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Fragmented Chronologies
The Simulation of Memory in *Station Eleven* and *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*

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Abstract

Non-linear narration within fiction innately encourages the reader to engage in the process of constructing a linear timeline of events in a text's storyworld. This thesis is concerned with two contemporary novels that employ this narrative strategy – Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014) and Pitchaya Sudbanthad's *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* (2019) – and asks what effect the fragmented chronologies in these novels have on the reader's understanding of key thematic concerns. My close analyses of these two novels are informed by existing critical discussions in narratology, philosophy, and psychology that focus on the representation of the human experience of time as portrayed within narrative. As it stands, current critical discussions of these novels rarely engage with this striking aspect of their narration, instead choosing to focus on their representations of anthropocentric apocalypse. I argue that this is a significant gap in existing research, which I seek to fill in this thesis.

Via close readings and reconstructions of linear timelines for each of the two novels, I argue that both seek to simulate within the reader the experiences of time, memory, forgetfulness and trauma felt by the characters. As the reader seeks to construct their own linear timeline of events within each novel, they engage in a similar process of 'sense-making' as the characters do as they try to negotiate their own pasts. Thus, the experiences of recollection, amnesia, dissociation, revelation, and trauma are all felt simultaneously by the reader and characters, amplifying each novel's key thematic concerns with memory and forgetting.

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Introduction

In the year 2021, for a first-year English Literature university course, I was handed the novel *Station Eleven* (2014). Whilst the class was prompted to read the novel as an example of popular fiction in the 21st century, I myself was stricken with curiosity when faced with the complex chronology of the novel. What was initially presented to me as a post-apocalyptic novel became so much more when scenes defined by plague were juxtaposed against a failing relationship in the modern world. The grandeur of it all raised in me so many questions, questions beyond the scope of a first-year university paper. Thus, I turned to my friend also in the same course, asking what he thought of the non-linearity and what its purpose and effects might be. He simply responded with the idea that it was an arbitrary decision, an attempt to mimic 'high literature.' I couldn't accept this as an answer and continued to think about this well after the course – and my BA degree – was complete. In the years after, I found myself engaging in research about non-linear narratives and thinking about why certain novels use this structure. When asked to propose a topic for my MA thesis, I did not hesitate in responding that I wanted to further explore non-linear narration in contemporary fiction. In order to narrow down this vast topic, I limited myself to exploring the relationship between the non-linear structure and thematic concern of three recent texts, asking, "how does the non-linear structure of these novels reflect and interact with their key themes?" Given the limitations of the thesis length, I narrowed my case study to my two favourite novels: *Station Eleven* (2014) and *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* (2019). It became quickly apparent that both of these non-linearly structured novels were deeply concerned with themes of memory, forgetting, and trauma. I resolved to explore this particular theme, investigating how these two novels amplify these themes through the act of simulating the processes of remembrance and forgetting within the very reader. The culmination of such research has resulted in this very thesis.

An important aspect of my exploration has been to consider the potential effects of non-linear narration on (hypothetical) readers and the ways in which this might invite readers to feel the impact of the trauma, erasure, unwanted recall and, even, reconciliation with the past, that is portrayed in characters. A non-linear plot innately asks readers to engage in the process of making sense of the disjointed plot in order to reconstruct a 'linear' storyline. I argue that this very activity of reconstruction functions to immerse the reader within the experiences of memory and forgetting presented in the novel. That is to say, the act of reconstruction that a novel asks the reader to

undertake mimics or mirrors what the characters themselves are doing as they try to make sense of their lives and histories. The non-linear narration, to varying degrees, can be stressed or simplified to further deepen the themes presented in the novel. Key information may be obfuscated by gaps in narrative time, confusing or confounding readers, making them experience the difficulty faced by characters as they seek to remember or forget crucial parts of their pasts. Or the non-linear narration may instead prompt the reader to try to make connections between temporally disjointed events portrayed in the novel that aid in understanding the greater story, reflecting the actions of characters experiencing amnesia or the 'blockage' caused by repression. I believe that the narrative strategies employed by Emily St. John Mandel and Pitchaya Sudbanthad are vitally connected to the characterisation within and content of their novels, *Station Eleven* and *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*. Both of these novels employ a non-linear narrative structure that reflects themes regarding different acts of memory, whether it be the importance of understanding the past, acts of sublimation or forgetting, the feeling of dissociation of oneself, or running from and inevitably coming to confront one's own past.

As I began the research for this project, it was important for me to understand how non-linear narration has been used in fiction, historically, to test my hypothesis that recent fiction, certainly from the later 20th century and in the 21st, has been exploring and experimenting with this mode of writing, achieving a different effect to fiction written earlier. This research was also important in providing an oversight as to what literary critics and theorists have observed and said about this mode of writing, especially over the past century. The fruit of this exploration is provided in my first chapter, Critical Contexts. Within, I offer a summary of some important critical accounts of the experimentation with chronology in literature and suggest how they inform my analyses of *Station Eleven* and *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*.

In Chapter Two I conduct a close analysis of *Station Eleven*, with a particular emphasis on the characters Kirsten and Arthur. I argue that the novel's fragmented chronology enables, rather than hampers, the reader's understanding of their struggles in remembering their own pasts. I begin with a summary of existing research on the novel, noting that it fails to afford the non-linear narration the attention it deserves. My chapter is an attempt to (begin to) fill this gap in critical discussions of the novel and to highlight the effects of a-chronological narration that I believe to be central to the understanding of the novel as a whole. My analysis is further informed by my own reconstruction of the novel's timeline, as I provide visual aids in the form of various graphs that depict each chapter's

temporal relationship with one another and the characters depicted within them, drawing attention to the patterns in the plot in relation to the storyline.

Chapter Three offers this same attention to *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*, once more informed by graphs depicting the novel's timeline. I pay particular attention to the storyline of one of the central characters, Nee, and argue that Sudbanthad stresses the sentience – and memories – of non-human agents, including the titular city itself. Whilst the relative recency of the novel's publication means there is limited scholarly discussion of the text, I consider what the few recent articles do have to say about it and draw attention to the fact that these have very little to say about the non-linear structure of the novel. This is a gap my own research seeks to fill.

Whilst my own studies are concerned with non-linear narration in two recent novels, I remain conscious that non-linearity has been inextricably intertwined in Western literature since its very inception. Ancient texts, originating from oral narration, have employed techniques such as beginning in *media res*, as is the case in the Greek poet Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, in which extended flashbacks dominate the story to relate past events. The Old English epic *Beowulf* also employs a non-chronological path, moving between different periods of the titular hero's life in order to portray his grand deeds. Flashbacks and flashforwards, prolepsis and analepsis, contractions and expansions have been used from the inception of the novel form, perhaps most famously in Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–1767) which does not simply begin *in media res*, with subsequent 'back-filling,' but portrays fragmented time and makes use of extensive digressions. In the nineteenth-century, novels such as Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868), normalise the use of frame tales, in which non-linearity is employed to create suspense, manipulating the reader's perception of the tale within for a precise affect – such as to facilitate a plot twist or hide a detail – or to explain how something came to be by retrospectively providing key details without delaying the introduction of the main plot hook.

Non-linear narration became very conspicuous in the modernist era (c. 1920-1945), not least to growing philosophical and psychological interest in human conceptions of time. Early twentieth century writers sought to portray the lived experience of time in the minds of their characters, attempting to accurately convey the internal human experience of time. Strongly influenced by the work of philosopher Henri Bergson, modernists distinguished between objective clock time, which proceeds linearly (*temps*), and the interior, subjective experience of time within the minds of the characters (*durée*) as they have memories, anticipate the future, engage with sensations in the present,

and so on. Sigmund Freud's conceptualisation of trauma, repression, involuntary memory and the notion that events in the past, even if ostensibly forgotten, continually affect action in the present, were also extremely influential in the literary world at this time.

In the postmodernist world, there has been even greater experimentation in the use of non-linear narrational strategies: jumbled timelines, reverse narration, parallel storylines, omissions of detail and perspectival multiplicity. Unlike modernist writers, however, this is less the result of the attempt to portray the subjective experience of time as experienced by the characters than a reflection of what Jean François Lyotard famously referred to as "an incredulity towards metanarratives" in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), and a challenge to singular truths in favour of subjective interpretation and the relativisation of value. These texts are often metafictional, requiring the reader to actively engage in the work of piecing together the narrative and, in doing so, are invited to recognise the constructedness of dominant social narratives ('metanarratives'). They also offer rich and complicated psychological portraits of characters viewed from within and from multiple external perspectives, providing deeper insights into what motivates characters and to build suspense.

As non-linear narration became more prolific and complex through the twentieth-century, many books and scholarly articles were written that analyse and describe such authorial techniques. Many critical discussions in the field draw on modernist fictions focused on the portrayal of characters' interiorities and how these are further developed in postmodernist fiction to portray the fragmented, non-linear existence of characters in a world characterised by uncertainty and disbelief. The majority of these discussions primarily focus on and engage with the technique as a means of representing how people or characters experience time (modernism) or experience the dizzying array of alternatives and incommensurate values, and linguistic instability, in contemporary life (postmodernism). These are important elements of non-linear narration and my own research builds on and extrapolates from these insights. However, I argue that there is insufficient research applied to the effects of this form of narration on reader beyond the standard claim that the reader must work hard to make connections between different perspectives, times, and events, and so 'unravel' the meaning of the text and becomes more attuned to how social narratives are constructed and maintained. I contend that rather than simply mirror a character's mode of thought and experience of time, non-linear narration is also often integral to, and amplifies, the thematic concerns of a given text. Put another way, close attention to non-linear narration in texts that employ this mode may offer insights into the fundamental issues and concerns that drive the novel itself. It is my belief that

one method in which non-linear narration achieves this is through simulating the experience of the storyworld within the reader themself, an effect rarely considered in existing research regarding both novels of concern to this thesis. That is to say, I believe that there is insufficient focus applied to the ways in which non-linear narration facilitates immersion within the narrative being told, and that studying the ways in which chronology is manipulated in both *Station Eleven* and *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* is key to understanding how these novels make otherwise foreign experiences of memory and time relatable to the reader through the act of timeline reconstruction.

Critical Contexts

Extensive research has been conducted regarding the relationship between time and narrative across many different fields, including beyond that of narratology. Questions regarding the experience of time and our ability to make sense of identity in the face of time have been posed by not only narratologists but also the likes of philosophers and psychologists, all of which seek to understand how we present and perceive time. The relationship between human conceptions of time and narrative was extensively explored by philosopher Paul Ricoeur, most notably in *Time and Narrative: 1-3*. At the core of Ricoeur's argument is the notion that "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (Ricoeur, Vol 1 3). This statement informs all three volumes of *Time and Narrative*, as Ricoeur believes "[t]he world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world" (3). Here, Ricoeur asserts that the experience of time can only make sense by organising events into a narrative, one that links past experiences and present ones in some kind of order – a process Ricoeur calls "emplotment" – while considering how these events anticipate the future. Crucially, emplotment does not just record a sequence of events, but rather involves linking these events via cause and effect, intentionality and consequence.

In this respect, Ricoeur is in line with E.M. Forster's famous discussion of the difference between 'story' and 'plot' in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927).[1] In Chapter 5 Forster writes:

> We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. 'The king died and then the queen died' is a story. 'The king died, and then the queen died of grief' is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it. (129)

Forster argues that readers of a story ask, "And then?" while readers of a plot ask "Why?" (129). It is worth noting here that the example of plot that Forster has provided is still a linear one. The same events could be narrated in a non-linear way, while still retaining the causal element. A story could assert, "The queen died …" and defer for some time (it could be a sentence, paragraph, or many

[1] This accords with the Russian formalist distinction between **syuzhet** (plot) and **fabula** (story).

chapters later), details of how she died ("of grief") and why ("because the king died"). The greater the temporal gap in the narrative between event and explanation, the more the reader is encouraged to seek for clues that answer "Why?" and "How?" The significance of this is something I will return to and explore in later chapters, but it is worth noting here that in non-linear narratives, the *plot* is fractured or scrambled, making the answer to "Why?" and "How?" a challenge for the reader to resolve.

Unlike E.M. Forster, Ricoeur is first and foremost a philosopher as opposed to a literary critic. His use of the word "narrative" encompasses all manner of narrative rather than that as found in fiction. In *Time and Narrative: Vol 1* he first explores Book XI of Augustine's *Confessions*, arguing that Augustine moves inward to the human mind to explore the past (via memory), the present (via direct sensation/attention) and the future (via anticipation or expectation). These are not discrete times but experienced simultaneously in thought and to make sense of them, argues Ricoeur, humans turn to narrative. He then discusses Aristotle's *Poetics* and Aristotle's theory of plot. Ricoeur believes that Augustine "inquires into the nature of time without any apparent concern for grounding his inquiry on the narrative structure of the spiritual autobiography developed in the first nine books of the *Confessions,*" whereas Aristotle "constructs his theory of dramatic plot without paying attention to the temporal implications of his analysis, leaving to the *Physics* the problem of how to go about analyzing time" (4). Ricoeur asserts that Augustine's and Aristotle's works "offer two points of access, independent of one another, to [the] circular problem" (4). This problem is the one asserted at the start and quoted above: "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (3). The two claims rely on each other for their meaning; neither claim can be asserted as being true prior to the other. Jonathan Martineau suggests that

> Paul Ricœur posited Aristotle and Augustine as the founders of the two main conceptions of time that run through the Western tradition. While Aristotle's *Physics* gave the West its concept of objective, worldly, or cosmological time, Augustine's *Confessions* inaugurated a subjective, experiential or psychological concept of time. The Western philosophy of time has navigated between these two broad positions ever since. (53)

Ricoeur's philosophy is dense and well beyond the scope of this thesis; however, I want to hold onto his fundamental notion that the terrifying vast abstraction of cosmic time can only be understood in terms of narration. While Ricoeur's work within *Time and Narrative* for the most part omits any extended attention to fictional narratives, an exception is found in Part III of Volume 2. Subtitled "The Configuration of Time in Fictional Narrative," here Ricoeur's engages explicitly with several modernist "Tales of Time," stories that he argues feature time itself as the central 'character' and subject: Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (*Der Zauberberg*, 1924), and Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (*À la recherche du temps perdu*, 1919-1927). Ricoeur acknowledges the paradox involved in the "fictive experience of time," as "[o]n the one hand, in effect, our temporal ways of inhabiting the world remain imaginary to the extent that they exist only in and through the text" while "[o]n the other hand, they constitute a sort of transcendence within immanence that is precisely what allows for the confrontation with the world of the reader" (6). Ricoeur begins to advance this argument by once again expanding upon concepts established by Augustine and Aristotle and extending these to the realm of fiction, before the following chapters discuss the semiotic constraints on narrativity and experimentation with the fundamentals of writing, namely utterances and statements. When Ricoeur turns to the fictional case studies he begins with the claim that "[o]nly the confrontation between the world of the text and the life-world of the reader will make the problematic of narrative configuration tip over into that of the refiguration of time by narrative" (100). Much of the discussion given to the representations of time in these novels considers each novel's attempt to make the portrayal of human time experienced by the characters relatable to that which the readers experience within their daily lives. The opening discussion of *Mrs. Dalloway* is particularly instructive for my project. The novel, which would otherwise be chronologically ordered if not for the multiple flashbacks articulated via a free flow of consciousnesses through the use of free indirect discourse, induces in the reader the same sense of confusion the characters themselves feel. Ricoeur notes that

> By giving a temporal depth to the narrative, the entanglement of the narrated present with the remembered past confers a psychological depth on the characters without, however, giving them a stable identity, so discordant are the glimpses the characters have of one another and of themselves. The reader is left holding the scattered pieces to a great game of character identification, but the solution to it escapes the reader as much as it does the characters in the narrative. The attempt to identify the characters certainly corresponds to

> the promptings of the fictive narrator, when this voice leaves the characters to their interminable quest. (*Time and Narrative*: *Vol 2* 104)

This claim about Woolf's novel and its effect on the reader aligns very closely with the argument I make in my later chapters with respect to the novels I consider therein.

Ricoeur's analysis gives way to a discussion around "monumental time" (external, linear, 'clock' time), and how this relates to the temporal existence of the various characters within Woolf's novel. Ricoeur notes that "[t]he variations on the theme of this relation lead fiction well beyond the abstract opposition we have just referred to and make of it, for the reader, a powerful means of detecting the infinitely varied way of combining the perspectives of time that speculation by itself fails to mediate" (108). Monumental time within the novel is represented by the chimes of Big Ben throughout the novel, which takes place in the space of one day as Clarissa Dalloway prepares for a party and her (unknown to her) alter ego, Septimus Smith, spirals towards his eventual suicide, somewhere else in London, which occurs while the party is in full swing at the Dalloway home. Ricoeur asserts that it is in how the varied and discordant temporal experiences of characters in the novel are ordered in relation to the markings of monumental time that the reader is encouraged to "*experience* … the mortal discordance between personal time and monumental time" (108; my emphasis). The novel conveys this discordance between personal time and monumental time, he argues, which is reflected in the reader having to also experience the same discordance. The reader, in order to make sense of the novel, must engage in that same act of what Ricoeur calls "configuration" as the characters. He defines the "configurational act" as "constist[ing] of 'grasping together' the detailed actions or what I have called the story's incidents. It draws from this manifold of events the unity of one temporal whole" (*Time and Narrative: Vol 1*. 66). The reader of the novel must "grasp together" the "incidents" in the novel – which occur widely spread across time, (distant past, near past, past and present, anticipated future, etc.) – including the many gaps and omissions, into a narrative that makes sense of time and seeks to answer the question of "why?"

