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**A CLOSER LOOK AT THE SUBVERSION OF RELIGIOUS,
HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL TROPES UNDER THE POST-
APOCALYPTIC PARADIGM IN *STATION ELEVEN* AND *THE BOOK
OF JOAN***

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Abstract: The article endeavors to show how in post-apocalyptic fiction the traditional religious, historical and cultural tropes can prove to be powerful enough to capture and embody the enormously complex and extremely ambiguous worldview of the narrative. Despite most such ideas of the past getting gradually bracketed, effaced and relegated to the background the traditional cultural religious and literary tropes often continue to exert significant influence on even a post-apocalyptic world thus refusing to function as mere storehouse of simulacra or images, devoid of any meaningful referent. The main idea that I have adopted for the purpose of present analysis is Fredric Jameson's 'pastiche' or blank parody as mentioned in his *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). The two novels undertaken for the study are *Station Eleven* (2014) by Emily St. John Mandel and *The Book of Joan* (2017) by Lidia Yuknavitch. The open, undecided and indeterminate future in a post-apocalyptic world demands the construction of a post-binaristic, post-dualistic, ambiguous and amorphous

framework where the referents and historico-cultural tropes of the past would no longer provide an adequate support to the overwhelming complexity of the newly emerging world.

Keywords: post-apocalyptic, apocalyptic, science fiction, 21st century fiction, religion, culture.

Introduction:Scholars and critics differ in their opinions as to what comprise of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic texts, how to best define each of them and at which specific points they differ from each other. But there is a consensus regarding certain areas where the difference is clearly perceptible and some really outstanding works of critical theories exist on these. For many, the term apocalypse denotes a final end to all sets of events and as such no event can follow the apocalypse itself. As DiTommaso writes, “Strictly speaking, ‘postapocalyptic’ is an oxymoron. In the biblical mode of the worldview, the end time is a literal event, not a literary setting. Armageddon is the last battle; the final judgment is for all time. After the salvation, the narrative terminates; there is no sequel. There cannot be anything ‘postapocalyptic’ in the classic apocalyptic texts, or in the mode in which they are expressed”. In apocalyptic science fiction, we may find a teleological unfolding of narrative where characters struggle to survive with specific goals which involve either averting the apocalypse or finding some means to escape the aftermaths of the catastrophe and very often, these narratives follow the traditional apocalyptic framework of a clear beginning, a catastrophe and an end where the past serves as a clear and coherent referent and in such a scenario, the existing cultural and religious symbols and myths operate quite flawlessly to reflect and reduce the complexities of the time. In these narratives, readers might often come across devices like chronological arrangements of parts all moving towards a final goal, use of Biblical imagery bearing great significance on the present crisis, foreshadowing of an ending which will eventually integrate various gaps, unexplained shifts and divergent strands of narratives etc. In stark contrast to these, post-apocalyptic narratives function quite differently from their apocalyptic counterparts and in them the action evolves in the absence of any such background comprising of coherent historical,

mythological and cultural referents. Claire P. Curtis in her book *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract: "We'll Not Go Home Again"* (2010) has clearly defined post-apocalyptic fiction "as any account that takes up how humans start over after the end of life on earth as we understand it". To her, the apocalypse is simply a destructive event with no religious or revelatory significance and she also opines that in a post-apocalyptic drama the action revolves around the workings of the three main characters namely, the survivor, the companion and the Other. James Berger in his book, *After the End: Representations of Post-apocalypse* (1999) also claims that the historical events like World War II, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Holocaust of the Jews- all can be thought of as instances of apocalypse and so the entire history of mankind starting from the latter half of the 20th Century can be thought of as belonging to a post-apocalyptic era. Thus, we see that various critics have tried to present their viewpoints on apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic genres in different ways and any study in this field necessarily entails dealing with several issues which are subtle, varied and rich with various connotations. In this paper however, I shall limit my focus towards analyzing the subversive power of post-apocalyptic narratives that seek to challenge the traditional religious and historical tropes generally employed in apocalyptic works for the purpose of presenting a meaningful paradigm. In the post-apocalyptic works, this sort of construction of meaning with references to the past becomes impossible since the past simply ceases to exist in a world after apocalypse. However, quite paradoxically, the post-apocalyptic also needs to incorporate certain elements of redemption and for that purpose a meaningful engagement with the past becomes necessary even though those ideas and images associated with the past begin serving different functions in the post-apocalyptic paradigm. Teresa Heffernan comments how the past continues to impinge on and influence the post-apocalyptic present even though the later clearly seeks to do away with. In her work *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth Century Novel* (2008), she remarks that "catastrophic narrations . . . that are bereft of

redemption and revelation are not apocalyptic in the traditional sense” (6). Williams also points out the influence of the past in shaping the mode of post-apocalyptic gamut of experiences: “You become post-apocalyptic when you learn to do something better . . . with the apocalyptic remains of the day” (47–8). Benjamin H. Bratton in a 2009 talk called ‘Postpolis’ given at Los Angeles has stated that the usage of “post” does not necessarily mean that we have to completely disassociate with the past connotations, rather the past continues to influence and inspire us in many different ways: “We use “post” to name a particular state of things that is somehow eclipsed but not entirely done with. Post-War period, Post-Watergate, post-modernity, post-fashion, Post-humanism ... post-bubble, post-finance, post-production, post-consumption. Post implies that that something is gone, that it is in the past but that its residue, its after image in some way haunts us. It is behind, but it still organizes and supervises the period that comes next” (“Benjamin H. Bratton (Postopolis! LA)”, *Cityofsound.com*). Now, following Jameson’s viewpoint, we may say that post-apocalyptic fiction actually treats those historical and cultural tropes as “depoliticized pastiche or nostalgia” and this is where the post-apocalyptic narratives can be seen as being rooted in postmodernism. Also, like postmodernist works, post-apocalyptic fiction also aims at dismantling the grand narratives founded upon the supposed timeless and transcendental qualities of religious and cultural symbols of the past. Some of the most remarkable post-apocalyptic texts worth mentioning are Walter M. Miller’s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), Louis Malle’s *Black Moon* (1975), Michael Haneke’s *Time of the Wolf* (2003), David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006), Will Self’s *The Book of Dave* (2006), Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* (2007), Sam Taylor’s *The Island at the End of the World* (2009), Douglas Coupland’s *Player One* (2010) and Colson Whitehead’s *Zone One* (2011). Andrew Tate’s *Apocalyptic Fiction* (2017) deals with detailed analyses of the postapocalyptic elements in such works as “Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006), Jim Crace’s *The Pesthouse* (2007), Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* sequence (2003–13) . . .

Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008–10), and Veronica Roth's *Divergent* sequence (2011–13), as well as *Station Eleven* (Tate, 2). **Analysis of the Post-Apocalyptic Elements in *Station Eleven***: First, I shall start the discussion with the novel *Station Eleven* (2014) by Emily St John Mandel. In Mandel's work, we find the characters to be suffering from some form of 'solastalgia' or a phenomenon through which a place which was once familiar but suddenly becomes unfamiliar through some cataclysmic occurrences or some enormous misfortune. In the words of Robert McFarlane, it is a "modern uncanny, in which a familiar place is rendered unrecognizable . . . the home become[s] suddenly unhomey around its inhabitants" (2016). Glenn Albrecht who originally coined the term defines it as "[t]he pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault (physical desolation). It is manifest in an attack on one's sense of place, in the erosion of the sense of belonging (identity) to a particular place and a feeling of distress (psychological desolation) about its transformation . . . It is the 'lived experience' of the loss of the present as manifest in a feeling of dislocation ... solastalgia is a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at 'home'". (Albrecht, 48).

Here, we see that in a pre-pandemic world the female protagonist Kirsten Raymonde begins as a nonspeaking character in a *King Lear* drama featuring Arthur Leander and, in a world, following the pandemic, she becomes a member of the peripatetic band 'Travelling Symphony' whose motto is "Because Survival is Insufficient". This is also tattooed in Kirsten's arms. So, Shakespeare's art which has lost most of its significance that it used to enjoy in pre-pandemic times, is still used as a repository of images but now for a completely different purpose. However, it no longer provides any meaning or stable and coherent philosophy in the traditional sense to the survivors in the new world. Kirsten, the protagonist finds it impossible to remember most of her life 20 years earlier except the fact that she played a little, insignificant part in *King Lear*: "Twenty years earlier, in a life she mostly couldn't remember, she had had a small nonspeaking role in a short-lived Toronto

production of *King Lear*. Now she walked in sandals whose soles had been cut from an automobile tire, three knives in her belt. She was carrying a paperback version of the play, the stage directions highlighted in yellow” (Mandel, 35). We also find Kirsten delivering certain lines from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* that seem to mirror the present day post-apocalyptic situation as portrayed in the novel itself. The lines read as “That rheumatic diseases do abound. Their wonted liveries; and the mazed world,/ By their increase now knows not which is which” which can be found in Act 2, scene 1 of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The novel describes, “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. Some centuries later on a distant continent, Kirsten moves across the stage . . . 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). The name of the character Miranda, the creator of the comic strips titled “Dr. Eleven” and “Station Eleven” that give the novel its title, itself is borrowed from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Miranda both in *The Tempest* and in Mandel’s work are startled by the presence of the objects and people from the outside world. In Shakespeare’s play, Miranda becomes amazed at the sight of the humans and Ferdinand in particular and exclaims these lines in Act 5 Scene 1: “Oh, wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,

That has such people in ’t!”

In *Station Eleven*, we see Miranda feeling extremely uncomfortable at the “otherworldly” presence of the ships: “...the local fishermen were afraid of the ships. The fisherman suspected a hint of the supernatural in these vessels, unmoving hulks on the horizon by day, lit up after dark ... was it so

unreasonable to wonder if these lights might not be quite of this earth? ... it ... seemed to her as she stood on the beach that evening that there was something otherworldly in the sight” (218).

In the post-apocalyptic or post-pandemic period, it is a comic book named ‘Station Eleven’ which becomes a source of meaning for the surviving characters. The character Arthur Leander gives this comic book to Kirsten before this death and it was written by Arthur’s first wife Miranda. The novel abounds in Biblical intertextual references (De Cristofaro, ‘Critical Temporalities: *Station Eleven* and the Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel’). However, none of these references could prove sufficient to give meaning and stability to the complex gamut of the experiences that the characters invariably encounter in their post-pandemic struggle for existence. The Georgia Flu, which is the name given to the apocalypse that has struck the protagonists, according to the character Prophet is “the great cleansing that we suffered twenty years ago, that flu was our flood. The light we carry within us is the ark that carried Noah and his people over the face of the terrible waters, and I submit that we were saved”—his voice was rising—“not only to bring the light, to spread the light, but to be the light. We were saved because we are the light. We are the pure” (Mandel, 60). He is convinced of the revelatory nature of the pandemic and feels that the catastrophe has occurred not without any purpose. The purpose behind their survival is to repopulate the world and this is the will of God according to him. However, all throughout the novel we find no evidence to support his claim of the catastrophe being religious in nature; rather it was an accidental and unforgiving disaster which befell the hapless population of the Earth and this calamity possessed not the slightest redemptive touch in it. Mandel describes the onset of the catastrophe thus: “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, before everyone caught on that there was no place they could walk to where life continued as it had before and settled wherever they could...” (Mandel, 37).

