors perform Shakespeare for small communities around the Great Lakes. Ms. Mandel.... writ[es] with cool intelligence and poised understatement. Her real interest is in examining friendships and love affairs and the durable consolations of art.

Sam Sacks - Wall Street Journal

If you're planning to write a post-apocalyptic novel, you're going to have to breathe some new life into it. Emily St. John Mandel does that with her new book, *Station Eleven*.... The story is told through several characters, including an A-list actor, his ex-wives, a religious prophet and the Traveling Symphony, a ragtag group of Shakespearean actors and musicians who travel to settlements performing for the survivors. Each bring a unique perspective to life, relationships and what it means to live in a world returned to the dark ages.... Mandel doesn't put the emphasis on the apocalypse itself (the chaos, the scavenging, the scientists trying to find a cure), but instead shows the effects it has on humanity. Despite the state of the world, people find reasons to continue.... *Station Eleven* will change the post-apocalyptic genre. While most writers tend to be bleak and cliched, Mandel chooses to be optimistic and imaginative. This isn't a story about survival, it's a story about living.

Andrew Blom - Boston Herald

Mandel deviates from the usual and creates what is possibly the most captivating and thought-provoking post-apocalyptic novel you will ever read.... Beautiful writing.... An assured handle on human emotions and relationships.... Though not without tension and a sense of horror, *Station Eleven* rises above the bleakness of the usual post-apocalyptic novels because its central concept is one so rarely offered in the genre—hope.

Independent (UK)

A beautiful and unsettling book, the action moves between the old and new world, drawing connections between the characters and their pasts and showing the sweetness of life as we know it now and the value of friendship, love and art over all the vehicles, screens and remote controls that have been rendered obsolete. Mandel's skill in portraying her post-apocalyptic world makes her fictional creation seem a terrifyingly real possibility. Apocalyptic stories once offered the reader a scary view of an alternative reality and the opportunity, on putting the book down, to look around gratefully at the real world. This is a book to make its reader mourn the life we still lead and the privileges we still enjoy.

Sunday Express (UK)

A novel that carries a magnificent depth.... We get to see something that is so difficult to show or feel – how small moments in time link together. And how these moments add up to a life.... Her best yet. It feels as though she took the experience earned from her previous writing and braided it together to make one gleaming strand.... An epic book.

Claire Cameron - Globe and Mail (Toronto)

So impressive.... *Station Eleven* is terrifying, reminding us of how paper-thin the achievements of civilization are. But it's also surprisingly— and quietly—beautiful.... As Emily Dickinson knew and as Mandel reminds us, there's a sumptuousness in destitution, a painful beauty in loss.... A superb novel. Unlike most postapocalyptic works, it leaves us not fearful for the end of the world but appreciative of the grace of everyday existence.

Anthony Domestic - *San Francisco Chronicle*

Darkly lyrical.... An appreciation of art, love and the triumph of the human spirit.... Mandel effortlessly moves between time periods.... The book is full of beautiful set pieces and landscapes; big, bustling cities before and during the outbreak, an eerily peaceful Malaysian seashore, and an all-but-abandoned Midwest airport-turned museum that becomes an all important setting for the last third of the book.... Mandel ties up all the loose ends in a smooth and moving way, giving humanity to all her characters — both in a world that you might recognize as the one we all live in today (and perhaps take for granted) and a post-apocalyptic world without electricity, smartphones and the Internet. *Station Eleven* is a truly haunting book, one that is hard to put down and a pleasure to read.

Doug Knoop - *Seattle Times*

Haunting and riveting.... In several moving passages, Mandel's characters look back with similar longing toward the receding pre-plague world, remembering all the things they'd once taken for granted — from the Internet to eating an orange.... It's not just the residents of Mandel's post-collapse world who need to forge stronger connections and live for more than mere survival. So do we all.

Mike Fischer - *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

Though it centers on civilization's collapse in the aftermath of a devastating flu, this mesmerizing novel isn't just apocalyptic fantasy—it's also an intricately layered character study of human life itself. Jumping back and forth between the decades before and after the pandemic, the narrative interlaces several individuals' stories, encompassing a universe of emotions and ultimately delivering a view of life that's both chilling and jubilant.