Ricoeur next discusses *The Magic Mountain,* which he reads as a *Zeitroman* – which translates, literally, as a "time-novel" or "novel of the times" – a novel concerned with portraying the contemporary mode of life in a particular historical era. As with *Mrs Dalloway*, Ricoeur argues that *The Magic Mountain* is structured around two kinds of human experiences of time: linear cosmic time (time that can be measured via clocks, calendars, units of work, etc.) and psychological time (*durée*). This dichotomy is physically represented within the novel itself. Linear cosmic time is the domain of

the social world below the titular mountain, whereas psychological time is exemplified by the time subjectively experienced by the protagonist, Hans Castorp, on the mountain itself. He visits his cousin in a sanatorium on the mountain, intending to stay for a few weeks, but remains there for seven years. His years at the sanatorium end abruptly with the onset of WWI when he returns to the social world and becomes a soldier in the War.

Ricoeur argues that chaotic, lived social time "wins out" over internalised, psychological time in the text. He notes how details of Hans's initial experiences at the sanatorium take up almost half the book, suggesting that this is because everything he experiences is new to him. But as he settles into a routine existence, the narrated years pass quickly – years are skipped in a single sentence. The days and weeks contain few new experiences; the familiar and the ordinary blur. The further the book progresses the rate at which time advances dramatically increases, inviting the reader to experience, in their act of reading, the way in which time 'concertinas' due to routine and repetition. Time passes as Hans stagnates and there are no new 'events' to narrate – until, that is, the violent historical rupture of WWI that forces Hans to return to social time. In accordance with my own argument, Ricoeur argues that due to the narratorial style adopted by Mann, readers are forced to experience the same sense of temporality as Hans does: the lengthy, in-depth narration of the early days bombard the reader with new experiences and events, dizzying the reader in a way akin to someone becoming overwhelmed in an unfamiliar environment. This feeling is later replaced as Hans falls into a monotonous routine, represented by the narrative 'shrinking.' Huge temporal gaps appear and the reader experiences the sense of 'nothing notable happening for years' and losing track of time, just as Hans does.

Finally, Ricoeur considers *In Search of Lost Time* (*Remembrance of Things Past*), reading the novel as an explicit dismissal of Bergsonian temporality. Notably, within the novel, there exists two characters with the name Marcel. One, the hero, imagines a future in which he is a writer; the other Marcel is the narrator who looks backwards and relates a series of involuntary memories. The novel thus juxtaposes an imaginary push into the future with the retrospection of memory. Ricoeur argues that the non-linear sequence, in which the narrator's forward drive is continually interrupted by fragments of memory, enables Proust to 'rescue' the protagonist from the fatality of aging and memory loss. Discontinuous memories, then, combat linear clock time. They add depth to the life emplotted (by the reader and Marcel himself) through time.

It is of note that *In Search of Lost Time* appears frequently in many narratological discussions of time, narrative, and chronology, and will continue to make appearances in the literature review

section of this thesis. Ricoeur asserts his goal as being to "consider, uncompromisingly, the narrator-hero as a fictive entity supporting the tale about time that constitutes *Remembrance* [*In Search of Lost Time*]" (*Time and Narrative: Vol 2* 131). Ricoeur details the ways in which the narrative seeks to mimic how human thought moves freely through time, emplotting the *self*. This is a key idea I return to in my later chapters. He argues that the reader is forced to experience the tedium of the slow, looping development of Marcel's character across the decades portrayed and thousands of pages read. The reader comes to experience relief when they share with the protagonist the epiphanic flash of involuntary memory in the final volume, a memory that resolves the narrative by creating a perfect recursive loop. Proust's seemingly endless story of the man failing to become a writer is the proof that the writer succeeded: he is the author of the very book the reader has just read. This information means that the readers, like Marcel, can finally 'make sense' of the chaotic jumble of memories that constitute the text. For Ricoeur, the experience is instructive for the reader: finishing the book, at last, they can return to their own jumbled life with a greater understanding of the capacity for self-interpretation.

My discussion of Paul Ricoeur's arguments in *Time and Narrative* is necessarily cursory. I include them, however, due to the importance Ricoeur accords to the impact of non-linear narration in fiction on readers, and due to his influence upon the exploration of philosophical accounts of time. This stands in contrast with some contemporary narratological accounts that are often more concerned with describing the techniques and methods writers employ when writing non-linear narratives, rather than considering how these are bound up with thematic concerns. This is amply evidenced in Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980), where the emphasis on methodology is very clearly indicated in the subtitle. Genette identifies three categories of temporal manipulation in narrative. The first concerns narrative order, that is, how events are sequenced through the use of analepsis (flashbacks) and prolepsis (flashforwards). The second category refers to duration and how narration is sped up or slowed down via techniques such as ellipsis (skipping events) or the expanded or drawn-out portrayal of actions and events. The third category is frequency and repetition, concerned with repeated portrayals of the same event. Genette also analyses and describes different kinds of narrators according to their position relative to fictional events: a narrator might be reporting on events from the outside of the storyworld (extradiegetic), or be involved in the events and so tell of them from the inside (intradiegetic). He further introduced the notion of focalisation to discuss the perspective that informs the narrative: the 'eyes' through which events are seen and the voice that reports on them.

Genette's foundational work on technique in narrative is well known and continues to inform narratologists within the field. His influence is evident, for example, in Chapter Three of Jose Angel Garcia Land's *Narrative Theory*, "Time Structure in the Story" (1990), Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structures in Fiction and Film* (1980) and Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (1985). *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, a dynamic open-access internet resource detailing core narrative concepts based *The Handbook of Narratology* (2009), exemplifies the descriptive, methodological, approach of many scholars of narratology, as this example, discussing time in narrative, shows:

> In text-based narratives, time structures the narrated world ('diegesis') and is the effect of verbal evocation which emerges from use of tense, deictic expressions, and literary techniques (e.g. leitmotifs). From an analytical point of view, one has to distinguish between three levels of reference which are characterised by their own temporality: 'story,' 'discourse,' and 'narrating' (Genette [1972] 1980). First, 'story time' ('diegetic time', Souriau 1951) is a constitutive phenomenon of the fictional world (cf. 3.1.1). Like the narrated world, story time is the product of the act of narration and is linked conceptually to 'event' (Hühn → Event and Eventfulness), 'space' (Ryan → Space), and 'character' (Jannidis → Character). Thus story time turns out to be a relative category rather than a fixed one: it is formed by the interplay with other elements of the narrated world (van Fraassen 1991; Weixler & Werner 2014). Second, 'discourse time' is the time of telling which is fixed by the text (cf. 3.1.2). And thirdly, 'narrating time' is the time of the narrating act which describes the spatiotemporal position of the narrative voice (cf. 3.1.3). (*The Living Handbook of Narratology)*

Many psychologists are also interested in narration, especially in relation to time and memory. Jens Brockmeier is representative of this and begins his article "Stories to Remember: Narrative and the Time of Memory" (2009) with the following claim: "Days or years are no valid currency in the realm of remembrance. Our psychological life, as Freud stated, is timeless" (Brockmeier 115). The question at the core of Brockmeier's article is "what is it that ties the time of memory – of autobiographical memory, to be more precise – so inextricably to its narrative form?" (117). Brockmeier outlines two opposing views, or "chronotypes" in approaching this question, which he labels as the "Newtonian view" and the "narrative view." The Newtonian view claims "that

time is an objective and absolute system, a fixed background against which all events in the universe are spatiotemporally localized or, at least in principle, can be identified" (117). He continues:

> [W]hatever the specific interrelationship between mind and time, the basic supposition is that ultimately it can be represented in terms of an underlying Newtonian trajectory – in the same fashion as, in classical narratology, the 'discourse time' of all narrated and narratable events and experience can be mapped along the linear and homogenous trajectory of 'story time.' (118)

Of more interest to Brockmeier is the narrative view, which he defines as assuming "that our concepts of time are neither universally given entities nor epistemological preconditions of experience but outcomes of symbolic constructions, constructions that are by their very nature cultural and historical" and that "the more we deal with human temporalities …, the more the construction site is language, and in particular the language of narrative" (118).

Brockmeier, like Ricoeur, turns to Marcel Proust's work *In Search of Lost Time* as a case study, commenting on "Proust's fascination with the multiple times of memory and the remembering self" (120). Brockmeier asserts that Marcel, the narrator-protagonist, "intentionally seeks the experience of involuntary remembering, an experience that allows him to float in the pool of time by being simultaneously in touch with different epochs of his life" (116): "the remembered self is unavoidably intermingled with the remembering self" (121). It is through these instances of chronology-defying narration, such as when the narrator in question "simultaneously dines with his lover [in the present] and plays ball with his nanny [in memory]," that Brockmeier concludes that the "concept of a natural flow of time," as suggested by the Newtonian chronotype, "reveals little about the shifting simultaneity of different experiences, temporal states, and, … different 'selves' of the experiencing or reminiscing narrator" (121).

This then points to what Brockmeier believes to be true for "all autobiographical remembrance: that it is a process of meaning construction that includes the simultaneous configuration of scenarios in very different times, times that are inextricably tied to their narrative reality" (122). The argument constructed here around autobiographical memory is then suggested to extend towards human memory in general. Brockmeier distinguishes between two sides of the dialectical process:

> On the one hand there is, as already mentioned, the cultural and historical world with its specific semantic and grammatical resources, its discursive orders, concepts, and narrative models of time and memory. On the other hand there is the individual as a subject of intentionality, a person with a social life, emotions, motives, and desires that, embedded in this social life, drive and orient his or her meaning constructions, including their temporalization. Without recognizing the subject's intentional attitude toward temporality and the personal significance of remembrances as well as of specific memories we cannot comprehend the concrete temporal scenarios that emerge in his or her autobiographical discourse. (124-25)

This statement here highlights part of the argument I will explore in later chapters of this thesis: the linear and structured flow of time as we understand is insufficient to represent the temporal workings of memory. Brockmeier makes a more generalised claim about how "modern individuals" "are engaged in the special human activity of interpreting and making sense of themselves in continuously changing time frames; and how they employ, in the process, the narrative models, genres, and strategies offered to them by the cultural world in which they live" (123). What most interests me here is the (psychological) claim that people try *to make sense of themselves* by engaging in continually changing time frames, ones in which events in the past and the present are experienced as if they were simultaneous. Linked to this is the idea that 'making sense' involves narration or what Ricoeur refers to as "emplotment" – the linking of (past and present) events via cause and effect, intentionality and consequence.

Brockmeier's focus in the article is on how fictional autobiographies, like that of Proust, throw light on the internal, psychological processes through which people orient themselves in (social) time and so construct a meaningful sense of self. A wider discussion of (non-autobiographical) fiction is outside of the scope of his article but I believe the central ideas advanced can be utilised when discussing non-linear fictional narratives. Non-linear fiction, I argue, mimics the human experience of time and, importantly, the human attempts of individuals to make sense of themselves and their place within the world. Moreover, I argue that non-linear fiction not only portrays characters engaged in this meaning making or self- and world-interpretation, but also invites readers to engage in a similar interpretative process as they try to make connections between temporally disparate events, seemingly disconnected characters, fragmented chronologies, gaps and omissions, and the repetition of events from multiple perspectives. The interaction between the text

and reader is crucial to understanding the effect of manipulating chronology. My argument in later chapters thus serves as a natural extension to Brockmeier's arguments here, applying his work in psychology to works of fiction, exploring how the concepts discussed in his paper may be adapted when considering non-linear fictional texts.

Non-linear narration is a staple in postmodernist fiction and has been the subject of much theoretical discussion. Contra the modernist attempt to portray the non-linear workings of the individual human mind, postmodernist writers often have a more overt political focus: they reject certainty and universality, challenging not only traditional storytelling, but also the validity of 'grand,' totalising ideological narratives and the teleology of progress that so many advocate. Mark Currie confidently asserts that postmodern theory involves the deconstruction of "the linear concept of time, of meaning, of narrative and of narrative history" (79) and finds this assertion evident in postmodernist fiction. Elana Gomel similarly comments on "[t]he revolt of postmodern theory [and fiction] against time and history" (3). Ursula Heise, in *Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative, and Postmodernism* (1997), argues that postmodern narratives are "retrojective," that they construct "an indefinite number of different or alternative temporalities that project the temporal mode of the future into past and present" (55). She claims that key devices used in such narratives are repetition [from different perspectives] and metalepsis, and suggests that the effect of such devices is that the presumed "certainty of linear time" collapses (56). Such commentary on the interest in postmodernist fiction in the subversion of temporal linearity are manifold. Well-known discussions are offered, for example by Brian McHale in *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), Patricia Waugh in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), and Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988). Mark Currie's *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and Philosophy of Time* (2007) differs from, and challenges, accounts of postmodernist fictional strategies such as those mentioned above insofar as it attempts to place philosophy and literature into dialogue. Currie states that "[t]he concern of this book is with the relationship between storytelling, future time, and the nature of being," which originates from two propositions:

> The first is that the reading of fictional narratives is a kind of preparation for and repetition of the continuous anticipation that takes place in non-fictional life. The second is that the place of fictional narrative in the world has altered since the beginning of the twentieth century, and that fiction has been one of the places in which a new experience of time has been rehearsed, developed and expressed. (6)

Rather than focus on postmodernist narrative challenges to history (or historical accounts of the past) his emphasis is on the future – on narrative strategies such as prolepsis or how the narration of present events (present in the world of the fiction, that is) gesture towards or anticipate future events: "For many years the study of narrative has been attending to the notion of the present as a place from which we continually revise stories about the past, and much less attentive to the relationship between story telling and the mode of continuous anticipation in which we attach significance to present moments" (6). At heart, he distinguishes between structured fictional time and human time: in a fictional narrative we can jump forward in time via prolepsis due to what he calls the "already-there-ness" (21) of the fictional future while in life the future is always provisional and unknowable. As Jane Elliott parses his argument, "when novels uncover and disturb the process by which we use the end to make sense of the middle [which Currie refers to as "anticipatory retrospective"], they are reminding us both of the way this works in [conventional] fiction, and the way it fails to work in life at large" (317).

Strikingly, Currie is less interested in the themes of the four fictions he analyses (Graham Swift's *Waterland*, Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*, Ali Smith's *The Accidental* and Ian McEwan's *Saturday*) than he is in their innovative temporal strategies. Within the introduction, Currie pushes against and elaborates on Ricoeur's analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway*,*The Magic Mountain* (*Der Zauberberg*), and *In Search of Lost Time* (*À la recherche du temps perdu*) as "novels about time." Currie argues that Ricoeur's claim that these are novels where time is what is 'principally at stake' "becomes something of a refrain in Ricoeur's discussion, proving the 'aboutness' of the premise with the 'at stakeness' of the discovery" (2). In this discussion however, there is a lack of acknowledgement of Ricoeur's argument that it is in the narrated timeline of these novels that the reader comes to understand the deeper thematic concerns of these novels, with Currie choosing to instead to argue "that it is important to see all novels as novels about time, and perhaps most important in the case of novels for which times does not seem to be what is principally at stake" (4). What follows in Currie's later chapters is an exploration of philosophical ideas in relation to fiction, as Currie later says: "With philosophy as its teacher, narrative theory can turn its attention to narrative not only in its function as archive, but to the question of narrative as a mode of being" (51). The various chapters within the book offer an analysis of "three philosophical approaches to time which have some relevance for a future-orientated theory of narrative," "offers an analytical framework for the concept of prolepsis," and questions "inner and outer time" (6-7). Currie does so with minimal close readings, dedicating

only a handful of pages to each novel, reflecting his concern with philosophical arguments rather than with novelistic content and how temporal disruption in narratives may be intricately bound up with thematic concerns, or the reader's own hermeneutic engagement.