So, this supposed claim of the prophet that the pandemic is in fact religious and has a divinely ordained purpose behind it becomes highly untenable and extremely unjustifiable, whose sole purpose seems to be nothing other than just masking the actual nature of the event and thus invest it with a possible meaning which would help him to further his own hidden agenda which is to capture even more power. The apocalyptic Georgia Flu in fact becomes a separation between past and present in the novel after which no one even if they have somehow managed to survive the outbreak can remember anything about their lives before it. This phenomenon effaces the past in the same way that Jameson envisages postmodernism would do when it comes to dealing with historical representations. The past, in Jameson's words fail to provide a meaningful background to the complexities of the experiences that the characters gain since "the past as 'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts (Jameson, 203). For Kirsten, however this plague serves as a curtain that hides her traumatic past and gives her a fresh start by freeing her mind of various kinds of troublesome childhood experiences. Still, Kirsten seeks to face her demons from the past and form a coherent identity by putting back together several fragments of experiences. For Kirsten, the past does not bear any meaningful referents by which she could hope to construct a meaningful present for herself; rather it exists only as a shadow world in the form of random clippings and images: "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" (Mandel, 66-68). Another character named Jeevan also seeks to escape the torturous and all-pervading gloom of this post-pandemic world by daydreaming in which images again come and go without forming a picture of a world having inner meaning and a purpose: "Jeevan had been prone to cinematic daydreams lately, images tumbling together and overlapping..." (Mandel, 179); but when Frank asks "What makes you think the lights will come back on?" Jeevan finds no words or images potent enough to give him a reply. For Kirsten, everything is utterly divested of any religious or

transcendental significance in this post-apocalyptic world. The prophet himself is not a man of piety, nor does he possess any semblance of qualities like tolerance, sympathy or forgiveness etc. He is just a 'blank parody' of the religious concept of a divinely inspired prophet generally found in Judeo-Christian scriptures. He reads verses related to plague from the Bible to the dead people and randomly takes many women he comes across as his wives. For Prophet the plague represents a divine punishment on the masses through which God seeks to select only a few by eliminating the rest. The very nature of this lethal Flu seems to the prophet as nothing short of a beckon from some higher power, a call to something divine for the remaining survivors: "And then came a virus like an avenging angel, unsurvivable, a microbe that reduced the population of the fallen world...such a perfect agent of death could only be divine. For we have read of such a cleansing of the earth, have we not?" (Mandel, 60). This description clearly reminds one of the eschatological pictures presented in the Book of Revelation's 'Seven Angels with Seven Plagues'. Thus, we see the prophet in his eagerness to appropriate the biblical apocalyptic tropes for investing the apocalypse with a clear and conspicuous religious pattern strikes a stark contrast to Kirsten and his travelling companions whose attitude is always grounded in a present-day reality and is highly distrustful of the possible presence of any saving grace. Arthur's second ex-wife and the mother of his only child Elizabeth Colton is equally religious and is influenced by the teachings of the Bible. She feels everything happens for a reason and carries with her a Bible all along. In another scene, a boy named Tyler is seen reading some passages from a text to the quarantined passengers in a plane: "Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her," he said to the plane as Clark approached. He paused and looked up. "Do you hear that? Plagues. 'One day her plagues will overtake her. Death, mourning, and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her'" (Mandel, 259). As the story unfolds, we shall discover that Tyler is none other than the Prophet himself, who grew up in the years following the Flu. Both Kirsten and Tyler's course of actions follow the

paradigm depicted in the comic book 'Station Eleven' created by Miranda. However, for the Prophet the religious overtones become the predominant way of connecting his past with the post-apocalyptic world. However, upon close analysis, we shall see how such a grand religious narrative constructed by the prophet is not so transcendental after all, rather it too is too embedded in a mundane and non-religious background. This is the essential postmodern spirit which the post-apocalyptic narratives so meticulously employ to subvert any attempt to build a totalizing and teleological paradigm that is generally found in many apocalyptic texts. In contrast to those few characters who are overtly religious and believe in a purposive working of the universe, we have several others who find no meaning or touch of salvation in the present condition, rather takes recourse to art and science for deriving justification for the events and consolation amidst grief. Such a character is August, who tells Kirsten about this theory of parallel universes or multiverse where despite bad things happening in some of the timelines, there would still be many others left where no pandemic, no flu has struck: "...given an infinite number of parallel universes, there had to be one where there had been no pandemic and he'd grown up to be a physicist as planned, or one where there had been a pandemic but the virus had had a subtly different genetic structure, some minuscule variance that rendered it survivable, in any case a universe in which civilization hadn't been so brutally interrupted" (Mandel, 2000). This goes beyond the scope of any scripture-based portrayal of worldviews soaked in religious symbolism although it can be said that it presents to build a worldview based on a teleology of altogether distinct nature. The present world blinded and blasted with the Flu has lost all its referents in the past to which it could fall back to for meaning and purpose and as such one has to rely on theoretical extrapolations derived from highly arcane field of science and cosmology for the grounding of reality. So, for Kirsten as well as many other survivors featured in the story we see there is no religious or cultural symbols which come to the forefront to help them build meaningful awareness of their situation amidst the chaos, rather it is the comic books like 'Station

Eleven' and the movies like 'Star Trek' and theoretical sciences that have begun acting the sources of meanings. The determinate, ordered and purposive linearity of traditional worldview thus gives way to a vision of future which is open, fluid, and full of varied possibilities and even branching out into the infinities amidst unfathomable vastness of cosmos. Gil imagines that since subatomic particles could constantly vanish and reappear over vast stretches of the cosmos, it is possible perhaps that they too like those particles "could theoretically be simultaneously present and not present, perhaps living out a shadow life in a parallel universe or two" (Mandel, 200). The epidemic for many is not a test from some heavenly superpower, but an iron curtain or a diving line "between a before and an after, a line drawn through life" (Mandel, 20). For most of the survivors of the plague like Kirsten or Clark, death means an end, a finality and nothing that one might speak beyond that point will make any sense and as such survival should be the primary aim for those still living, but for Prophet every act including death follows a teleological pattern of an apocalyptic determinism and as such one's life should progress according to that apocalyptic logic of divine unfolding of a special design where the distinction between the elect and the non-elect is a primary driving force. When the Prophet tells Kirsten about the various ways of dying, Kirsten responds by pointing out that indeed she has seen multiple ways of dying ranging "everything from drowning to decapitation to fever" only to be interrupted by the prophet for to the latter, the different ways include not just different ways of dying an ordinary physical death, but "the death of the soul also". The prophet talks at lengths about "faith and light and destiny, divine plans revealed to him in dreams, the preparations they must make for the end of the world" (Mandel, 60-61), and feels that the initial phase of this great pandemic has been but "an initial culling of the impure, that last year's pestilence was but further preview and there will be more cullings, far more cullings to come" (Mandel, 61). Prophet is driven by what Frank Kermode calls 'sense of an ending', by means of which "We project ourselves – a small, humble elect perhaps – past the end, so as to see the

structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle” (Kermode, *Sense of An Ending*, 8). The prophet can be said to be engaged in maintaining an apocalyptic paradigm even in a post-apocalyptic world where he assigns to the Flu a divine significance and attempts to see everything progressing towards a deterministic end. Marian Goldman in her *Rewriting Apocalypse in Contemporary Canadian Fiction* maintains that the trope of “purgation of the non-elect and the violent destruction of the earthly world in preparation for the creation of a divine one” has been a very familiar feature in apocalyptic fiction and it is this vision driven by atotalizing historical teleology that the post-apocalyptic works seek to undo and even go beyond.

Miranda, who illustrated the comic series titled ‘Station Eleven traveled around the world with Arthur and in her comics once presented a vision of a post-apocalyptic world where people are seen as living in underwater. It turns out that her portrayals in the comic book becomes not just a source of petty amusement for the surviving generation, but an illustration bearing a profound significance and thus a source of meaning. In fact, just like the world in the actual novel ‘*Station Eleven*’ suffers a global electric outage, so does the world in the comic book suffer an apocalypse of its own. The artificial sky of the space station has suffered a terrible damage from the invasion of some alien race, so “on Station Eleven’s surface it is always sunset or twilight or night” (Mandel, 83). So, the world of the comic book and that of the post-apocalyptic world of the novel bear uncanny parallels to each other. From an essentially post-modernist perspective, we see how post-apocalyptic narratives carefully deconstruct and dismantle various traditional associations between signifiers and signifieds around which our web of relationality is spun to give birth to new set of ideas. This is how the narratives aim to expose the artificiality and constructedness hidden beneath the glossy surface of apparently flawless and unquestionable sets of tropes. The prophet along with his followers sees a pattern of Biblical design in everything that they do or happen to them. Tyler’s words “She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her” (Mandel, 260) echoes ideas of judgments

described in the Book of Revelation, the archer's belief that "The virus was the angel," and "names are recorded in the book of life" (Mandel, 286) connect their suffering to the salvation imageries in *The Judgment of the Dead* mentioned in Book of Revelation 20:11-15, but the novel ultimately dismantles this revelatory paradigms in favor of an open indeterminate and incoherent world forever grasping in the dark in search of an alternate source of meaning.

The situation in this post-pandemic, post-apocalyptic nature becomes so grueling that the even the basic task of maintaining sanity requires one to train and control his mind to think and reflect in a certain way. This also happens in a normal civilization, where the agents of power and authority calculatingly and constantly shape and mold our mind to think, feel, react and respond in a certain way and anyone not conforming to those modes of thinking is labeled as an insane or mentally challenged person: "The maintenance of sanity required some recalibrations having to do with memory and sight. There were things Clark trained himself not to think about" (Mandel, 249).

In the post-apocalyptic world, the past becomes synonymous with a collection of absent referents and the present engages with a past in way which renders the past as "a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum" (Jameson, 203). This is obvious from the description of Clark in the novel who wants to connect to his past not as a 'referent', because it has already been bracketed and effaced, but as "a series of photographs and disconnected short films" (Mandel, 279), where he will be wandering through the myriad trivial experiences that lie scattered like ashes across the dilapidated wasteland of his memory lane. He wants to taste a life made of ordinary memories, not part of any grand narrative, or connected to some divine source of transcendental meaning and purpose. The entire setting, the background, the nature everything against which the novel is set smacks of such oppressive disconnectedness and lack of coherence and meaning, that any reference to a past or a religious symbol for deriving meaning and

purposiveness ends up feeling a salt to the wound and only serves to further deepen the state of alienation and gloom in which the novel is already abound. The past has simply ceased to exist as a collection of referents: “The claustrophobia of the forest...monochrome contrasts of black shadow and white moonlight, and beyond that an entire continent, wilderness uninterrupted from ocean to ocean with so few people left between the shores. Kirsten and August watched the road and the forest, but if anything was watching them back, it wasn’t apparent” (Mandel, 136). In the absence of interacting agents all kinds of interplay between signifiers and signifieds have grinded to a halt and no meaning can be derived from the uninterrupted wilderness of soulless abstractions. Even the morning lights which in the pre-apocalyptic world used to announce a new beginning every day, here only evokes in one just an awareness of the “beauty in the decrepitude”: “sunlight catching in the flowers that had sprung up through the gravel of long-overgrown driveways, mossy front porches turned brilliant green, a white blossoming bush alive with butterflies. This dazzling world...” (Mandel, 296). Life still thrives amidst all the chaos, but it does not convey any message of a new beginning or some rejuvenation. Kirsten finds neither any hope for a new beginning nor any hidden undercurrent of purpose flowing underneath this desolation, she is rather acutely aware of the “emptiness of the landscape, the lack of people and animals and caravans around her. Hell is the absence of the people you long for” (Mandel, 144). In the end, the death of the prophet appears not as some form of redemptive act of totalizing conclusiveness but only as what Jameson terms as a pastiche or a “blank parody”. The blank nature of the pastiche is essentially a postmodern idea which lacks any form of coherence and connection between signifiers and signifieds and also lacks any referent. The prophet’s story has been unfathomable but ultimately blank especially in the post-apocalyptic context: “Kirsten knelt by the prophet, by the pool of his blood, but he was just another dead man on another road, answerless, the bearer of another unfathomable story about walking out of one

world and into another. One of his arms was outstretched towards her” (Mandel, 304).