People

Emily St. John Mandel's tender and lovely new novel, *Station Eleven*.... miraculously reads like equal parts page-turner and poem.... One of her great feats is that the story feels spun rather than plotted, with seamless shifts in time and characters.... "Because survival is insufficient," reads a line taken from *Star Trek* spray painted on the *Traveling Symphony's* lead wagon. The genius of Mandel's fourth novel...is that she lives up to those words. This is not a story of crisis and survival. It's one of art and family and memory and community and the awful courage it takes to look upon the world with fresh and hopeful eyes.

Karen Valby - *Entertainment Weekly*

Few themes are as played-out as that of post-apocalypse, but St. John Mandel finds

a unique point of departure from which to examine civilization's wreckage.... With its wild fusion of celebrity gossip and grim future, this book shouldn't work nearly so well, but St. John Mandel's examination of the connections between individuals with disparate destinies makes a case for the worth of even a single life.

Publishers Weekly

A movie star who's decided to pound the boards as King Lear collapses and dies mid-performance, and shortly thereafter civilization collapses and starts dying as well. The narrative then moves between the actor's early career and a journey through the blasted landscape 15 years after the book's opening events. Indie Next darling Mandel breaks out with a major publisher.

Library Journal

(*Starred review.*) Survivors and victims of a pandemic populate this quietly ambitious take on a post-apocalyptic world where some strive to preserve art, culture and kindness.... Mandel spins a satisfying web of coincidence and kismet while providing numerous strong moments.... [S]olid writing and magnetic narrative make for a strong combination in what should be a breakout novel.

Kirkus Reviews

Discussion Questions

1. Now that you've read the entire novel, go back and reread the passage by Czeslaw Milosz that serves as an epigraph. What does it mean? Why did Mandel choose it to introduce *Station Eleven*?
2. Does the novel have a main character? Who would you consider it to be?
3. Arthur Leander dies while performing King Lear, and the Traveling Symphony performs Shakespeare's works. On page 57, Mandel writes, "Shakespeare was the third born to his parents, but the first to survive infancy. Four of his siblings died young. His son, Hamnet, died at eleven and left behind a twin. Plague closed the theaters again and again, death flickering over the landscape." How do Shakespearean motifs coincide with those of *Station Eleven*, both the novel and the comic?
4. Arthur's death happens to coincide with the arrival of the Georgia Flu. If Jeevan had been able to save him, it wouldn't have prevented the apocalypse. But how might the trajectory of the novel been different?
5. What is the metaphor of the Station Eleven comic books? How does the Undersea connect to the events of the novel?
6. "Survival is insufficient," a line from Star Trek: Voyager, is the Traveling Symphony's motto. What does it mean to them?
7. On page 62, the prophet discusses death: "I'm not speaking of the tedious variations on physical death. There's the death of the body, and there's the death of the soul. I saw my mother die twice." Knowing who his mother was, what do you think he meant by that?

8. Certain items turn up again and again, for instance the comic books and the paperweight—things Arthur gave away before he died, because he didn't want any more possessions. And Clark's Museum of Civilization turns what we think of as mundane belongings into totems worthy of study. What point is Mandel making?
9. On a related note, some characters—like Clark—believe in preserving and teaching about the time before the flu. But in Kirsten's interview with François Diallo, we learn that there are entire towns that prefer not to: "We went to a place once where the children didn't know the world had ever been different...." (page 115). What are the benefits of remembering, and of not remembering?
10. What do you think happened during the year Kirsten can't remember?
11. In a letter to his childhood friend, Arthur writes that he's been thinking about a quote from Yeats, "Love is like the lion's tooth." (page 158). What does this mean, and why is he thinking about it?
12. How does the impending publication of those letters affect Arthur?
13. On page 206, Arthur remembers Miranda saying "I regret nothing," and uses that to deepen his understanding of Lear, "a man who regrets everything," as well as his own life. How do his regrets fit into the larger scope of the novel? Other than Miranda, are there other characters that refuse to regret?
14. Throughout the novel, those who were alive during the time before the flu remember specific things about those days: the ease of electricity, the taste of an orange. In their place, what do you think you'd remember most?
15. What do you imagine the Traveling Symphony will find when they reach the brightly lit town to the south?
16. The novel ends with Clark, remembering the dinner party and imagining that somewhere in the world, ships are sailing. Why did Mandel choose to end the novel with him?

(Questions are issued by the publisher.)

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