Similarly, Monika Fludernik in "Chronology, Time, Tense and Experientiality in Narrative" (2003), explores how the use of different tenses can create an accurate representation of the human mind, but veers away from an exploration of the relationship between the novel and reader. Fludernik's primarily argues that "[l]iterary narratives are much freer in their use of tense than non-fictional and nonliterary narratives" (Fludernik 131), built on the understanding, in accordance with Ricoeur, that in fictional narratives "temporality becomes increasingly divorced from objective or scientific notions of time and moves towards more psychological, subjective and contextually malleable conceptions of temporality" (120). Of interest to my concerns in this thesis is Flurdernik's analysis of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992). Fludernik notes the importance of the tenses used within different parts of the novel, in which

> [It] at first appears as if this were a present-tense novel in which only the memories of Almásy, the English Patient, are rendered in past tense … [but] [l]ater such shifts from present to past (actual present to remembered events) no longer occur automatically. At some points, the move into memory is signalled only contextually, the mental presentness of the memory is emphasized. (125)

Fludernik notes that "despite the introduction in the meantime of past-tense passages for the hospital scenes, the present tense re-emerges in situations of 'pauses' or moments of stasis" (126). She argues that this has the effect of representing the mode of thought of the human mind, referencing an excerpt of the book in which the present tense is used in this way:

> We are offered a slow-motion view of every tiny second of his visual impressions, as Caravaggio comes to realize that his life has been in danger. The detail creates a pause or slow-up. Time stands still for Caravaggio. (126)

The manipulation of the sense of time in the analysed passage, created through shifts in tense, mimics human modes of thought in response to danger. Fludernik also notes that in relation to the more habitual sequences presented in the novel (scenes of ordinary engagement), the shifts in tense

and time "evokes a filmic stasis by making fuzzy the distinction between habituality and singularity" (129). Despite this however, Fludernik curiously claims that the alternation "between presents and preterites" occurs for "no obvious purpose" (129), and only come the final two sentences of her analysis offers any revelation regarding thematic concerns of the text: "In my [Fludernik's] view, therefore, the novel thematizes the hazards of historical reconstruction, especially in the memory of participants. Its nostalgia for the past, by the blurring of consistent temporality, emphasizes the irreality of past and present in view of the nightmare of war" (130). This thematic interpretation is largely absent from the rest of her argument which tends to be descriptive. Fludernik instead seems more concerned with the role of tense in conveying the human experience, and the development of the use of tense, than exploring how this impacts reader understanding or its role in exploring the thematic concerns of a given novel.

Brian Richardson in "Beyond Story and Discourse: Narrative Time in Postmodern and Nonmimetic Fiction" (2002) provides another example of an article concerned with describing textual methodology rather than the implications of fictional experimentation with temporal representation. Richardson discusses "texts that construct impossible stories and thereby challenge the mimetically grounded distinctions of *fabula* and *syuzhet* and Genette's category of order" (53), believing that previously established frameworks posed by narratologists such as Genette "do not work if applied to many late modernist and postmodern texts" (47). Richardson identifies six emerging narrative strategies that challenge the pre-existing frameworks and vocabulary for understanding time: circular narratives, contradictory narratives, antinomic narratives, differential narratives, conflated narratives, and dual or multiple narratives. Richardson highlights late modernist or postmodern novels that employ these strategies, providing brief excerpts from such novels. Richardson asserts that the understanding of these experimental developments "can lead not only to a more comprehensive model of narrative temporality, but also perhaps to a better understanding of the nature of narrative itself" and that "[i]nstead of ignoring the anomalous or 'impossible' chronological features or, what is practically speaking little better, indiscriminately lumping all such works together under a single general category, we would do well to identify several of the most significant varieties of antimimetic narrative temporality" (57). However, despite approaching the selected texts from a 'postmodern' lens, Richardson fails to consider the implications of each of these narrative strategies and the effect it has on the reader. These strategies are described as "impossible' chronological features" (57), though it is my contention that these strategies may be utilised in a way to deepen a novel's thematic concerns via more accurately representing the world of

the novel and simulating an experience of such within the reader. Richardson, while highlighting these developing narrative strategies and rejecting prior understandings of narrative structure and chronology, fails to consider why the novels utilise these strategies and what they achieve aside from experimentation.

Whilst only a microcosm of academic articles, the ones briefly discussed above by Currie, Fludernik, and Richardson accurately represent the majority of approaches taken by academics that fail to consider the deeper implications of the manipulation of time and chronology within fiction, choosing to instead prioritise a modernist understanding of 'human time' or serving to purely observe and describe developments in the field without adequately suggesting the ways in which thematic concerns and narrative structure are intertwined and how the *work* done by the reader to figure out the proper [i.e. linear] temporal sequence of the story/*fabula* is intimately bound up with their understanding of the novel's meaning. It goes without saying, that the more authors 'play' with time, the harder readers have to work to infer meaning and this, I argue, encourages deeper thematic reflection.

While many critics who discuss non-linear narration in contemporary fiction tend to be descriptive rather than interpretative, or explore the narrative mode to reflect on philosophical approaches to time or psychological concerns with internal thought process, it would be mistaken to suggest that they all do so. Although less common, there are some who consider the impact on the reader of postmodernist fictional representations of time. One example is Steven Willemsen's and Miklós Kiss's "Keeping Track of Time: The Role of Spatial and Embodied Cognition in the Comprehension of Nonlinear Storyworlds" (2020). In this article, the two explore the cognitive load imposed upon the reader when faced with both non-linear storytelling and non-linear storyworlds. First and foremost, they make an important distinction between these two forms of non-linearity. They define non-linear storytelling as "when narration systematically presents events in an order that is different from their chronological occurrence," which differs from non-linear storyworlds. They define that latter as when the "deviations from linearity are not the result of a non-chronological order of narration" but instead "form a feature of the *diegetic fictional world* that is narrated," providing examples of such mediums through which this can occur such as time travel, temporal loops, or parallel universes (174). Though this article focuses on the cognitive demand of non-linear storyworlds, Willemsen and Kiss provide valuable insight into what is asked of the reader when engaging with non-linear storytelling. They pose the question "In what ways do these nonlinearities impact our cognitive engagement with stories?" (174). In answering this question, they break the

process of making sense of a story down into three aspects, "the *source text* or discourse's *surface* structure …, the network of *propositions* that the recipient can derive from this …, and the resulting *mental representations* formed by the reader or spectator" (175). Willemsen and Kiss conclude that non-linear storytelling involves the former of the three aspects, as "narrative information is presented chronologically on the text's *surface* level, but recipients can derive from the textual cues a network of propositions and situations that contain *linear* relations, thus allowing the formation of a *mental model* that ultimately represents linear and chronological states of affairs comparable to real-world affairs" (176). In contrast, non-linear storyworlds instead cue the audience "to form a *mental model* that accommodates a world in which *nonlinear* time organization is somehow the natural state of affairs" (176).

While the majority of the article focuses on non-linear storyworlds, Willemsen and Kiss also consider the cognitive effects of non-linear storytelling, drawing on existing research such as that conducted by Rolf Zwaan, that suggests that "nonlinear presentation tends to make information more difficult to grasp and memorize due to the effect of heightened cognitive load" (176). This is because "readers generally rely on an assumed connection between sequentiality and chronology," as their "default assumption is that the order in which events are presented corresponds to the actual order of occurrence unless indicated otherwise" (176). In a given non-linear narrative "chronology must be determined on an inferential basis, by way of causal relations, verb tense, or other temporal markers," and when these factors prove sparse "this process demands more active processing effort and slows down comprehension" (177). According to Willemsen and Kiss, non-linear storyworlds are "harder to grasp because they frequently entail *violations or deviations from spectators' (real world) schemas of knowledge*" (179). Although early in the article they acknowledge that their theoretical work "is not restricted to audiovisual media …, but also targets more general underlying processes of narrative and textual comprehension" (173), Willemsen and Kiss provide figures depicting plot maps for various films with non-linear storyworlds but do not do the same for other kinds of narratives. Though brief, their insights on the cognitive effort involved in understanding non-linear storytelling are very valuable. However, Willemsen's and Kiss's analysis only provides information about what is asked of the reader, and fails to consider what the purpose of non-linear storytelling might be. While it is important to note that non-linear narration in fiction does indeed demand greater reader engagement than conventional linear narration, and so may result in greater reader curiosity, suspense, and investment in the text, I do not believe it is adequate to suggest non-linear narrative strategies only function to enhance these effects, or that this effect is all that is at stake in such

fictions. Put another way, I seek to answer the question: are there certain themes or concerns that might justify imposing this greater 'cognitive load' on readers?

In "Negative Strategies and Nonlinear Temporality in Postapocalyptic Fiction," a chapter in *Narrating the Mesh: Form and Story in the Anthropocene* (2021), Marco Caracciolo explores the role non-linearity plays in immersing the reader within the different experiences of memory in the story world. However, as the title of both the book and chapter suggest, Caracciolo's discussions are limited to an exploration of dystopian fiction rather than the wider literary canon. Caracciolo discusses how "negative strategies" have been employed in three different novels, a term he defines as highlighting a core object, concept, or theme within a given novel through the acknowledgement or emphasis of its absence (a concept Caracciolo derives from the Kanizasa triangle, a triangle whose existence is only implied or derived from an absence of colour). Caracciolo ties this concept to the portrayal of apocalyptic catastrophes in the worlds of these three novels, as he states that as "the postworld emerges as the narrative negates (i.e., subtracts or pares down) some of the salient characteristics of the preworld" (Caracciolo 79). Examples of such catastrophic negotiations include how "famine negates the availability of food and other resources, the postapocalyptic wasteland negates the organized urban environments of the pre- period, widespread violence contradicts the rule of law, and so on" (79). Caracciolo also details how catastrophes play a large part in his proposed understanding of narrative non-linearity in his selective texts, as he notes that the "catastrophic destabilization is built into the very structure of [the] storyworld: by definition, postapocalyptic fiction implies and foregrounds a catastrophic rupture between a preapocalyptic and a postapocalyptic state" (77), thus embedding temporality within the core of postapocalyptic fiction.

The three novels Caracciolo turns to are ones which he deems belong in the post-apocalypse genre, each of which employ their own negative strategies. It is of note that one of these novels is *Station Eleven*, a text I discuss in Chapter 2 of this thesis. However, as I will discuss, I do not find Caracciolo's argument particularly useful to understanding the novel as a whole. Of more salience to my concerns is his study of Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011), a novel concerned with the aftermath of an apocalypse which brings about a zombie-like infection. Caracciolo notes that the novel "teems with flashbacks to earlier time frames" that are commonly "left unannounced and unmarked" (89). These unannounced flashbacks create what Caracciolo describes as a "free-floating temporality that constantly blurs the distinction between the pre- and postworld" and in consequence readers "have a hard time following the narrative progression in 'path'-like terms" (89). Caracciolo links this fragmented and disjointed temporality to the "movements internal to the

protagonist's consciousness: typically, remembering a salient episode of his (pre- or postapocalyptic) past," further linking it to what the storyworld characters refer to as "PASD," or Post-Apocalyptic Stress Disorder (90). Caracciolo thus relates the achronological structure of the novel directly to the psyche and lived experience of the characters within.

Commenting on "the link between the character's traumatic memory of the past and the novel's loose temporality," he argues that "the temporal structure of the novel mirrors the disruption brought about by catastrophe not just in the storyworld's external reality but – more important – in the protagonist's understanding of his life" (90). This idea is then tied back to the concept of negative strategies, and a claim that valuably highlights what I believe to be an important comment on the relevance on non-linear narration in the texts I consider later in this thesis: "far more striking in Whitehead's novel is another negative strategy: *Zone One* consistently negates narrative continuity and closure as Mark, the protagonist, struggles to make sense of his life" (90). *Zone One* is said to impress a "need for narrative meaning on the reader," as the characters provide varying detailed accounts of their pasts, but, "at the same time, it denies this possibility through its loose, erratic progression, which challenges readers' expectations of narrative linearity and closure" (91). The negative strategy being employed here is the refusal to provide conventional narrative structure and understanding. The effect of this is that the reader experiences the same sense of amnesia and confusion that the protagonist suffers: like him, the readers find it hard to place themselves temporally within the storyworld. This then creates "an affective experience that is shared by protagonists and readers alike," a result of "the psychological traumas [the non-linearity of catastrophe] creates at the individual level, [which disrupt] attempts at straightforward narrativization" (93).

There is much to be admired in Caracciolo's discussion of *Zone One*. However, I believe his insistent focus on "negative strategies" and the necessity of a catastrophe ultimately limits his other fictional analyses, especially that of *Station Eleven.* In this novel the narrative is also non-linear, but Caracciolo largely disregards this aspect of the text. Instead, he applies his notion of "negative strategy" to missing or lost objects of the novel. Likewise, in his analyses of *The Road,* another novel which features non-linear narration, Caracciolo focuses on the negation of space and colour. Caracciolo's reliance on catastrophe as facilitator of non-linearity also does his argument a disservice, as well as his reliance on fictional portrayals of apocalypse as a whole. While I acknowledge that the novels I analyse in subsequent chapters feature a catastrophe that define pre- and post-apocalyptic worlds, I do not believe that this aspect alone is the only element central to these novels or fully

justifies Caracciolo's claim that "[c]atastrophe denies the protagonist precisely the possibility of a linear life narrative" (90). While I believe this is true for particular characters and storylines in the novels I analyse it ignores elements in narratives that aren't concerned with a defined catastrophe, as seen in smaller arcs in both novels I discuss (e.g. Arthur's dissociation from himself, Clyde's descent into obscurity). Moreover, it is clearly the case that novels in genres other than post-apocalyptic fiction also use disjunctive narrative strategies.

Developments in literary trauma theory also provide valuable insight into some of the achieved effects of non-linear narration. Whilst non-linear narration can be employed to deepen thematic concerns that aren't inherently concerned with trauma (see Paul Ricoeur's analysis of *Mrs Dalloway*, or smaller plot threads found within *Station Eleven* and *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* in later chapters), trauma theory highlights non-linear narrative's innate ability to convey the lived experience of a character's memory affected by trauma in the very experience of reading it. In Wiespape et al.'s "Personal Narratives in Trauma-Related Disorders: Contributions from a Metacognitive Approach and Treatment Considerations" (2025), traumatic experiences are defined as "significant life events that are thought to impact one's personal life narrative and narrative identity," and that "[i]ndividuals who have experienced trauma may display fragmented memories and decreased narrative cohesion, resulting in trauma narratives that are disjointed and poorly integrated into the larger picture of their lives" (Wiespape et al. 150). This claim is informed by research that suggests "that trauma memories are fragmented and incomplete immediately after a traumatic event and generally increase in coherence with time" (150). This highlights a clear intersectionality between my own studies and that of trauma theory, and thus it is appropriate to draw from insights offered in the field.

Carry Caruth is perhaps one of the best-known trauma theorists. Drawing upon Freud's original work, she has created a framework that many later trauma theorists draw upon. In her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), Caruth suggests "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 4). Caruth further notes that trauma "resists simple comprehension" (6), and that it is in "insistently recurring words or figures" within works of literature that the story of trauma may be traced (5). At the core of her argument lies the idea that trauma itself may not be the initial encounter perceived to have created the trauma, but instead "the ongoing experience of having survived it" (7), which in itself suggests a non-linear narrative, one that returns to the same point of origin repeatedly.

Michelle Balaev expands on Caruth's formulations in her article "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory" (2008), extending Caruth's research into the genre of the trauma novel. While Balaev notes a wide variety of trends and techniques employed over a range of novels depicting trauma to accurately convey post-traumatic stress disorder, the act of creating an achronological structure repeatedly emerges as a common technique within her analysis. Balaev claims that:

> The trauma novel conveys a diversity of extreme emotional states through an assortment of narrative innovations, such as landscape imagery, temporal fissures, silence, or narrative omission… . Authors employ a nonlinear plot or disruptive temporal sequences to emphasize mental confusion, chaos, or contemplation as a response to the experience. … These strategies help the author structure the narrative into a form that attempts to embody the psychological 'action' of traumatic memory or dissociation. (Balaev 159)

Here, Balaev ties directly the temporal fissures and structure of the novel to a recreation of "traumatic memory or dissociation," an observation very relevant to much of my arguments in subsequent chapters. Later, Balaev also notes:

> The complex view of memory as an active and revisionary process expressed in the trauma novel challenges the predominante model that suggests traumatic experience remains frozen and separated from "normal" memories. Traumatic memory is rarely represented as an exact recalling of events. Rather, the construction of the past includes new details with each telling, or it is constructed from different perspectives, which demonstrates that memories of the traumatic experience are revised and actively rearranged according to the needs of the individual at a particular moment. (164)

This claim further highlights the necessity of employing a non-linear narrative structure in order to accurately convey the ways in which characters attempt to reconstruct (partial) traumatic memories, at times relying on the memories of others to do so. This is especially of importance in narratives that either feature multiple perspectives or have a third person narration focalised through various characters, such as both the novels featured in later chapters.

Balaev's claims are further extrapolated in Yali Yang's article "The Trauma and Fragmentation Narrative in Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (2023).

Before conducting an in-depth analysis of the two novels indicated in the title of the article in relation to their fragmented narratives, Yang acknowledges how "trauma literature acts as a testament to victims' experiences" and that the fragmented narrative is a "narrative technique pivotal to this literature … mirroring both the inherent nature of trauma and its external portrayal" (Yang 1). In relation to fragmented narratives, Yang further claims

> Many scholars regard the fragmented narrative as a staple of the postmodern narrative. Postmodernist novels often lack a central thread, and their story structures are convoluted, rendering the narratives elusive. … This narrative perspective causes thoughts and concepts to evolve into scattered fragments within the non-linear flow of time, embodying elements of contingency, subversion, and randomness. (2)

Yang's arguments further emphasise the natural intersectionality between trauma theory and non-linearity, as she says the following:

> The intersection of fragmentation and trauma introduces a fresh perspective to literary research. Trauma is inherently resistant to the chronological narrative structure. It often occurs in fragmented flashbacks, which are imitated by the fragmented narrative. (3)

My exploration of trauma theory is necessarily cursory as giving it the attention it deserves is beyond the scope of this thesis. Regardless, the insights offered by studies in the field are very useful in understanding various applications of non-linear chronology in fiction. While it is my contention that achronological narration has the capacity to reinforce themes beyond those concerned with traumatic memory, literary trauma theory serves as a particularly useful approach to such a theme, especially as it is a theme explored in both *Station Eleven* and *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*. The act of deciphering a fragmented memory as conducted by victims of trauma is naturally expressed to the reader via a fragmented story structure, asking the reader to engage in a similar process and thus immerses them within the characters' psyches.