In fact, the very existence of the characters in post-apocalyptic fiction is steeped in irony since they occupy a point in time and space which follows some eschatological event which had already marked a decisive end and thus the narratives seem to mock the notion of any traditional and teleologically rich conclusive paradigm involving a clear beginning, middle, an end and a revelation. The post-apocalyptic structure clearly abstains from following any such pattern, nor does it believe in any striving forward towards a higher form of revelatory unveiling. The ending of this novel is ambiguous, amorphous, and undefined where imaginary ships seem to be moving forwards to some unknown destination and the closing paragraphs are full of questions thus thwarting any attempt of constructing a conclusive end to the tale: “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 armed with maps and knowledge of the stars, driven by need or perhaps simply by curiosity: whatever became of the countries on the other side?” (Mandel, 332-334).

Analysis of The Book of Joan: Our second novel in analysis is Lidia Yuknavitch’s *The Book of Joan* (2017). In this novel too I shall attempt to analyze how familiar icons from cultural, religious and historical materials get subverted and parodied or to put it in Jameson’s words transformed into a ‘pastiche’ in post-apocalyptic setting. This novel is another brilliant example of this act of subversion and parodying of traditional ideas and figures of importance. The novel is centered round the retelling of the action of three main characters taken from actual history –Jean de Meun, the author of *The Romance of the Rose*, Christine de Pizan, the poetess and a contemporary rival of Jean de Meun, and the great warrior of Joan of Arc. Also, Pizan’s companion Trinculo is another character whose name is taken from

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, but much like *King Lear* in *Station Eleven*, here too nothing Shakespearean truly remains to be seen or experienced in the post-apocalyptic world. So, here the disconnection of the figures and symbols from the past becomes even more conspicuous than in *Station Eleven*. The action takes place in a far future alternate timeline but the novel actually bears a reminder that even in a technologically advanced society when humans have actually transcended the limitations of basic physicality and conquered time and space, the thoughtlessness of their actions have degraded their culture to one of dark, medieval type. In this post-biological, transhuman future we see characters moving beyond their bodily limits, sensations merging with words and symbols and narratives flying beyond the confines of the pages to become one with the flesh. The burning skin grafts are arguably the most dominant mode of narrativity in such a culture and various characters have various levels of elaborate skin graftings. Also, following a great ecological horror, humans have devolved into a state of white, hairless, genital-less modified transhumans able to feel pangs of desire but unable to express them. Jean de Men is the totalitarian ruler of CIEL, the space station where humans now live as a result of those events that led them to leave Earth and his antagonist is Christine Pizan who is one of the most skilled skin artists. It is Christine who first takes the initiative of telling the 'world-breaking' story of Joan of Dirt, a parody of the name of Joan of Ark. The book simply refuses to abide by any form of binaries based on dualistic categorization and the entire action and atmosphere presented here smack of pure transhumanism. In fact, the character of the protagonist Joan of Dirt herself is an example of post-apocalyptic myth-making if any such myth is at all possible in a post-dualistic world of modified humanoids. The traditional historical figure of Joan de Arc was wounded, betrayed, tortured and burnt in public and that end is apocalyptic in itself, for death is the conclusive finality in a traditional storytelling but here the character of Joan possesses magical powers, warrior's skills and is born in a post-mortal world. Art also becomes transformed in a radically different way in this world where words are burned into flesh and

information becomes weapons of both control and resistance as is evident in the cases of de Men and Pizan respectively. Also, the world moves above and beyond the binaries and barriers and the singularity of self, division of self into fragmented bounded shells become meaningless and characters like Joan and Christine discover the inseparable oneness of nature and man. The pain that the characters feel often corresponds in some inexplicable, mystical way to the irreparable ecological damages that man's relentless advancements in technology has caused to the nature.

The novel very emphatically asserts that the past as we know it now has ceased to exist and all that the inhabitants of that period are left with is a 'blank parody' or a pastiche of a past (Jameson, 17). Joan is told "There is no longer any such thing as tradition. We are at the end of the world". Several alternate strands of reality exist far beyond our own little stretch of spacetime and the binaries which shape and define our view of the world and ourselves are simply made up of illusion within an illusion: "...tragedy and comedy, love and hate, life and death, were never really opposites; when language and being and knowing themselves are revealed to have been blinded by dumb binaries" (Yuknavitch, 109). All forms of central agencies in this world are lost and the stage is set for the posthumanism to take over. There is an intrinsic harmony in this worldview which has only become apparent after the collapse of the traditional, hierarchical world order. Joan, the very epitome of this emerging posthumanism according to Christine could peer deep into the heart of the material reality and discover a hidden undercurrent of incomprehensible symmetry where "There are strings to existence, and harmonies—cosmic harmonies—born of the strings" (Yuknavitch, 54). The traditional Biblical paradigm of creation and destruction and its unique way of depicting the dynamics of human relations by capturing the complexity and power of human language and consciousness through symbolic representations are then thoroughly subverted and later used in the novel as a pastiche or a 'blank parody', a parody that lacks any ultimate meaning and motive. Talking about Jean de Men and his meddling with the act of creation Christine states:

“Under the guise of creating culture, he had set out to regulate and reinvent sexuality and everything that came with it, across the bodies of all women, and turn them into pure labor and materiality. What could be more biblical than that? All he needed was an apple and a goddamn snake” (Yuknavitch, 231). In this post-apocalyptic age, new agents have appeared to supplant and supersede the past with the new order of things based on posthuman, postgender and post-binaristic paradigm and no one is sure about the nature of things to come. Emergence of posthumanism aims to shatter the “The myth of one humanity, based on universal values, an essential human “nature” and human exceptionalism with regard to nonhuman others” (Herbrechter, 6). In the novel, the CIELers have reached the posthuman stage of being when most of the traditional modes and patterns of thinking have gotten disrupted and “The hunger for love replaced the hunger for god or science” (Yuknavitch, 15). They have already learnt to manipulate their body “as the original prostheses” (Hayles, 2). The past becomes a repository of symbols “increasingly incapable of fashioning representations” of the characters’ present experiences (Jameson, 205), except in the cases where these symbols could help the characters build a semblance of that order which served as a basis of the now extinct worldview of the past. Christine feels that “even in this de-sexualized world, the idea of love and all her courtesans—desire, lust, eroticism, the chase, the capture, the devouring—had a stubborn staying power” (Yuknavitch, 15). The apocalypse was brought on them not by any divine agent but by some geo-catastrophe and the “radical changes in the magnetic field” which eventually induced radical changes in the morphology of life. In such a situation men turned to “the only savior in sight, technology and those who most loudly inhabited it” (Yuknavitch, 16). Christine feels that the narrative strategies which De Men employs via his own skin graftings only reinforce the ideas of a patriarchal dominance by legitimizing rape culture and violent subjugation and victimization of an ever-vulnerable race of women and this is exactly what she rebels against through her writings: “...all the women in his work demanded to be raped. All the women in his stories used

language and actions designed to sanction, validate, and accelerate that act” (Yuknavitch, 20). So, we see how in the dystopic world the battle for power is being waged by means of manipulation of words, phrases, propaganda and tattooed mythologizing in the form of “narrative grafts” on flesh. Christine However, while engaging in the process of skin-grafting the inhabitants of CIEL become thoroughly “incapable of fashioning their representations” in the traditional ways since this process erases all forms of sensory details from the bodies of the subjects and instead of those carnal drives and sensory pleasures, “a kind of streamlined consciousness” divested of any relation to materiality remains. The single sentence that summarizes the motto of the work is this: “Two things have always ruptured up and through hegemony: art and bodies” (Yuknavitch, 97). Christine through her graftings wants to capture every bit of these now lost sensory details - “smell of sweat. Blood. Cum. Even shit” (63), which are “signs of health when they are within the body, but signs of dangerous transgression of boundaries when they are outside” (Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*, 15). In fact, this grafting process has reduced the CIELers into “pure representations of themselves. Simulacral animated figurine” (Yuknavitch, 63). This is again the crux of the Baudrillardian vision coming true in a posthuman culture where the simulations are seen as gradually subsuming and supplanting their original counterparts. In this world, simulated representations of actual events from history such as the horrific burning of Joan attempts to keep alive all the minute details associated with or evocative of the horror and excruciating pain of Joan in fire so that it can be reliably “filmed and disseminated via media outlets all over the world” since “a fire death was likely to create the most dazzling visual display” (Yuknavitch, 102). Here, even “Political power, in the conventional sense” has been “replaced by digitalized matrices and algorithm systems”, and all important meetings and conferences are now presided over by various “holographic faces” (Yuknavitch, 44-45). This is the posthuman version of fourth and final stage of pure simulation when everything simulated will be deemed more real than their original counterparts. Christine feels an

irresistible urge to connect herself to the past via the carnally alive physicality of Joan's body, but since she is no longer available physically she seeks to build Joan's reanimation or simulacrum. Christine puts it thus: "she was the force of life we could never return to. The trial, and its subsequent reanimations, were our only remaining connection to the material world" (Yuknavitch, 46). This is the very essence of a Jamesonian 'pastiche' or blank parody now used in a post-apocalyptic context where history gets converted into a series of styles or simulacra and "the new spatial logic of the simulacrum can now be expected to have a momentous effect on what used to be historical time" (Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 18). It is through the "trial" or "reanimation" of Joan that Christine seeks to immerse herself in "her sexuality—her sexual reality. The fact of her body. Not particularly female, leaning toward male, an exquisite androgyny" (Yuknavitch, 50). In fact, the real becomes "increasingly incapable of fashioning representations of Christine's "own current experience" (Jameson, 205) only to be replaced by simulacrum. So, all that eventually remains of the past are just a semblance of it, bereft of any substantiality and devoid of any intrinsic meaning of its own, and more like a blank parody or a Jamesonian pastiche. Here, it is the body that seems to be endowed with the power of creating a narrative of its own and as such Joan's sexually charged body becomes the source and spring of an endless narrative potentiality. In fact, in an age when sexuality and textuality have become synonymous to one another and repression of one becomes the repression of another, Christine seeks to liberate the disruptive force through her narrativization of Joan's story in flesh: "All sex is restricted to textual, and all texts are grafts. Our bodies are meant to be read and consumed, debated, exchanged, or transformed only cerebrally" (Yuknavitch, 34). Christine wants to transform this body-politics based on the patterns of consumption, objectification and ingestion into something subversive and violent. Following Deleuz and Guattari's imagery of rhizome, we can interpret that Joan following her death, becomes deterritorialized whom Christine through her graftings in flesh seeks to reterritorialize thereby becoming deterritorialized

herself in the process only in the end to become one with Joan's body thus reterritorializing herself once again where both she and Joan continue to exist in the act of always becoming the other and never forming a final, finished entity. Here, the shifting modes of narrative also make it impossible to invest it with a rigid delineation, concrete definiteness, and absolute beginnings and endings. Along with Joan and Christine and an unknown narrator, the body itself partakes in the act of narration. The body becomes a source of narration with its own point-of-view thus rendering the entire creative process increasingly amorphous and ambiguous. Christine wonders how their bodies refuse "to privilege one culture or point of view over another" (Rosen, xxiv), and also realizes that their "bodies, carrying these stories, resist the narratives" that the culture seeks to impose on them, but "the body has a point of view. It keeps its secrets. Makes its own stories. By any means necessary" (Yuknavitch, 71). Christine's insistence on using her "graftstorying" as a weapon of resistance against the established cultural paradigm can be interpreted in Rosen word's as a mode of narration which is "intensely subjective, aggressively theoretical, unabashedly self-absorbed, and skeptical of established ideas, of value judgments and norms, of traditional aesthetic models in general and of grand narratives in particular" (Rosen,175). Christine through her novel mode of fleshly discourse does not aim to erect a new messianic paradigm reminiscent of pre-eschatological grandeur; rather her aim is to reinvent the very definition of narrativity through a harmonious fusion of everything discordant. All forms of definiteness and concepts related to beginnings and ends become untethered and a total ontological crisis is set in motion. Christine along with Joan wants to build a world of their own based on the raw and untamed physicality and find a mode of expression which is free from all kinds of singular, totalising chains of command. Her aim is "To claim our humanity as humanity only, an energy amidst all other energy and matter that emerges, lives, dies, and then changes form" (Yuknavitch, 101). In fact, this is basically the concrete realization of the Haylesian "dream" of embracing "the possibilities of information technologies without being