Station Eleven

> "RAYMONDE: … There are towns like this one, where you're interested in the past, you've got a library–
>
> DIALLO: The more we know about the former world, the better we'll understand what happened when it fell.
>
> RAYMONDE: But everyone knows what happened. The new strain of swine flu and then the flights out of Moscow, those planes full of patient zeros …
>
> DIALLO: Nonetheless, I believe in understanding history.
>
> RAYMONDE: Fair enough. Some towns, as I was saying, some towns are like this one, where they want to talk about what happened, about the past. Other towns, discussion of the past is discouraged. We went to a place once where the children didn't know the world had ever been different, although you'd think all the rusted-out automobiles and telephones wires would give them a clue. Some towns are easier to visit than others."
> (Mandel 114-115)

Introduction and Critical Context

Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* offers selective insights into the lives of five main characters before and after "the collapse" – a deadly flu virus that has wiped out much of the global population. The novel portrays the different ways in which the protagonists engage with and view their own pasts as they attempt to negotiate their apocalyptic present. Mandel employs a non-linear timeline that spans from a realistic early-21st century, to 20 years after the fall of civilisation (referred to as "Year 20" as years are numbered sequentially since the collapse) due to the highly contagious and fatal Georgia Flu. Each chapter is set in a different time period, before or after "the collapse," and is focalised through the perspective of one of the key protagonists, with omniscient narratorial interventions. It becomes apparent over the course of the novel that their lives are all interconnected in varying ways although the achronological structure obscures some of these connections and/or their import at the start. The first chapter is set in Toronto before the collapse, with Jeevan Chaudhary, a paramedic in training who has had trouble sticking to a job in the past, watching a

stage production of *King Lear* starring the famous actor Arthur Leander. During the climactic scenes of the play, Arthur collapses. The first to notice the signs of an impending heart attack, Jeevan rushes to the stage to administer aid, but ultimately fails to save Arthur's life. Jeevan then consoles a young child actress by the name of Kirsten Raymonde who had been close to Arthur, before he himself leaves the theatre under the impression he has found his calling as a paramedic. This revelation is cut short when a friend, who works at a hospital in the city, warns Jeevan to leave Toronto as fast as possible, as the virus known as the Georgia Flu is rapidly spreading, with a near 0% survival rate. The rest of the first "act" sees others reacting to Arthur's death and Jeevan making preparations for the oncoming pandemic, before the reader is catapulted into the post-apocalyptic future.

Twenty years after the outbreak, we are re-introduced to now-adult Kirsten Raymonde who is roaming with a group known as the "Travelling Symphony" to perform Shakespearean plays and orchestral pieces to various survivor settlements in North America. Similar shifts occur throughout the novel as the narration jumps back and forth between the pre-apocalypse world, the time of the outbreak, and various years in the post-apocalypse world. In the chapters set before the outbreak, we learn more about the actor Arthur Leander: his climb to fame and his discontentment with his own life. We are also introduced to his first wife, Miranda Carroll, an aspiring visual novelist uncomfortable with the world of fame and public eye in which her relationship with Arthur has thrust her. We gain information about Jeevan's struggles to survive in the first few months of the outbreak, and move ahead again, to Year 20, as Kirsten tries to salvage her pre-apocalypse memories while on the run from a doomsday cult. In other chapters set post-apocalypse, we are introduced to a number of survivor settlements, one of which is led by Clark Thompson, a man committed to preserving artefacts from the world before the collapse, who also happened to be Arthur Leander's best friend before the outbreak.

Criticism focused on *Station Eleven* is quite limited, perhaps because it was published relatively recently, in 2014, although the miniseries based on it produced by HBO (2021-2022) has garnered more attention and resulted in some comparative discussions of the novel and television adaptation. In one such example, "Streaming Shakespeare in Apocalypse: Post-Apocalyptic Intertextuality in Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* and its HBO Max Miniseries Adaptation," Erin Paulhus considers the impact of the decision made by the miniseries' producers to replace the Travelling Symphony's performances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with *Hamlet*. She argues that "[t]his distinct change from a hopeful comedy to a tragedy centering on grief, loss, and personal

apocalypse affects the way in which the focalized character Kirsten engages with Shakespeare on a personal level, making this engagement much more centered on "personal memory" (1-2). Although many of Paulhus's comments on Kirsten offer insights into Kirsten's character that are relevant to the novel, especially the significance of "personal memory," here article's dominant focus is on the miniseries adaptation and has little relevance to my concerns in this thesis.

Dominant critical approaches to the novel have been to read it as exploring and advocating (or questioning) the persistence of (high) art or to read it as dystopian climate fiction. While most of the scholarly discussion about the novel acknowledges its non-linearity, this aspect of the text is usually covered briefly in descriptive discussions of the narration. In this chapter, I argue that this is a significant gap in literary analysis. It is my contention that the a-chronological structure of the novel is crucial to the reader's experience and comprehension of key thematic concerns in the novel, notably its exploration of the effects of trauma, and the various ways in which characters deal with this, whether by repression or active attempts to recall their conflicted pasts.

Critical discussion surrounding the role of art in *Station Eleven* focuses on the many ways in which the novel highlights the importance of Shakespeare and other artefacts of our current world and their ability to provide a moral compass for those surviving in the post-apocalyptic world. Natasha Tripney claims that "there is a sense that all texts from the pre-flu world have become artefacts, relics of a lost civilisation, to be treasured and studied and celebrated." Likewise, Philip Smith asserts that, "If *King Lear* heralds the apocalypse, then *A Midsummer Night's Dream* heralds the possibility of rebirth" (294) and so "we find affirmation of an essentialist Shakespeare in *Station Eleven*" (298). Charles Conaway, in "'All the world's a [post-apocalyptic] stage': The Future of Shakespeare in Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*," complicates such readings. Conaway notes that *Station Eleven* has been read, by critics such as Smith, Andrew Tate, and Maximilian Feldner, as a novel that "presents a post-apocalyptic world in which allusions, quotations, performances and other references to Shakespeare invite us to consider the nature of his continued cultural importance in a world where civilisation as we know it has been devastated" (4). He suggests that the fictional Georgia flu is a proxy for real biological disasters such as SARS, Covid-19, or Ebola, all of which had (or have) the effect of raising existential fears and questions about human (and civilisational) survival. He draws attention to a repeated phrase used throughout the novel: "Because survival is insufficient." The phrase, borrowed from *Star Trek: Voyager*, is tattooed on Kirsten's arm and painted across the caravans of the Travelling Symphony, and points, suggests Conaway, towards the "motivations of the actors and musicians of the Travelling Symphony" (4). Theirs is a mission to

"enrich the lives of the traumatised survivors of the viral apocalypse" (5), because, as the mantra suggests, survival itself isn't enough of a reason to move forward in life. Conaway asserts that critics such as those he discusses "attribut[e] to Shakespeare a therapeutic value" (6) in the novel's storyworld, and claim that his plays have the capacity to "help [the] characters (and us) work through traumatic experiences" (6). However, Conaway complicates his argument by asserting that the novel "does not present any sort of simplistic argument about how Shakespeare can help us," noting how "no other characters in the novel [beyond those in the Travelling Symphony] seem to be smitten with his works" (7).

The elevation of Shakespearean high art and its "therapeutic value," Conaway contends, is further undermined by the significance accorded to the imaginary comic series within *Station Eleven* titled *Dr. Eleven* self-published by Miranda Carroll, Arthur's first wife. Most characters engage with the comic in some way within the narrative, especially Kirsten. Her engagement with *Dr. Eleven* and its importance to the overall story diminishes Shakespeare's role as a therapeutic or revelatory work of fiction as *Dr. Eleven* proves far more influential to the characters and the novel as a whole, as the title of the novel suggests (the first issue of the *Dr. Eleven* comic series is titled "Station Eleven" and takes its name from a fictional space station). Conaway notes that there is a "gradual de-emphasis on Shakespeare as the novel progresses," which problematises the claim made by so many reviewers about Shakespeare's (and high art's) significance in the novel. In the latter part of his article, Conaway pivots to a more general discussion about Shakespeare "becoming less important" in our current society (12), and thus begins a commentary on the relative status of 'high' and 'low' art. He further claims that in the post-apocalyptic world of the novel, "Shakespeare seems more likely to instantiate an existential crisis than serve a therapeutic function" because his plays and other "cultural memories" might "serve as a constant reminder of what has been lost" (9, 8). This then "throws into question what seems to be the novel's most basic assertion: 'because survival is insufficient'" (9). The ways in which the varying survivor settlements still struggle for basic survival for the majority of the novel indeed seems to support his assertion.

Conaway closes his article, somewhat curiously, by veering away from discussion of Mandel and *Station Eleven* and instead focuses on a discussion about Shakespeare and rhizomatics, moving from the Bard and his direct works towards "adaptations, allusions, and (re)productions of Shakespeare" (13). Conway suggests that this "aggregate" "does not amount to an improper devaluation of his intrinsic merit as much as it offers a palliative limit to the sometimes tyrannical effect his culturally constructed literary authority can have" (13). Rather than trying to recall the

authentic Shakespeare, which may compound trauma in a post-apocalyptic scenario, attending to him rhizomatically "can help us work through the potential trauma of such an apocalypse" (14).

These claims prove only tangential to my concern with the narrative structure in *Station Eleven*, though Conaway's repeated references to trauma are interesting to me. I agree with his suggestion that Mandel is "thinking about how her characters might work through the psychological trauma brought on by the Georgia flu pandemic" (5) and portrays how each character seeks out their own forms of "therapy." In what follows, I argue that understanding the representation of trauma in *Station Eleven* requires close engagement with the non-linearity of the novel. This crucial element of the novel is dismissed by Conaway in a single sentence: "[Mandel] writes flashback scenes depicting incidents in the pre-pandemic lives of Arthur and Kirsten" (7). This diminishes the import of significant "scenes" set before the collapses, and ignores the impact of the other characters and events that are significant in the pre-apocalypse storyline.

The novel's non-linearity provides the reader with experiential insight into how the characters negotiate their individual trauma through acts of remembrance in an attempt to build a coherent – linear – narrative from the jumble of partial memories and the 'blanks' of forgotten events. Theirs is an attempt to bridge the gap between past and present in order to construct a chronology that makes sense of who they have become in relation to who they once were. In this respect, the characters engage in the "rifiguration of time by narrative," the process suggested by Paul Ricoeur as discussed in Chapter One. Crucially, I argue that the non-linear narrative in *Station Eleven* requires the reader to engage in a similar act of narrative "refiguration" as they attempt to make sense of the "discordant" and a-chronological novel. The reader's act of refigurative interpretation, then, mirrors that of the characters themselves – especially Kirsten.

I'd argue some aspects of the Shakespeare motifs even point to this reading, as Kirsten acknowledges the parallels between her present and the plague-filled period with that in which Shakespeare lived. Chapter 11 of the novel highlights the importance of Shakespeare, at least to Kirsten, and in it she notes that the play they are performing was "written in 1594, the year London's theatres reopened after two seasons of plague," and that the play itself provides a definition for the word contagious, being "pestilential" (Mandel 57). These references point towards the importance of time within the novel, drawing attention towards parallels or connections between very different historical eras.

Maximillian Feldner similarly argues for the importance of Shakespeare in the novel, suggesting his works contribute to a "celebration" of the "beauty" of the "present, flawed world"

(Tate, qtd, Feldner 166) to present "an unusually optimistic and hopeful vision of an otherwise bleak future" (Feldner 166). He asserts that the novel "demonstrates that our cultural activities lie at the core of what makes us human" (175). He acknowledges the non-linearity of the novel and the significance of Arthur's story: "Through the character of Arthur, the years after the flu are narratively linked to the pre-collapse world, whose events are otherwise unrelated to the later catastrophe" (170). He then quotes Carol Christ, who claims that movements between pre- and post-apocalyptic periods are common in apocalypse fiction: "This contrapuntal narrative structure gives a narrative richness to the novels that their more diagrammatic future worlds prohibit" (qtd. 170). No further comments are made on the non-linear narration however, apart from this suggestion that it imparts "richness," and while he mentions the importance of memory in the text (177) he does not discuss this in relation to the narration.

Mark West is another critic who comments on the ways Shakespeare is apparently preserved and validated within the post-apocalyptic storyworld of the novel, although he does so in order to critique the novel's representation of the 21st century. In "Apocalypse Without Revelation?: Shakespeare, Salvagepunk and *Station Eleven*," West highlights the role of Shakespeare within the post-collapse world, and how the Travelling Symphony views it is committed to preserving his works. But, rather than explore Kirsten's attempts to revitalise Shakespeare as a response to trauma and memory loss, West details how Shakespeare is fetishised by survivors in the novel as the basis for an argument about the harm capitalism causes, drawing on similar arguments made by the likes of Andrew Tate. West claims that Shakespeare's presence in the novel is a "testament to the novel's entanglement of economic and ecological collapse and helps to establish their historical scale" (West, 2018). He further notes that "Mandel's use of Shakespeare, then, draws attention to a historical period in which diseases were mobilized by global trade networks," and the article becomes increasingly concerned with global capitalism, detailing how "Clark rather blithely aestheticizes – to the point of reverie – the forms of labor upon which global capitalism relies, and fetishizes the 'beautiful objects' at the expense of the workers who make them, workers who are dehumanised into assemblies of working parts" (2018). Much like Conaway and Feldner, while West does acknowledge various scenes that occur in vastly different time periods within the novel, he too does not acknowledge the scale to which this is done, nor the a-chronological structure's importance to the novel as a whole.

The other prevalent mode of thinking about the novel is to read *Station Eleven* as climate change literature or literature of the Anthropocene. In his article "Beauty That Must Die: *Station*

Eleven, Climate Change Fiction, and the Life of Form," Pieter Vermeulen adopts this line of thinking by considering the relationship between "life forms" and "forms of life" in the novel. His approach relies on Roy Scranton's *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene* and Samuel Scheffler's *Death and the Afterlife*, with Vermeulen utilising *Station Eleven* to navigate their concerns. Scranton and Scheffler's work are different in many ways, but both reflect on death and share a concern with what makes life meaningful. Both argue, albeit in different ways, that what is at stake is collective, not individual, survival. They advocate abandoning greedy, individualistic pursuits in favour of valuing what we pass down to future generations and their survival. Vermeulen notes that "while [*Station Eleven*] does not engage directly with changes in climate, it does engage with crucial elements of the Anthropocene imagination – extinction, epidemics, energy depletion, survival – in ways that are also relevant for our understanding of cli-fi" (12), and that it "articulat[es] the threat of biological extinction with accounts of different communities situated before, during, and after the epidemic" (12). In this respect, Vermeulen acknowledges the import of the non-linear structure, going so far as to state that the "novel's frequent temporal shifts [are] … its most remarkable formal feature" (12). Vermeulen pays a fair amount of attention to discussing the novel's portrayal of the time before the outbreak, unlike many critics who focus almost exclusively on its representation of the post-collapse world. This takes the form of discussion about the death of "beauty" in the novel, the tension between life forms and forms of life culminating in the assertion that appreciation of a given object, person, or lifestyle is amplified or realised only when it is clear that it is dying or is forever lost, such as Miranda finding "the family home more beautiful than ever" upon the realisation her marriage is ending, or how "it is only when cars have stopped driving and planes have stopped flying that people recognise the beauty of flight" (17). This idea is in accordance with Dereck Daschke's assertion that "[a]pocalypses are … decidedly nostalgic" (465), in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, an idea promoted in many discussions of apocalyptic fiction.

One of Vermeulen's central claims about the novel, then, is that "[b]eauty, it seems, is premised on scarcity; it only emerges when we acknowledge the finitude of things. Only things that can be lost, the novel seems to suggest, can be beautiful, which means that a strong reminder of finitude, such as the catastrophe at the heart of the novel, has the power to make things beautiful" (17). When Clark, one of the post-flu survivors, starts a "Museum of Civilization" – a collection of random pre-collapse objects that are now obsolete (iPhones, stiletto heels, a snow globe) – obsolescence itself grants each curated item beauty. Thus, he avers, "[i]n the same way that the aesthetic operation of the museum renders things beautiful, the novel itself, which like the museum

is organized around a situation of massive loss, constellates the human life form and sociocultural forms of life in a way that makes things beautiful" (18). This implies that the significance of the past scenes in the novel is simply to amplify the tenuous 'beauty' of survival/the survivors, an idea I challenge.

Like the critics discussed above, Vermeulen also dedicates a section of his article to the significance of Shakespeare in the novel, "connecting Shakespeare's early modernity" to the Anthropocene, arguing that the novel "is not about the unperturbed continuity of humanist tradition" but instead "shapes a half-buried affinity between historical periods in which the fit between life and the forms that normally contain it becomes less stable" (19-20). In contrast, I argue that the "affinity between historical periods" in the novel – very clearly demarcated by the collapse – is central to the novel's emotive and thematic concerns. Vermeulen's discussions about both the 'before' and 'after' exist only to reinforce his arguments about scarcity (and remembrance of what is now lost) as securing value/beauty: "The novel repeatedly insists that those who remember everything suffer most [267], and it is implied that such remembrance also provides the experience of loss – of a "divide between a *before* and an *after*, a line drawn through … life" [20] –on which beauty depends" (18).