seduced by fantasies of unlimited power” (Hayles, 5). Christine projects this Haylesian dream-like scenario in which through some form of horizontal transfer of information she hopes to establish a symbiotic and self-sustaining culture centered around but not limited by her posthuman union with Joan. This is the type of information sharing that Lenton and Letour (2018) have proposed as the propellers behind a self-aware and self-regulating Gaia 2.0. By tapping into the narrative power of skin grafting, Christine uses the corporeal existence of the living body as the chief medium to capture the vivid, varied, paradoxical and multilayered complexity of the embedded experience and perception. Through these grating narratives, the body/self is burned or technologized through engagements with flesh and the flesh becomes the central praxis of perception and the perception is transformed into an embodied process thereby freeing the body of its disembodied illusion based purely on the de-sexualized abstraction. The complex nature of Christine’s lived narrative can be expressed in Allison Gibbons’ words as “a corporeal realization of the blending or conceptual integration of two conceptual domains, body and book” (Gibbons, 98). Christine endeavors to penetrate and explore the intersection between separation and hierarchization of mind and body and by subverting the power centers of centralizing discourses such as the pre-determined scope of language, myth-making, ownership and history of dominance etc. she wants to write a story “untethered from what we need it to be in order to feel better about ourselves” (Yuknavitch, 101). Christine wants to revel in abundance; an abundance of creative free energy neither constrained by any norms, nor weighed down by an ontological crisis resulting from a breakdown of the chains of signifiers and signifieds and a consequent disassociation with the past. Her union with Joan only makes her more aware of the abundance of creative energy flowing through the cosmos and if she can tap into it, she feels certain that a new narrative from her flesh can emerge where the past will only exist as a distant shadow, “a multitudinous photographic simulacrum” (Jameson, 203). Christine realizes that “Everything is matter. Everything is moved by and

through energy. Bodies are miniature renditions of the entire universe. We are a collective mammalian energy source. That is what we have always been. What an epic error we made in misinterpreting it all.” (Yuknavitch, 222). Joan seems to embody that surplus raw, vital energy which is simultaneously creative and destructive and this is what Christine feels could help her create a new future for an entire generation of “CIELers” who then could be moved to “perform an epic poem written across their bodies” (Yuknavitch, 201).

From the very beginning, we see the novel keeps challenging our notions of binaries. The chief narrator Christine proclaims that she has “no gender” (9) and their necks, temples, ears and eyes, “all have data points to interface with media” (Yuknavitch, 13). Joan arrives on the scene as an ‘engenderine’, “Someone whose mutation has resulted in a kind of human-matter interface” (Yuknavitch, 94). This form of symbiotic relationship with technology is one of the critical aspects of posthumanism of which Seltin opines, “As much as people create and determine technology, technology creates and determines people. Therefore, this critical theory of technology is thoroughly posthuman” (Seltin, 46). Thus, the ontological crisis is already set in motion and as the novel progresses we discover how with each increasing level of modification and transformation of the body and mind, the distinction between a human and a machine become ever more blurred. In fact, it is not just the distinction between human and technology but also the distinctions word and the body, the sacred and profane and the representation and the medium continue to get blurred: “The medium itself was the human body. Not sacred scrolls... thus the gap between representation and living, collapsed. In the beginning was the word, and the word became our bodies” (Yuknavitch, 22).

Joan’s story is inscribed on to Christine’s skin and the more their journey progresses, we find how through their inexplicably intertwined stories they continue to grow aware of Earth as a sentient, living organism with all its inhabitants forming a part of it. Christine admits that “the more we understood our bodies, the more we understood the universe, and vice versa”

(Yuknavitch, 75). This is essentially a posthuman rendering of the Gaia hypothesis first propounded by Lovelock and Margulis in the '70s and then modified by Professor Tim Lenton and Bruno Latour (2018). The original Gaia Hypothesis envisaged a mechanism in which the living and non-living entities have evolved together in a single, planetary scale self-regulating system, while the Gaia 2.0 hypothesis as put forward by Lenton and Latour propose that humans with their ever-increasing command over technology could take control over random and undirected natural selection and transform it into a goal-oriented global process. This is one of the fundamental assumptions upon which the idea of posthumanism is based. Here in the novel, we find Nyx exhorting Christine to think of Earth as one gigantic, living organism where the collective vision of the lifeforms flourishing in an eco-system is always so much more important than any individual being: "Our love for Earth and for all living matter violently trumps humans' love for one another. We are not more than the animals we made extinct. We are not above the organic life we destroyed. We are of it. Our desire, unlike what yours has been thus far, is to give the earth back its life. No single human life is more important than that" (Yuknavitch, 225). This is how Christine seeks to "disturb an idealized definition of the human subject as separate and liberated from nature and fully in command of the self and non-human other" (Castree, 501). Joan has always possessed that sort of intimate connection with nature from her early childhood as Christine imagines, "But the world was her deepest intimate. Trees and dirt and rocks and rain, and ocean and river water compelled her almost completely" (Yuknavitch, 72). This idea of a GaianSuperorganism is more in tune with the picture of Gaia as depicted in Asimov's 2004 novel *Foundation and Earth* where the Gaia is not a theoretical abstraction, rather an actual "superorganism; a whole planet with a mind and personality in common" sharing a "common consciousness of every dewdrop, of every pebble, of even the liquid central core of the planet" (Asimov, 4). Christine knows that Joan's "body is of the earth more uniquely than any other in human existence" (Yuknavitch, 190). In Haylesian