My disagreement with Vermeulen's claims relate to his viewing the novel through an anthropocentric lens that insistently points towards the time post-outbreak being the focus of the novel rather than the novel *as a whole*. For him, the past only matters because it no longer is and this informs valuation in the present. While he acknowledges that the temporal shifts are a "remarkable formal feature" of the novel (12), and closely analyses some of the scenes and plot threads that occur pre-outbreak, he sits *within* the scenes, explored as individual scenes, rather than discussing the relationships between them. He pays particular attention to the production of *King Lear* that opens the novel; however, he reads this as an example of the "death of beauty" and then proceeds to identify scenes in the pre-outbreak period that he claims similarly highlight beauty that is lost due to the collapse. Vermeulen pays scant attention to the ways in which the opening *King Lear* scene is framed within the chronology of the novel or how it is one of few events to which the novel returns repeatedly, either through fragmented recollection or through retellings by various characters. Moreover, at the end of Vermeulen's second section, he states that "reading the choreography of life and form in *Station Eleven* reveals an account of life and value in the Anthropocene that can complement (if not correct) Scheffler's and Scranton's [aforementioned] philosophical positions"

(15). This makes clear that *Station Eleven* is being used to explore the philosophical arguments made by Scheffler and Scranton, rather than using insights from both to analyse the novel itself.

As briefly mentioned in my previous chapter, Marco Caracciolo focuses on what he calls "negative strategies" in his analysis of *Station Eleven* in a chapter in *Narrating the Mesh*. Here, Caracciolo pays careful attention to the chronology of the novel and carefully constructs a timeline of the pre-apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic world to support his claim that the relationship between the two eras is defined by negation. As an example, he refers to Chapter 6, which simply comprises "an incomplete list"of all the smaller trivial luxuries that have been lost since the arrival of the post-apocalyptic world. He notes that the "multiplication of negative statements describes, indirectly, how the virus outbreak reshaped the reality of those who survived" (83). Caracciolo's analysis of *Station Eleven* in this chapter remains brief however, and much of it is dedicated to the discussion of "lost objects" and how this defines the character's relationship between the before and after: "[t]he negation of familiar objects performed by the enumeration is thus made in a thematic focus" (85). He pays particular attention to Miranda Carroll's visual novel and its role in the narrative as it "appears to be controlled not by a single character's intentions but by the non-linear circulation of an inanimate object" (84). However, his claim that the "comic book connects all the major characters" is not true (84). Many plot points do not relate to the comic book. Jeevan, the character who focalises events the most aside from Kirsten, never comes into contact with the comic or is affected by its existence in any way. And, much like Vermeulen, Caracciolo chooses to analyse *Station Eleven* purely as a post-apocalyptic novel, omitting close analysis of the numerous chapters and characters who do not function to centralise anthropocentric concerns. Curiously, as discussed earlier, Caracciolo pays close attention to the workings of memory and the reader's engagement with non-linearity in the novel *Zone One* within this same chapter, but doesn't apply this same lens to *Station Eleven*, despite briefly acknowledging Kirsten's desire to piece together her past. The "negation of narrative continuity" (92) that he notes in *Zone One* is very much applicable to *Station Eleven* as well.

Claire P. Curtis' article "Affiliation as Environmental Justice in Three Climate Novels" is another work that analyses *Station Eleven* through an apocalypse-fiction lens. Drawing on Martha Nussbaum's concept of "affiliation" ("living with and towards others"), and how humans live with both other humans and the non-human, Curtis considers *Station Eleven* and two other climate novels to highlight the ways survivors of various pandemics navigate their new worlds. She asserts that while *Station Eleven* "may not be a classic climate novel [... but] it is fully a novel of the

Anthropocene" (Curtis 135). She notes it is set "both before and after a deadly flu" but asserts "the analysis here focuses on the sections of the novel after the Georgia Flu" (136). In my opinion, this does a disservice to the intricate plotting and narration of *Station Eleven* due to Curtis' selective disregard for large sections of the novel. She neglects many characters and storylines to make the novel fit her prescriptive reading. Curtis' analysis also hinges entirely on the relationships between various members of the Travelling Symphony, and a character analysis of the Prophet (the name adopted by Tyler Leander, Arthur's son). The Travelling Symphony appears very sparingly in *Station Eleven*, as it only features in Kirsten's Year 20 storyline, which quickly sees her split up from the group and thus zooms in solely on her and her best friend August. Analysing the Travelling Symphony's dynamic in order to understand the novel as a whole thus proves problematically partial. Her emphasis on the Prophet is curious as for the majority of this same storyline he is merely an unseen and stereotypical threat chasing the Travelling Symphony: the leader of a doomsday cult. Curtis reads him as representative of doomsday cultists found within other apocalypse fiction, creating an echo chamber as she compares him to characters in other fictions who reflect this trope, only to contrast his "anti-affiliation" with the productive co-existence of other characters.

Reading *Station Eleven* as a climate change or apocalypse novel tends to place more importance on the storyline post-outbreak, when humanity's disastrous impact on the Earth is fully realised. Characters such as Arthur Leander, who dies before the collapse, are almost entirely overlooked when the novel is observed through such a lens. Arthur's individual storyline is disregarded in favour of analysis of how he influenced survivors or how they recall him from their present, post-apocalypse position. Neglecting Arthur and his portrayal *in the past*, I argue, is to dismiss a core part of *Station Eleven*, as the structure of the novel points to his relevance time and time again. Much the same could be said of Miranda. While she is linked to anti-anthropocentric concerns (via her awareness of greater economic powers and how they influence the environment as seen in the fleet of ships in Malaysia; the dormancy and scale of the ships affecting the natural beauty of the coast), her arc is dominated by the toxicity of her relationships and the escapism provided by her visual novels – all of which occur prior to the flu outbreak. Given that two of the three chapters in the novel's final Act occur *before* the full effects of the outbreak are fully realised on Earth, and conclude the stories of Arthur and Miranda, they deserve closer attention as significant characters than anthropocentric or apocalypse readings typically would offer.

Diletta De Cristofaro, in "Critical Temporalities: *Station Eleven* and the Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel" offers commentary on the significance of religious motifs in traditional

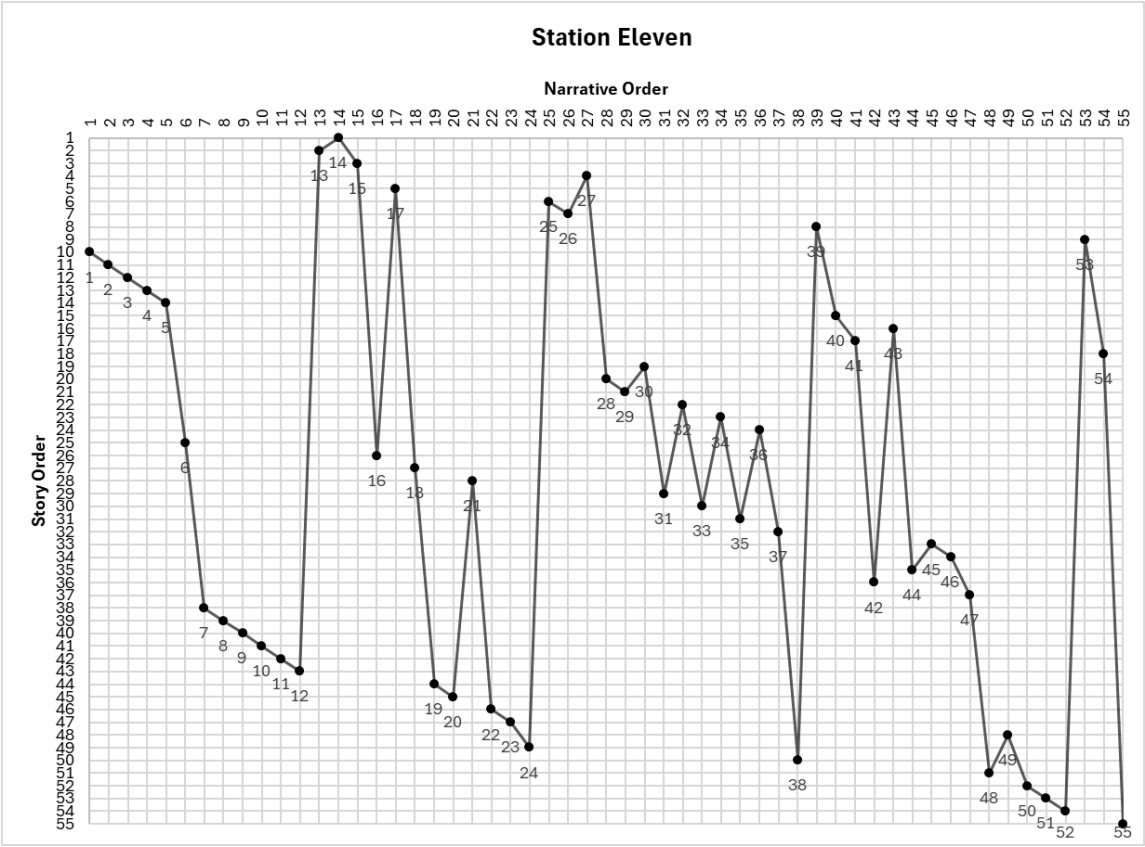
apocalyptic narratives, "from the Flood, in Genesis, to Revelation" (8), claiming that "[t]he goal of traditional apocalyptic logic is to order time and make it intelligible, by disclosing that the whole course of human history is tending towards a final resolution which will make sense of everything that happened before" via "the revelation of a utopian new world" (3). However, she notes that most "contemporary post-apocalyptic scenarios are predominantly dystopian" (4). Of interest to my concerns in this thesis, she also begins to engage with the structure of the novel in a way the previously discussed articles do not. One of her key arguments is that "*Station Eleven* self-reflexively emphasises this difference between traditional and contemporary apocalyptic imagination" (4) and does so by using a non-linear structure that disrupts teleological views, which she astutely argues not only underpins notions of (linear) human 'progress' but also traditional apocalyptic discourses. She asserts Mandel problematises and undermines what she defines as "the hegemonic temporality" of the "apocalyptically-inflected neoliberal end of history and its supposedly utopian completion of modernity" (5). Her claim is that apocalyptic thinking itself is structurally anthropocentric and she raises concerns about the consequences of the linear conceptions of time that inform such thinking.

I note with interest that in the introduction to *The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel: Critical Temporalities and the End Times*, De Cristofaro asks,

> What are the implications for agency of a culture obsessed with the thought of its own approaching end? The answer to these questions, I argue through my analysis of the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel, is intertwined with the answer to another question: what is at stake in the shift from narratives that uphold a teleological conception of history to narratives in which this utopian end is removed? And in turn, how is this shift, in which the end is no longer the privileged site of meaning, reflected in narrative form? (2-3)

Cristofaro doesn't discuss *Station Eleven* in this book; however, the questions she asks here are certainly valid ones to ask of Madel's novel and I will return to them in my discussion of *Station Eleven*, later in this chapter. First, however, I will detail the story timeline and plot construction in *Station Eleven*.

The Timeline and Plot Structure of *Station Eleven*



(Fig. I: *Station Eleven* Story and Plot Order)

Fig. I is a visual representation of the timeline of *Station Eleven*. The x-axis details the narrative order, or the events as presented in the novel, which in this case is approached chapter by chapter. The y-axis depicts the plot order, or the events in the story as they occur chronologically, thus Chapter 14, the chapter portraying one of Arthur and Miranda's earliest dates, occurs first in the story order, and Chapter 55, the chapter that depicts Clark reminiscing on the past as the Travelling Symphony leave the Museum of Civilisation, concludes the novel's timeline.

When reading, it is possible to quickly establish when some of the chapters occur within the novel's timeline, usually due to a temporal cue that orients the reader or a reference to how long it has been since the outbreak, or how long it will be before it occurs. One such example is near the start of Chapter 13: "This is well before the Georgia Flu. Civilization won't collapse for another fourteen years" (Mandel 71). In examples such as this, focalisation through individual characters gives way to omniscient narration. This helps guide the reader through the narrative, providing information the characters don't have, and also manipulates the tone, as in this comment at the end of Chapter 2: "Of all of them there at the bar that night, the bartender was the one who survived the

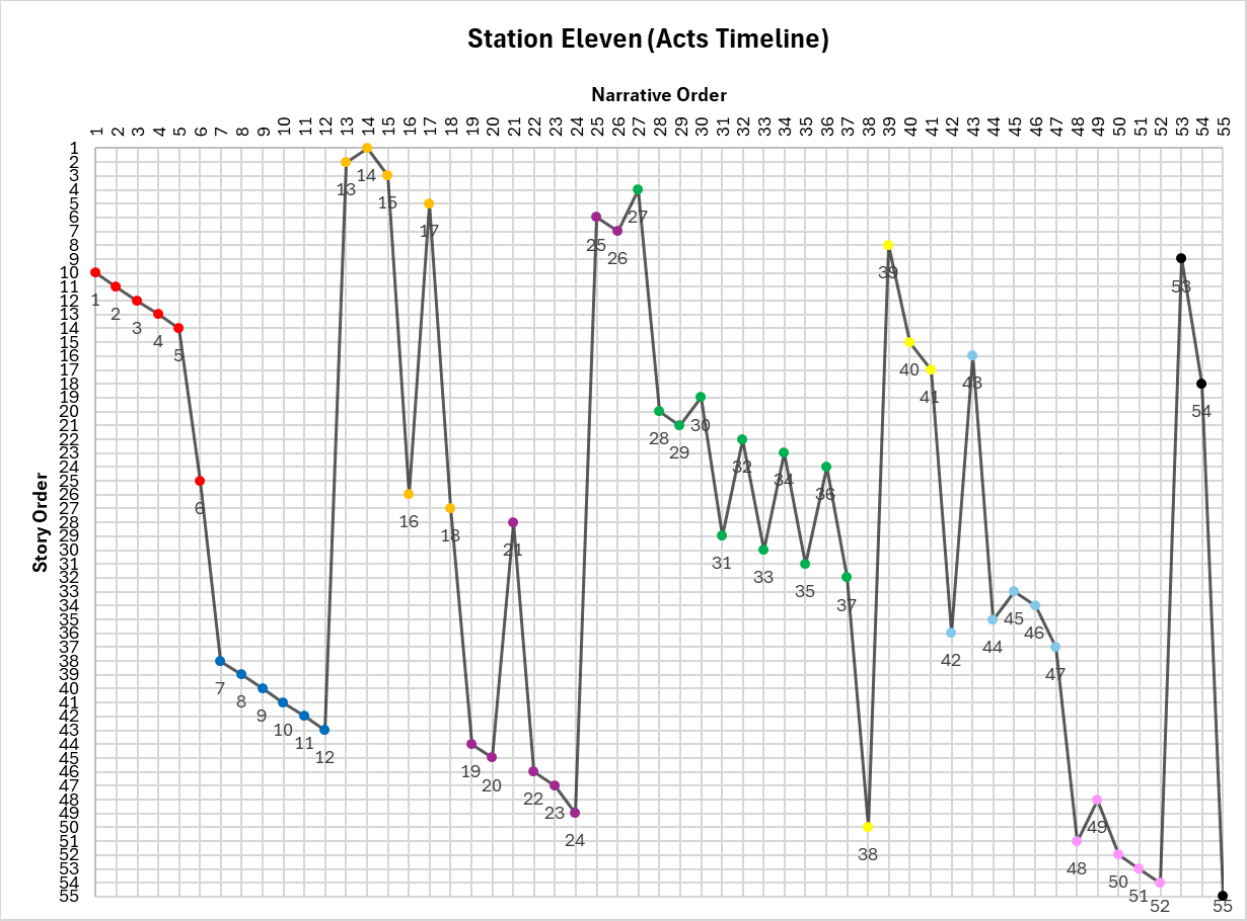
longest. He died three weeks later on the road out of the city" (15). This comment imposes a sense of bleak inevitability on what was otherwise a minor sombre moment of reflection on Arthur's death. Further temporal signposting is provided by numbering the years since the outbreak ("Year 1," "Year 5," etc.), although the majority of the post-apocalypse storyline occurs in "Year 20." These tactics help the reader to navigate the various jumps made in the narrative, enabling the construction of the timeline as shown in Fig. I.

Despite this, however, there are a few chapters that are hard to definitively place 'in time.' Three, in particular, present notably different time periods within a single chapter, most often due to reminiscence on the part of the focalising character. Chapter 13, for example, centred on and largely focalised through Arthur, depicts a date he has with Miranda 14 years prior to the flu epidemic, before revealing some of Arthur's childhood memories, decades prior. Chapter 42 follows a similar pattern, showing Clark in Year 16 or 17 of the apocalypse, before we are provided with his memories of the initial outbreak. Likewise, in Chapter 49, the first and only chapter that offers insights into the mind and thoughts of Sidney, aka "the clarinet," opens with a recount of the origins of a note she wrote in Year 19 which was found in her bag by the Travelling Symphony members after her kidnapping in Year 20, and then jumps to details of her escape from this kidnapping. Of note, however, is that in each of these examples of reminiscence, the tense remains consistent between both the 'present' and the 'memory', present tense for Chapter 13, and past tense for Chapters 42 and 49.