way of thinking, Joan has means to extend her “embodied awareness in highly specific, local, and material ways” (Hayles, 291). Christine foresees the emergence of such a future following her union with Joan. In this context, Hope Jennings in her remarkably insightful article on *The Book of Joan* writes, “In other words, Joan’s trans-corporeal relation to the earth/dirt exemplifies both a material and conceptual “movement across bodies” that not only underscores how humans are “inseparable” from their environments, or “nature,” but also makes possible a transformation in how humans relate to a nonhuman “world of fleshy beings, with their own needs, claims, and actions”” (Jennings, 201). In the novel the boundaries between different entities and strands of narratives continue to merge into one another and form something entirely new which is at once deconstructed, amorphous and ambiguous. Joan’s body for Christine becomes the techno-scientifically reinvented Carnavalesque from a Bakhtinian perspective, where transgression and disruption reign supreme and the distinction between body and art disappears. As the story of Joan progresses, Christine could feel that every minute detail of the story is coming alive in each of her cells, pores and neurons. Her story seems to be burning underneath her skin and rising up to establish a “flesh to flesh” contact for telling tales of uninhibited desires. Christine then “can enter a world not limited by any cell, for the mind, the body, even the eye, is a microcosm of the cosmos” (Yuknavitch, 50). In this way, Christine enters into the world full of “lived dimensions that are not reducible to the merely visible” (Sobchack, 179). From the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘Body Without Organs’ theory, we may interpret this as a manifestation of the nonorganizational form of desire which is “opposed to the organisation, the organic organisation of the organs” (Deleuze and Guattari, 158). Christine wants to compose a macro epic comprising of several “micrografts” and “individual lines” emanating from her body to enter into the bodies of the others and thus craft “a resistance movement of flesh” with Joan’s body as the fulcrum in her counter-discursive play, and make it culminate in “plural acts of violence so profound” that no one will ever forget

“the fact of flesh” (Yuknavitch, 91). Christine even imagines herself dreaming the sequence of events through grafting on her own body: “As events play out in my dream, I can see myself grafting the story directly onto my body. It’s as if I am history writing itself” (Yuknavitch, 81). Here, Christine’s narrative of Joan assumes the power of an autotelic agency and the stories which it endeavors to create seem to be emerging from an “epiphylogenetic memory...a recapitulating, dynamic, and morphogenetic (phylo-genetic) accumulation of individual experience” (Steigler, 177). In this process, Christine not only rediscovers or rematerializes Joan through the particular technology of grafting but also discovers herself and her sexuality. Christine’s interiority and Joan’s exteriority aim to merge into one in this act and thus both interior and exterior will discard their respective binaries and influence and intermingle with each other: “Interior and exterior are consequently constituted in a movement that invents both one and the other: a moment in which they invent each other respectively, as if there were a technological maieutic of what is called humanity” (Stiegler, 141-142). Christine’s play will erode the boundaries between internal and external and erase all divisions between creation and destruction, living and dead: “Eros with Thanatos and began re-creating the story of our bodies, not as procreative species aiming for survival, but rather, as desiring abysses, creation and destruction in endless and perpetual motion” (Yuknavitch, 21). Their counter-discursive story starts swimming against the “current of linear, mechanical, quantitative, dualistic, Boolean logical and rational thinking” (Merrell, vii). Christine knows that the world Joan is going to create will be beyond binary divisions and so not plagued by conflicts between false oppositions. In a post-apocalyptic world, Christine, alongside Joan believes in the superiority of their own narrative burned into their flesh which simply supersedes and surpasses any traditional religious or cultural texts one could imagine: “The Bible and the Talmud, the Qur’an and the Bhagavad Gita, the scrolls of Confucius and Purvas and Vedas—all that is over, I understand now. In its place, we begin the Book of Joan. Our bodies holding its words” (Yuknavitch, 105). The

eschatological end has already exposed the hollowness of religious and cultural tropes all ultimately centered round an omniscient, omnipotent Godhead and as such the only hope Christine and Joan feel they have for the future is their own bodies and the words etched onto them: “The various religions that were the source of so much war on Earth historically went out with a whimper when we realized our sky world was, to put it bluntly, dull as death. God has no weight in space except as reinvented entertainment” (Yuknavitch, 34). In this regard, we may recall Elizabeth Rosen’s opinion that in the postmodern rendering of apocalyptic tales, various factors like God, time and judgment will cease to hold any tangible influence on the soul of the narrative. In post-apocalyptic texts, “The absolutist Judeo-Christian depiction of God ceases to be a factor; plurality and ambiguity are stronger influences here” (Rosen, xxiii).

Conclusion: The aim of the study has been to show how in two 21st century post-apocalyptic novels, namely *Station Eleven* (2014) by Emily St. John Mandel and *The Book of Joan* (2017) by Lidia Yuknavitch, the emergence of a new world order demands invention of new modes of narrativity and for the purpose of which the cultural and religious tropes of the past might prove to be quite powerful and effective. Post-apocalyptic, in that sense, could very well be thought of as another way of correcting or improving upon the errors of the past which initiated the catastrophe in the first place and thus it is not simply a way of obliterating/disregarding the past. As Williams puts it : “all that we know very well yet regard as exceptional nightmares or accidents to be corrected with better, greener, more ethical management: hellish zones of the world, whole populations destroyed in famine and sickness, ‘humanitarian’ military interventions, the basic and unincorporable fact of class antagonism, closure of access to common resources, the rendering of mass culture more and more banal, shifting climate patterns and the ‘natural’ disasters they bring about, the abandonment of working populations and those who cannot work in favor of policies determined only to starkly widen wealth gaps” (8). Even though many of the religious-cultural tropes of the past still clinging to “some

residual zones of 'nature' or 'being,' of the old, the older, the archaic” (Jameson, ix) cease to operate in the same way as they used to do in the past, they can make their influence felt in certain indirect but still significant way.

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