In constructing my timeline, I have placed such chapters in the time period in which they were framed, rather than the time period being remembered by the focalising character: 14 years before the apocalypse, Year 16, and the year of the kidnapping escape, respectively. Further difficulties are raised in Chapters 6 and 25, which both (for different reasons) lack a defined date. Chapter 6 takes the form of a list of everyday luxuries that get lost in the apocalypse, while Chapter 25 takes the form of various excerpts from the book "*Dear V: An Unauthorized Portrait of Arthur Leander*," which is a published collection of letters Arthur wrote to his friend Victoria. Both chapters lack a true focalising agent, as Chapter 6 is narrated omnisciently and Chapter 25 comprises excerpts from the book. Chapter 6 could realistically be placed at any point after the outbreak has fully dismantled society, and I have thus chosen to place it at the earliest point this could happen, which is after any chapters depicting the first few months of the outbreak. Chapter 25, due to it being extracts from a book of letters written at different times, first introduced to us by Kirsten in Year 20, could be placed there; however, as each letter provides a date, and Chapter 15 recounts Arthur

writing one such letter, it could be located among any of the dates provided with each letter. After some consideration, I have decided to place it just before Chapter 26, the chapter where Clark learns the book has just been released.

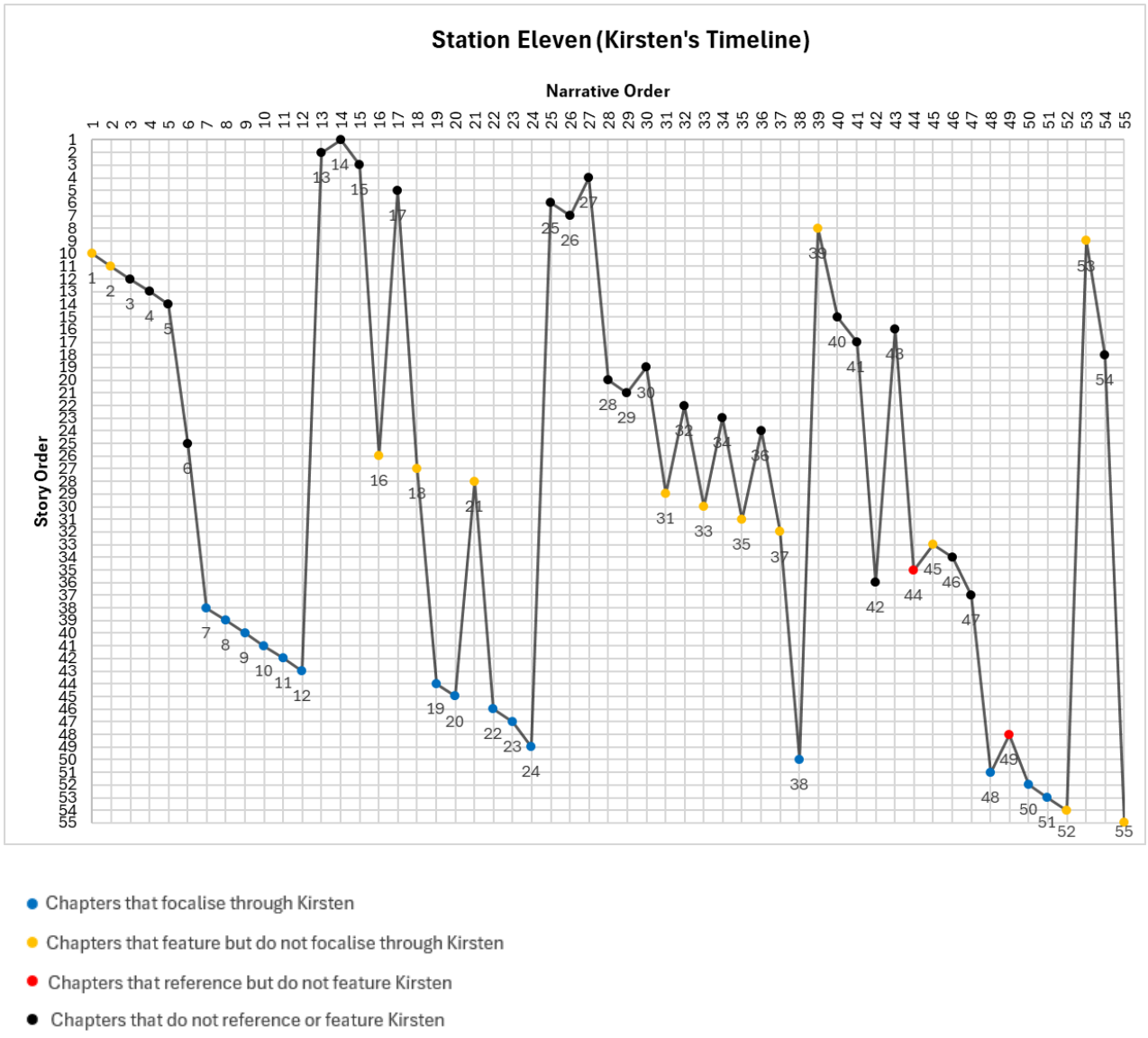
Aside from these few instances, it is possible to construct a clear timeline of story events. Doing so makes the non-linearity of the novel's narration abundantly clear. My visual representation of the plot/chapter timeline highlights that across the novel there are 15 chapters that move backwards from the last chapter, and 39 instances in which the novel moves forwards. Of the instances where the chapters move forward, 16 progress chronologically to the next chapter. Although the timeline may appear erratic, we can still observe a downward sloping trend, indicating that overall the narrative still trends forwards in time.



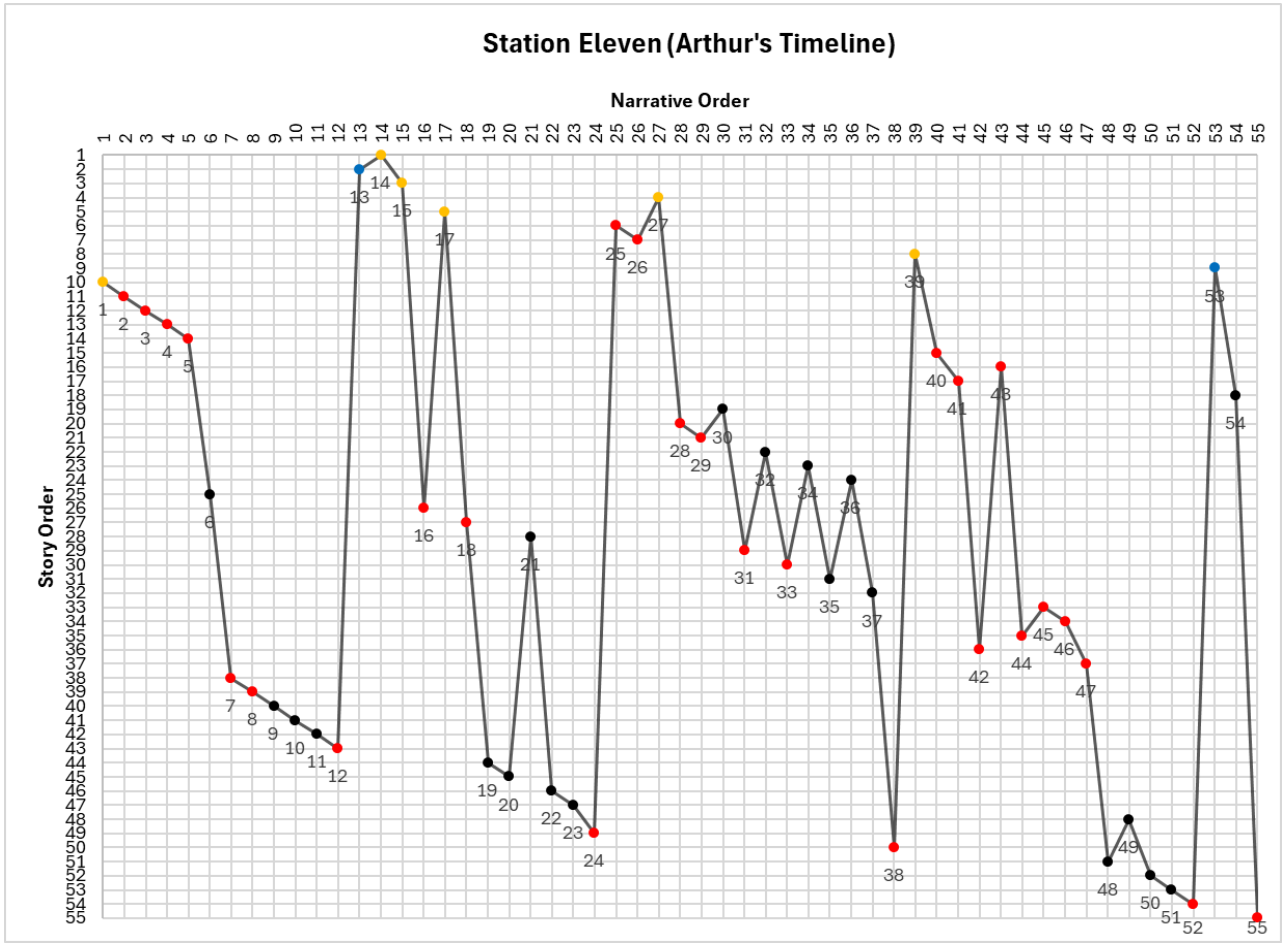
(Fig. II: *Station Eleven* Plot and Story Order by Act)

This is also observable among the different "Acts" of the novel, as seen in Fig. II, in which the nine Acts that comprise the novel are organised by colour. The majority of the Acts also trend forwards

in time, as they tend to contain within them a smaller narrative that progresses forwards, such as Act 1's focus on the stage production of *King Lear* and Arthur's death, or Act 7's timeline of the Severn City Airport's development into a fully fledged survivor settlement. The visual representation of the timeline also highlights various narratorial features such as instances of parallel storytelling, the most notable instance of which occurs in (the majority of) Act 5. In this Act, Chapters 28-37 alternate between details of Jeevan's survival in the initial outbreak and Francois' interviews with Kirsten in Year 15. To a lesser degree, this also occurs in Act 3: Chapters 15-18 alternate between accounts of Miranda and Clark's respective falling outs with Arthur and further interviews by Francois of Kirsten from Year 15.



(Fig. III: *Station Eleven* Kirsten's Timeline)



(Fig. IV: *Station Eleven* Arthur's Timeline)

Figures III and IV represent individual character's storylines and makes clear that these are also revealed to the reader in an a-chronological manner. Here I focus on the two central characters, Kirsten and Arthur. These timelines not only highlight the interconnectiveness of the chapters, but also highlight that the non-linearity of the overarching narrative also extends to the narratives of individual characters. Isolating the non-linearity of each character's narrative also highlights further trends, such as Kirsten's dominance in consecutive chapters as seen on Fig III, and Arthur's large narrative impact and presence, despite there only being two chapters in which he serves as the

focaliser (this is not surprising as he dies before the epidemic breaks out). The exploration of both the a-chronological master plot and the a-chronological character narratives and the relationships between the two encourages greater understanding of the novel and its thematic concerns as a whole. I turn to these next.

Memory in *Station Eleven*

The storyworld of *Station Eleven* is structured by a before and an after, detailing life before the outbreak and the world left in its wake. As stated earlier, a variety of cues in the narrative guide the reader through the timeline via repeated references to this very divide such as this, in Act Two: "Twenty years after the end of air travel, the caravans of the Travelling Symphony moved slowly under a white-hot sky" (35). It is clear from various conversations between characters in the post-outbreak world that there is a divide in how survivors regard life "before." 15 years after the Georgia Flu devastated Earth, in what was once Virginia, Jeevan's friend Michael asks him, "Does it still make sense to teach kids the way things were?" (269). Michael's daughter had come home from school crying that day after learning that "life expectancies were much longer before the Georgia Flu, that once sixty hadn't been considered particularly old" (269). Life before that collapse has become "science-fiction" to the children of the new world, prompting Michael to ask whether "knowing these things make them more or less happy?" (270). He comes to think that it might be time to stop "telling them these crazy stories. Maybe it's time we let go," while Jeevan resolves that "'[He doesn't] want to let go" (270).

On the same day in what was Michigan, Kirsten has a similar discussion with François Diallo in an interview for his newspaper. When discussing how children have adapted to the new world, Kirsten says, "doesn't it seem like the people who struggle the most with it [adapting] are the people who remember the old world clearly," further clarifying that "the more you remember, the more you've lost" (195). These discussions point the reader toward an internal conflict survivors have with their memories. Kirsten, who finds herself thriving in the post-apocalypse world, finds herself unable to recall the first year after the outbreak, stating in the aforementioned interview with François that she doesn't "remember that year at all," and recalls "absolutely nothing" (195). She also says she "can't remember very much from before the collapse" (113), and that such recollections from this period "seem like dreams now" (195). As a result, when looting houses, she spends much of her

time digging through anything that could be tangentially related to her, in an effort to fix the patches in her pre-outbreak memory.

Jeevan, during the first months of the outbreak, appears to have a memory breakdown, as "It was becoming more difficult to hold onto himself" (194). He tries to "keep up a litany of biographical facts" in an effort to maintain his sense of self, though his memory begins to "fragment" and the only words repeating in his head become "[k]eep walking" (194). Come Year 20, having settled with a wife and children, he appears to have stabilised, with his new simpler life. However, the final words focalised through his perspective are "Always these memories, barely submerged" (313). This suggests a reservoir of barely repressed recollection with the potential to manifest and disturb his apparent peace. Clark's response to loss is to actively seek out and collect now-redundant objects from the past in his "Museum of Civilisation." As he ages, we learn he spends "more time in the past," as "memories overtake him" (279). He remembers his life as "a series of photographs and disconnected short films," that he cannot clearly piece together. These characters' memories and the attempt to either repress or recover them are all defined by the fulcrum point that is the outbreak.

The apocalypse only serves as a very tangible and measurable facilitator of the dominant thematic concern with memory. This is evidenced by the importance in the novel of the characters whose lives are not defined by the before and after of the outbreak: Miranda and Arthur. Both die before the outbreak and subsequent dissolution of society. Miranda succumbs to the Georgia Flu just two days after it is identified as a true threat, and Arthur dies before he and the rest of the world even truly consider it as such. However, Arthur and Miranda are central characters in the novel. Memories of Arthur are one of the primary ways in which surviving characters are connected, and Miranda is the author of the self-published, limited-run graphic novel which gives Mandel's novel its name: *Station Eleven*. The comic series is a *mise en abyme* narrative, reflecting the conflicts of the novel in which it is embedded. It features an astronaut, Dr Eleven, who lives on a broken and isolated space station with other inhabitants who have escaped an alien invasion of Earth. These inhabitants are divided between those who wish to remain safely in space and those of the 'Undersea', a rebellion who reside in the flooded sections of the space station, who wish to return to Earth. Arthur gifted eight-year old Kirsten a rare two-volume set of the comics before he died, and she holds onto these in her post-collapse life, treasuring them, unaware that they were written by Arthur's first wife, Miranda, who had gifted the comics to Arthur just two weeks before he had given them to Kirsten.

While Arthur and Miranda aren't engaged with the act of survival in the post-apocalypse world, details of their lives occupy a significant part in Mandel's novel. Both characters come to express a fraught relationship with their own memories. In a letter to his friend, Arthur writes that he lives unaware of how he has landed in his life, expressing a feeling of "such disorientation" and that his current situation seems like "an improbable outcome" (157). Meanwhile, Miranda sees "ghosts of herself everywhere," reflections and reminders of her past struggles in women around her (205). She expresses that remembering past versions of herself was "almost like remembering other people, acquaintances, young women whom she'd known a long time ago, and she felt such compassion for them" (206). All while she seeks to escape her circumstances through her creating visual novels, the lines in her reality blurring as she sees the environs of (her fictional spaceship) Station Eleven "all around them" (107) in moments of fragile beauty.

The conflict with memory thus exists outside of the outbreak and the apocalyptic storyline, running deep through the heart of the novel on all levels. I argue that this concern with memory – the desire to recall or make sense of it – is reflected in the very structure of the novel, both on a wider scale and in each individual character's story arcs. This can be seen in smaller elements such as Act 5's shorter chapters reflecting the way Jeevan's "thoughts broke apart in his head and were replaced by strange fragments" (194), or how the chapters portraying the interviews between François and Kirsten take on the very format in which they would later be published, as an act of preserving their lives. However, it is in the chronology of the novel where the concerns with memory can be seen playing out at a grand scale. In presenting information and the story non-linearly, the past and present are in a physical conversation with one another in the structure itself, as we move from one time period to another. The battle with memory – the battle to recall or forget – is played out in the ordering of the chapters: the past that characters like Miranda are desperate to forget or characters like Kirsten are actively pursuing are juxtaposed with the 'present' in which they express these divergent desires.

This paints the discussions people have around the importance of the past, such as the aforementioned one between Jeevan and Michael, in a new light. Michael proposes omitting references to the old world in the presence of children who were born after its collapse, as he believes that their being aware of a 'better' mode of life – one more 'civilised' and technologically advanced – is only harmful to their psyche. This conversation isn't resolved within the dialogue or the content of the chapter itself, but instead the novel *shows* that the past is inescapable and

irrevocably intertwined with the present. The continual returns to the narrative past prove it is impossible to evade memory. In her interview with François, Kirsten mentions that she can not remember the first year on the road, expressing gratitude as that means she "can't remember the worst of it" (195). This discussion immediately follows the chapter in which we see Jeevan making this same journey from Toronto southward, his mental state deteriorating as he travels, proving Kirsten right to be grateful. The narrative structure highlights the inevitability of coming back to the past, with the final act beginning not only with one of the earliest chronologically ordered chapters but also the very event that the novel opens with, Arthur's death, and the final chapter presenting Clark being unexpectedly pulled back into his memories. The past is interwoven throughout the 'present,' thus highlighting the conflict between traumatic memory and healing memory as the reader experiences the effects of recall.

Kirsten's Search for the Past

The character through which most events are focalised in the novel is Kirsten, and thus she provides a valuable case study for exploring the relationship between a character and their memories and the way this plays out chronologically within the novel. As seen in Fig. III, Kirsten is the focaliser in fifteen chapters. Notably, all of these chapters are set within Year 20 of the post-apocalypse, although she features in other chapters pre- and post the epidemic. In Year 20, Kirsten is 28 years old, and one of the lead actresses in the Travelling Symphony. We are first introduced to older Kirsten as the Symphony arrives in a township named St. Deborah's by the Water, a settlement that was once safe and accepting, but has since been taken over by a Doomsday cult. The leader of this cult, known initially only as the Prophet, scares them from the town and off their usual path, and they seek out a rumoured safe settlement at Severn City Airport. After the Prophet kidnaps various members of the Symphony in retaliation for unwittingly taking one of his child brides, Kirsten and her friend August are separated from the Symphony. The two confront the Prophet, who is killed by one of his own men, and they reunite with the Symphony at the airport. These details about Kirsten's life in Year 20 provide the reader with a picture of life long after the immediate effects of the Georgia Flu. Panic has subsided and survivors are attempting to rebuild pockets of lost society in small settlements.

Despite the horrors she has experienced by Year 20, such as the death of her brother and her own killing of two separate assailants, the narrator tells us that Kirsten sees "there is still such beauty" in the world (57). Her thoughts are described in fantastical and magical terms, as here: "Twilight in the altered world, a performance of *A Midsummer's Night Dream* in a parking lot in the mysteriously named town of St. Deborah by the Water, Lake Michigan shining a half mile away. Kirsten as Titania, a crown of flowers on her close-cropped hair, the jagged scar on her cheekbone half-erased by candlelight." (57). This sentiment, her accrued fame as the lead actress of the Travelling Symphony, and her adept survival skills, all imply she thrives in this world. Her desire to seek the beauty of the world overcomes the ugliness of the dystopia, as when she thinks of "[t]he beauty of this world where almost everyone was gone" (148). In her final appearance in the novel, she is described as seeing, "[i]n the distance, pinpricks of light arranged into a grid. There, plainly visible on the side of a hill some miles distant: a town, or a village, whose streets were lit back with electricity" (311). The sight makes her step back and her final chapter ends with a vision of hope for the future. This scene is often referred to by critics who argue for the fundamental hopefulness of *Station Eleven*.

Strikingly, in a novel with such a temporally discordant and non-linear structure, the chapters focalised through (or focused on) Kirsten progress chronologically (although they are interspersed with other chapters in which the point of view and/or time is different). Kirsten's acuity for living in the new world is reflected in the consistency of her chapters. Here, in the apocalypse, she remains grounded, and thus, her chapters play out in an expected, linear manner. Where readers may otherwise face disorientation due to the fragment chronology of the chapters, having to locate the chapters in relation to other chapters featuring the same focaliser/main character, this challenge is absent in Kirsten's storyline. Her proficiency in navigating the post-apocalypse world is thus extended to the reader's experience as they navigate the novel, the chronology simulating in the reader the same aptitude Kirsten has grown in the new world.

This stands in contrast to what we learn of her life before the outbreak. Kirsten still appears in other chapters as a secondary figure in chapters set after the collapse, most significantly in those in which (librarian and newspaper publisher) François interviews her in Year 15 as he attempts to compile an oral history of the world before and after the pandemic. In these, François gains insights into Kirsten's life and view of the world and his observations are presented with journalistic objectivity. This objectivity is reflected in the orderly, linear chronology of these chapters when they are isolated from the novel as a whole. Talking with François, Kirsten details her disconnect with

both her pre-outbreak and early-apocalypse memories. Of the early-apocalypse, especially Year One, she claims, "I don't remember that year at all" (195). Earlier in the novel, in Chapter 12, she claims that she had "walked for all of Year One," though the narrator adds "she felt dishonest claiming this, given she had no memory whatsoever of that first year" (61). Of her life before the Georgia Flu outbreak, she tells François that "I have some problems with memory. I can't remember very much from before the collapse" (113). Kirsten also tells François that her "memories from before the collapse seem like dreams now," recalling "just impressions" of her parents (113). The conclusion to Chapter 7, the first chapter focused on and at times through Kirsten, also draws attention to her amnesia, as the narrator points out "[t]here were countless things about the pre-collapse world that Kirsten couldn't remember – her street address, her mother's face, the TV shows [her friend] August never stopped talking about" (40).

Reflecting these lapses in her memory, Kirsten has a very limited presence in the pre-apocalypse chapters, appearing only thrice in chapters focused on other characters. The effect of this is that the reader is kept in the dark about her past much like she is. Though, the few pre-collapse provide further insight into how memory is woven into the chronology of the novel. She is first introduced in Chapter 1, a chapter largely focalised by Jeevan Chaudhary. Set on the same night as the outbreak, Jeevan watches a performance of *King Lear* starring Arthur Leander, a performance that also happens to feature an 8-year old Kirsten playing one of Lear's daughters. Arthur suffers a heart attack on stage, prompting Jeevan, a former paparazzo and entertainment journalist now training as a paramedic, to rush to his rescue and attempt to resuscitate him. After it becomes clear Jeevan can't help, he notices Kirsten on the side of the stage, grieving the dead Arthur. He consoles her and the two have a brief conversation as Kirsten waits for Tanya, the woman in charge of the child actresses, to find her.

We learn Kirsten is close to Arthur, as she asks, "Is Arthur going to be okay?" and expresses that the two share the same passion for acting, saying, "It's the thing I love most in the world too" (8). Their conversation is cut short as Tanya collects Kirsten, and Jeevan comes to forget (or at least omits any references to) this brief exchange. In later chapters set after the apocalypse, we learn that Kirsten is actively searching for any information pertaining to Arthur and Jeevan, as she rummages through houses looking for articles referencing Arthur as well as during her interview with François. In this interview, she recalls the night of the outbreak and Arthur's death, remembering Jeevan as having been "kind to me" (181), and asks François about Jeevan's name. Kirsten has forgotten Jeevan's name given her sparse memory of pre-apocalypse life, and she knows François has a copy of

Arthur's obituary published in the "second-to-last edition of the *New York Times*" (184). However, François cannot help, claiming, "That man from the audience who performed CPR on Leander, he's unidentified. Under normal circumstances there would've been a follow-up story, presumably" (184).

Arthur also proves to be of significance to Kirsten in scenes taking place in Year 20. She cannot remember "her mother's face," but does "remember Arthur" (40), and we learn that the memory of his death is "the clearest memory she retained from before the collapse: a stage, a man in a suit talking to her while Arthur lay still on his back with paramedics leaning over him" (41). Her fascination with Arthur's obituary extends to other paraphernalia regarding Arthur as, when raiding houses, she searches for "celebrity-gossip magazines, because once, when she was sixteen years old [This would be Year 8], she'd flipped through a magazine on a dust-blackened side table and found her past. … The photograph: Arthur with a three-day beard, rumpled clothes, a baseball cap, carrying a small boy who beamed up at his father's face while Arthur smiled at the camera" (40). Ever since finding this, she "went through every magazine she could find in search of him … collect[ing] fragments, stored in a ziplock bag in her backpack" (40). Kirsten believes that when she finds information about Arthur she also "found [aspects of] her past" (40), so information about him becomes a proxy memory.

This act of finding memorabilia to serve as a proxy memory can be seen in full effect come Chapters 38 and 39. Chapter 38, set in Year 20 and largely focalised through Kirsten, sees Kirsten and her friend August raiding another house after being separated from the Travelling Symphony. Here, she is once again successful in finding information related to her past, this time in an article titled "Furtive Departure from the Stage Door of the Toronto Theatre where Leander is Performing in *King Lear*," with a photo of Miranda, Arthur's ex-wife, on display. Seeing this, Kirsten tells August, "I think I was there … . I might've been in that building at that moment" (201). This then prompts brief, vague memories to surface: "An impression of a colouring book, the smell of pencils, Arthur's voice, a warm room with a red carpet, electric light" (201). Subsequently, Chapter 39 shows the moment Kirsten finds herself reminiscing from another perspective, that of Miranda. The narration shifts between omniscience and free indirect discourse from Miranda's perspective and describes her meeting with Arthur after years of estrangement. Arthur believes that Miranda is the only person who can console him after his father's death, as he tells her "You know where I'm from" (207). This exchange happens inside of Arthur's personal changing room in the theatre where he performs *King Lear*; and it is after this conversation where the paparazzi catch Miranda and take the photo Kirsten finds in Chapter 38. Midway through Arthur and Miranda's conversation, they are interrupted by a

"little girl, seven or eight years old" entering the room (212). The girl in question is soon revealed to be a young Kirsten, whom Arthur affectionately refers to as "Kiki," as she has come to seek privacy from the other child actresses, something Arthur tells Miranda she does "[a]lmost daily" (215). Miranda describes Kirsten as clutching "a colouring book in one hand, a pencil case in the other" (212), providing credence to the vague memories Kirsten had of the same objects in the prior chapter. This once again highlights Kirsten's reliance on other characters to supplement her very vague pre-apocalypse memories and also provides the reader with necessary information to build amnesiac Kirsten's backstory, alongside Kirsten herself. In addition, this also highlights the way in which Kirsten's memory informs the chronology of the wider story. Kirsten's discovery of details of a past event reflect her acts of time-skipping remembrance, and thus the disruption of the chronology allows the reader to experience the same revelation alongside her.

The third and final chapter in which Kirsten appears as a pre-apocalypse child is in Chapter 52, this time centred on Arthur. The chapter provides us with Arthur's thoughts and perspective of the events on the night of his death. We learn that just before the *King Lear* performance, he handed Kirsten a copy of the *Dr. Eleven* comic books given to him by Miranda (previously detailed in Chapter 39). He says, "I have a present for you" (322), a line Kirsten can recall in Year 20. The instance of her recollection has been provided many chapters back, in Chapter 7, where Kirsten remembers "a fleeting impression of kindness and grey hair, a man who'd once pressed two comic books into her hands – 'I have a present for you,' she was almost certain he'd said" (41). This prior foreshadowing and repeated phrase emphasises the significance of this chapter, despite chronologically coming long after this moment. We know this moment to be a pivotal moment in Kirsten's life, as it is one of the few memories she retains from her life before the pandemic. We also learn that aside from his lines in the play, Kirsten is the last person he talks to, as the two have a quick exchange on the side of the stage before Arthur says, "Here's my cue … . I'll talk to you later" (328). Hence we are once more privy to Kirsten's past from another point of view. This chapter, alongside chapters 1 and 39, reflects her reliance in adult life on what I have called proxy memory. Kirtsen, having forgotten so much of the past, relies on the memories of others to help piece together her life. In much the same way, the reader is able to slowly piece together details from Kirsten's pre-apocalypse life, details she has since forgotten, via access to the stories of other characters, notably Arthur, Miranda and Jeevan. Readers, then, are given a more direct account of these events than Kirsten can recall herself. What is crucial, however, is that the novel's jumbled chronology requires readers to work hard to puzzle all the pieces together, to create a linear account

of Kirsten's life – and that of the other key characters in the novel. The effect of this is that readers initially experience the same dislocating sense of amnesia as many of the characters, and gradually feel a degree of relief when the parts of the narrative puzzle start to come together as a result of the *effort* of reading.

This disparity between the linear chronology of chapters featuring and focalised through Kirsten in Year 20 and the sparse non-linear chapters featuring a young pre-outbreak Kirsten focalised through other characters' perspective on and about her provides a microcosm of the structure of the novel is doing as a whole. We see, through Kirsten as a case study, that the non-linear structure is used to highlight the themes surrounding (lost and recovered) memory by simulating in the reader the very disconnect the characters feel. Readers must *work* to build a more comprehensive picture of Kirsten's life before the apocalypse and during its first twenty years. Crucially, we learn new information alongside Kirsten in Year 20, the narrative present, and thus the reader is placed exactly in her shoes. As she slowly pulls together a narrative of her earlier life, so do the readers.

While Kirsten's chapters in Year 20 are consistent in relation to one another, the interspersion of other chapters between them highlights a secondary novel Kirsten's timeline plays within the novel. Kirsten's life within Year 20 plays out chronologically, but this storyline is interspersed with chapters concerned with other characters and their lives, disrupting once again the reader's ability to easily construct a timeline of the novel as a whole. Mandel thus manages to both appease and disrupt linear narrative conventions, while also inducing in the reader the effect of Kirsten's attempt to reconstruct a narrative of her life.

Kirsten's first chapter as the central figure and focalising agent comes in Act Two of the novel, and the remaining 5 chapters of Act Two are also told through her perspective. This is a departure from Act One, where only one character's perspective, that of Jeevan, was presented more than once, making Kirsten's more consistent presence in Act Two the most consistent feature come the end of the act. To further emphasise the consistency related to Kirsten, these chapters have a clearly defined chronological relation to one another, occurring sequentially and in order, whereas Act One features chapters portraying events that would otherwise overlap with one another and a chapter without chronologically-orienting markers, Chapter 6. This establishes Kirsten's storyline as a consistent anchor or throughline for the reader throughout the novel, a consistent line moving forward through the text, which aids the reader in navigating the complex structure of the novel.

Beyond the introduction of Kirsten as the throughline in the novel in Act Two, her arc and personal quest continues to aid the reader in navigating the complex temporality of the novel. This starts at the end of Act Two in Chapter 12, where Kirsten describes a photo of Arthur on a date with Miranda. Chapter 13 transitions into Arthur's account of this date, 14 years before the Georgia Flu outbreak. Not only does this mimic the same process described earlier, where Kirsten learns of the past through paraphernalia related to Arthur, but it shows Kirsten's thoughts and storyline guiding the reader through the novel and serving as a bridge to the past. The chapters that immediately follow Chapter 13 continue to follow Arthur and Miranda, until once again we return to Kirsten's storyline and the process begins again. The function of Kirsten serving as a guide or bridge in the novel is again apparent in Chapter 24, where she is searching for a book she lost some years back, "*Dear V: An Unauthorized Portrait of Arthur Leander*." The following chapter is comprised of excerpts from this very book, and then Chapter 26 shows how Arthur's former best-friend Clark reacts when he learns about the book. Kirtsen similarly acts to bridge Chapters 38 and 39. In the former she finds a photo of Miranda and remembers being present the day it was taken; the latter chapter portrays Miranda's point of view of the events that took place on the day the photo was taken. This is a consistent pattern: Kirsten's discoveries and recollections in Year 20 are used as a bridge, enabling the transition to related past events in chapters that follow hers. Her storyline being spread out post-Act Two also means readers keep returning to Kirsten's consistent familiar narrative, while jumping between the other storylines. Interspersing Kirsten's post-apocalyptic story throughout the timeline of the novel allows Mandel to spend time detailing realistic portrayals of 21st-century life (pre-apocalypse) that are far from science fiction. Events from this past, whether discovered in recovered books, photos, or journalistic accounts, along with the proxy memories of others adopted by Kirsten, aid her in the narrative reconstruction of her past and her understanding of her present sense of self. The readers *work* alongside her as they traverse the novel, experiencing the same process and effort that is involved in constructing a linear narrative from the discordant chronology of the novel.

Arthur's Here and There

While Kirsten serves as the primary protagonist in the novel, Arthur Leander is vitally important to the overall plot. Arthur has a deep connection with all the major characters, whereas Kirsten's

interactions with anyone aside from Arthur remain very limited. I have discussed the influence of Arthur on Kirsten. Her most prominent memories of her life before the Georgia Flu are of acting alongside Arthur in the production of *King Lear,* likely influencing her pursuit and love of acting evident in Year 20. Articles about and paraphernalia connected to Arthur also allow Kirsten to piece together aspects of her pre-apocalypse life and she keeps any piece of information she has on him safe on her person.

In the early days of the outbreak, Jeevan finds himself reminiscing on an interview he conducted with Arthur 7 years prior, in which Arthur told Jeevan he was divorcing his second wife Elizabeth and wanted "'twenty-four hours before [the published interview] appears anywhere,'" to which Jeevan responds he will ensure this is the case, saying "I'm a man of my word" (171). Jeevan keeps this promise, and thinks to himself that this "was one of the very few moments [he] was proud of in his professional life" (175). As mentioned, Jeevan also previously worked as a paparazzo, with Arthur being one of his primary professional obsessions. At times he even camped outside Arthur and Miranda's house in an attempt to get candid photos. It is Jeevan who rushes to aid Arthur on the night of Arthur's death, after which he has the "revelation that being a paramedic was the right thing to do with his life" (16). He ultimately becomes his settlement's doctor in Year 15 of the apocalypse. Arthur is thus gradually revealed to have shaped Jeevan's career and life trajectory, at least in regards to what the reader learns.

Clark and Arthur regarded each other as best friends since the early days of university, even despite a growing emotional distance between the two as Arthur rose to fame. It is Clark who is first called by Arthur's lawyer upon his death, and it is their shared relationships with Arthur that bring Kirsten and Clark together at the end of the novel, triggering Clark to reminisce about his old friend in the final pages. Arthur is of course also connected to Miranda. The two were married before Arthur began a string of relationships and divorces. Miranda, in pre-apocalypse sequences in the novel, seems unable to escape the memories of her life with Arthur after their parting. Fragments of their life together bleed into the visual novel she creates, shaping the comic as a whole, further influencing events in the post-apocalyptic world through the comic's survival.

Arthur also has ties to the greater plot post-death, as it is revealed that his son Tyler is the one who takes on the mantle "the Prophet," and hunts down Kirsten and the Travelling Symphony in Year 20. Arthur and Tyler had a conflicted relationship prior to Arthur's death, as Tyler's mother and Arthur's second wife, Elizabeth, moved to Israel with her son, thus limiting Arthur's contact with him. Chapter 53, largely focalised through Arthur, reveals Arthur has repeatedly neglected Tyler

throughout his acting career, even forgetting his birthday, which fostered hostile behaviour from Tyler in return. On the day of his death, Arthur resolves to repair the relationship with his estranged son, deciding he would "shed his obligations and belongings and start over in the same country as his son" (317). His death ultimately prevents the reconciliation, and in order to attend the funeral, Tyler and his mother fly to America and are stranded at Severn City Airport. He survives the pandemic and eventually becomes the Prophet. Arthur's neglect of Tyler, and the trauma of losing his father at such a young age, his death occurring not long after the two speak on the phone, fosters a darker side in Tyler that develops into his adulthood. Two weeks before his death, Miranda gives Arthur two sets of the *Dr. Eleven* comics. One of these sets Arthur gifts to 8-year old Kirsten, and the other he sends to his son. Tyler brings these with him to America and, after the collapse of society, begins to obsess over it. Alongside the Bible, he memorises much of the text, using words from both form the basis of his cult religion, gaining followers whom he manipulates and controls through fear and violence, preaching that the pandemic was a divine cleansing. When the Prophet and his followers engage in an armed standoff with Kirsten, he quotes the comic as he prepares to execute her, though her own knowledge of the comic allows her to disorient and distract him by quoting lines back to him. This buys time for one of Tyler's followers to turn on his leader, shooting Tyler and then himself. The comic – a gift given to both Kirsten and Tyler from Arthur – thus serves as the tool used to resolve the conflict that defines the plot of the Year 20 storyline.

Despite the presence and influence on the lives of the other characters, and his overall effect on the novel itself, being the connective tissue between the various plot threads, Arthur himself is only used as a focaliser in two chapters. As seen in Fig. IV, Arthur has a large presence, either remembered or referenced in the majority of the chapters, but readers gain very limited insight into his perspective and interiority. The first of the chapters to feature him as the focaliser is Chapter 13, which depicts the date in which his and Miranda's relationship was made public by paparazzi, and details about Arthur's life up to this point. The chapter recounts his upbringing on Delano Island, a place about which he has conflicted feelings: "I loved it and I always wanted to escape" (74). It then details his climb to stardom as an actor after dropping out of the University of Toronto. In terms of the overall story, the details regarding Arthur's past are chronologically the first events in the novel's story. Chapter 13 is itself second in the chronological order as it depicts the date with Miranda (during which Arthur has memories about his past). The second and last chapter focalised by Arthur is Chapter 53. This chapter, which I have previously discussed in relation to Kirsten and her storyline, details the final night of his life. The opening lines of the chapter, offered in omniscient

narration, allude to his fate, one the reader is fully conscious of due to its depiction in Chapter 1: "On his last morning on earth, Arthur was tired. He'd laid awake until sunrise and then drifted out of a twilight half-sleep in the late morning, sluggish and dehydrated, a throbbing headache behind his eyes" (317). The deterioration of his body here seems to make him reflect on his life, both as an actor and as a father.

The gap between Arthur's two chapters, both in terms of plot and story, is significant when compared with the storylines of the other main characters. In terms of plot, Chapter 53 occurs 40 chapters after Chapter 13, and in terms of story, 34 years occur between the date depicted at the start of Chapter 13 and the events of Chapter 53. Both of these gaps are larger than the gaps between the plot and storyline in any other chapters focalised through or on the same character. These spans in time and chapter distribution are substantial, but Arthur still appears in chapters between these two, told through Jeevan's, Miranda's, and Clark's perspectives. In these chapters, the characters express a growing sense of distance between themselves and Arthur or comment on Arthur's deteriorating relationships with others. When the two meet for Arthur's 50th birthday in Chapter 17, Clark notes that the conversation quickly veers away from "anything of substance" (111), and he realises Arthur's intent "wasn't to have dinner with a friend … so much as having dinner with an audience," leaving Clark "sick with disgust" (112). In Chapter 15, focalised through Miranda, Arthur and Miranda host a celebration of Arthur's new movie with Arthur's co-star and PR team, which coincides with the couple's third wedding anniversary. Over the course of the night, Miranda questions whether Arthur is "going out of his way to avoid looking at her directly" (95), noticing that he's "talking to everyone except her" (92). She comes to realise that Arthur has been cheating on her with his co-star Elizabeth Colton, and that "it's been too late [to repair their relationship] for a while" (98). At the end of the night, Miranda accepts that much of her life with Arthur has been alien to her, as she says to her dog Luli that "This life was never ours … We were only ever borrowing it" (101). Arthur himself acknowledges the growing distance between himself and those he is close with, as just before he dies, he asks himself, "How many friendships had he neglected until they'd faded out?" (327).

In much the same way as working to piece together Kirsten's timeline engages the reader in the activity she herself is engaged in, the attempt to construct a narrative of her earlier life, a similar process occurs when the reader is confronted with the chronologically-jumbled chapters that involve Arthur. The reader experiences the same sense of frustration and distance as do other characters who were once close to him as we gain fewer and fewer insights into his interiority. Miranda and

Clark were once very close to Arthur, and much like these characters, the reader is initially encouraged to believe they will remain close to him as the novel progresses. This expectation is established in Chapter 13, the first of Arthur's chapters and the first chapter to directly feature Arthur apart from in his dying or dead state. This chapter provides an in depth account of Arthur's earlier life, through access to his 'intimate' memories, a treatment the narration offers no other characters. The only other character who offers a self-reflective account of parts of their childhood, via recollection/focalisation is Kirsten, but her memories are partial and confused. We learn some of what happened to Tyler as a child, but only from the perspective of others much later in the novel. He never recounts his child to anyone, nor is he the focaliser in any of the chapters.

In contrast, readers are given a first hand account of Arthur's perspective of his childhood. This early, personal revelation sets up an expectation in the reader that more intimate self-reporting from Arthur will follow. The number of references made to Arthur in earlier chapters, for example by Kirsten (recalling him in Year 20 in Chapter 11) and just after his death by Jeevan and his fellow actors (in Chapters 1 and 2), the reader moves forward in the book with an expectation of remaining close to Arthur's storyline and psyche. However, as the reader progresses through the book, it becomes clear this 'promise' is an empty one. The absence of any further insights into Arthur's interiority means the reader is made to feel the same alienation that characters such as Miranda and Clark feel in relation to Arthur: someone they once knew intimately has become increasingly obscure and distant. The chronology of the novel obfuscates our understanding of Arthur, introducing him through intimate detail in Chapter 13 only to deprive the reader of any further personal insights until the very last act. All we are privy to are second hand accounts of him and his activities. The gap in the plot between the two chapters largely focalised by Arthur magnifies the reader's sense of alienation and distance from him. This sense of distance would have been far less if the chapters were ordered in a linear timeline (Chapter 13 occurs 2nd in the timeline, while Chapter 53 would chronologically occur 9th). The readers are distanced from the 'real' Arthur just as the characters are, relying on second hand accounts of him and their own memory of him as he revealed himself very early on in the novel. The achronological structure of the novel, then, means readers feel a sense of growing alienation from Arthur, just as many characters do. The non-linear structure expanding the gap between Arthur's focalising chapters thus simulates in the reader the experience of the characters in the storyworld, their own memory of Arthur distorting as he pulls farther away from him, while the reader loses their own ability to recall Arthur's perspective.

Interestingly, within the two chapters focalised by Arthur, he himself expresses a very similar sense of disconnection from himself. Not only are the audience and Arthur's loved ones losing touch with him as time passes but he himself appears to be disassociating, experiencing a sense of psychological detachment from his own actions and identity. This can be seen as early as Chapter 13, as while he is just making a name for himself in the acting world at the age of 29, he feels as though he "lives in a permanent state of disorientation like a low-grade fever, the question hanging over everything being How did I get from there to here?" (77). A similar sentiment is expressed in his intimate, revealing letters to his friend Victoria, which she later goes on to publish in her book titled *Dear V: An Unauthorized Portrait of Arthur Leander*, much to his dismay. One of these letters happens to be one Miranda found unfinished on Arthur's desk on the night of their third anniversary in Chapter 15, and in this he describes feeling "such disorientation," asking himself "how did I get here? How have I landed in this life?" (157). He writes that where he finds himself in life "seems like an improbable outcome, when I look back at the sequence of events" (157). The famous actor has come to feel that his whole life is a performance in which he has lost any real sense of who he is.

In Chapter 53, while reflecting on his life, he expresses discontent with his past as he describes himself as "a man who repented almost everything" with "regrets crowding in around him like moths to a light" (327). Moments of regret pass him by leading up to this moment, such as when earlier in the day, when talking to his current love interest Tanya, she asks him which ex-wife he was referring to in a conversation, a question he sees as "a sign of having gone seriously astray … . Having more than one ex-wife? He wasn't sure where exactly he'd gone wrong" (320). It is also evident when he thinks back on how "he'd spent his entire life chasing after something, money or fame or immortality or all of the above" or how "he didn't really know his only brother" (327). Thoughts such as these come to him during his final performances of *King Lear* when he is left to think on stage as the audience enters, which results in him having "barely made it off the stage: on the first night of the previews, the thoughts themselves weighing heavily on him" (327).

However, the reader is not exactly aware of how this all played out, and they are prompted to ask the same questions Arthur asks of himself. Just as Arthur asks, "[h]ow have I landed in his life?" (157), the reader is similarly prompted to ask, "who is this man and how has he become what he is?" There are significant gaps in what readers come to know about Arthur's life, seeing only glimpses of it, largely through the perspectives of other characters. As a result of Mandel's narratorial choices, then, most of Arthur's thoughts and the reasons for his choices are withheld from the reader. The very same distance the characters around Arthur express about their relationships with him is

something he feels himself. Here, he is shown dissociating with his very identity, unable to recall his own history, and the question he poses to himself, "[h]ow did I get from here to there?" (77), becomes a more direct question for the reader: "how did Arthur get from his life in Chapter 13 to his life in Chapter 53?" The lengthy gap between the two chapters in which Arthur focalises both expand the sense of time passed and facilitates forgetfulness in the reader, immersing the reader in that very question. In Chapter 53, Arthur looks back upon his life unable to understand what happened to get him there from his earlier days, those which the reader saw in Chapter 13. In consequence, the reader is prompted to look back from Chapter 53 and, much like Arthur, are unable to see how his younger, innocent Chapter 13 self became the man he is in Chapter 53, only able to create an image built upon the less savoury images portrayed through the perspectives of other characters. Much like the fame he has accrued in the storyworld, Kirsten's repeatedly expressed admiration of him in Year 20 paints a glorified picture of the actor, but it becomes clear to both the reader, and ultimately to Arthur, that this is merely a facade covering up a hollowed man "who repented almost everything" (327).

Chapter 53, the second and final chapter featuring Arthur's interior thoughts, opens the final Act of Mandel's novel, Act 9. The thematic concern with the vagaries of memory, of what shouldn't or must be remembered or forgotten, and what can and cannot be, come to a head in the final Act. The chapters in the penultimate Act lead to this. Act 8, titled "The Prophet," composed of chapters 48-52, is primarily concerned with Kirsten's confrontation with Tyler Leander, aka the Prophet. All chapters within Act 8 are set in Year 20, and aside from Chapter 49, which details Sidney the Clarinet's escape from the Prophet a day earlier in relation to the other chapters, the chapters are all told chronologically. Three of the five chapters also utilise Kirsten as the focaliser. As argued earlier, this has the effect of inducing confidence in the reader's understanding of the arc in Year 20, as the consistency of the chapters and the minimal use of achronological storytelling aid the reader in navigating the plot, mimicking Kirsten's own confidence in the post-apocalyptic world. Act 8 also contains the longest sequence of Year 20 chapters aside from Act 2, which has the effect of creating the sense of building to a climax. Kirsten's confrontation with the Prophet provides just that. Very much steeped within conventions of the apocalypse genre, Kirsten finds herself cornered by the Prophet's men with weapons trained at her while she plots the most efficient way of killing each of them with her knives: "She could rise out of the underbrush and throw a knife, and as it spun through the air she would be felled by a bullet or a metal arrow – the crossbow and three guns were trained on her now – or she could remain unmoving until they were forced to approach, attack at

close range and be killed by one of the others" (299). This imagined sequence, and the subsequent stand off, provides the greatest amount of direct action seen within the novel and appears to conform with apocalyptic tropes. As mentioned above, Kirsten matches the Prophet's quotations of lines from the *Dr. Eleven* comic series with quotations of her own. In the resultant confusion and bewilderment, one of the Prophet's followers turns on him and his allies before taking his own life. This conclusion to the Year 20 storyline is likely to satisfy those who read the novel as pure post-apocalyptic fiction, with Chapters 51 and 52 serving as the resolution or denouement for the plot. Chapter 51, focalised through Kirsten, sees the Travelling Symphony arrive at the Severn City Airport while Kirsten attempts to decompress after the tragic events she has both heard of and witnessed over the past few days. Here, she meets Clark for the first time, who, having heard of her and her connection to Arthur earlier through François' published interview, takes her to see a glimpse of a city with electricity in the distance, electricity being a fascination of hers expressed in the interview. Chapter 52, briefly details Kirsten and the Symphony's activity in the airport, dedicating a line to each member, before focalising through Jeevan to describe his life in Year 20, revealing he has settled down with his wife and children in a safe environment.

Though Act 8 would be a satisfactory climax and end to the story, the novel does not conclude alongside Kirsten's storyline and instead continues into Act 9, "Station Eleven," comprising chapters 53-55. While Act 8 brings a sense of conclusion to the very tangible threats present in Year 20, and brings a conclusion to the apocalypse storyline, it leaves hanging issues to do with memory and forgetting, a core thematic concern articulated throughout the novel. While Kirsten has found safety, and found someone with a direct connection to Arthur, she has not reconstructed her past or found some alternate form of resolution to her amnesiac history. Instead, Act 8 brings a conclusion in the form of hope for the future, without truly resolving the past. This brings us back to Chapter 53, Arthur's final chapter that details the night of his death through his perspective. The reader approaches the events in this chapter already well aware that Arthur will die. This chapter is unique in that aspect, as no other chapter has detailed the same event from another perspective with a foregone conclusion. While Act 8 concludes by instilling in its characters and the reader a hope for the future, the reader is aware that the future cannot possibly exist for Arthur in Chapter 53, and that there is nothing to be resolved regarding what comes next for him. Readers know, because they were told so in the very first chapter, that Arthur will suffer a heart attack on stage, and no one will be able to save him. This thus leaves Chapter 53 with a different problem to resolve, that of Arthur's past.

As discussed earlier, Arthur increasingly disassociates from himself and his own history as his fame as an actor rises, wondering, "How did I get from there to here?" (77). He is filled with discontentment and regret and thoughts of these fill his mind during his last stage performances. He thinks of his ex-wives and "the way he dropped Miranda for Elizabeth and Elizabeth for Lydia and let Lydia slip away to someone else," as well as how "he'd let Tyler be taken to the other side of the world" (327). But, we learn that in the days leading up to his death, he had made attempts to address his past failures. In the time leading up to his death, Arthur expresses to his lover, Tanya, a desire to shed himself of any sense of materialism, as he tells her he intends to part with the copies of *Dr. Eleven* Miranda gifted him. She says, "[y]ou told me you're trying to shed your possessions or something, right?" (320). This sentiment appears to be in full effect on his last day, as he concludes:

> He'd definitely decided: when *Lear* closed, he was moving to Israel. The idea was exhilarating. He would shed his obligations and belongings and start over in the same country as his son. He would buy an apartment within walking distance of Elizabeth's house and he'd see Tyler everyday. (317)

Throughout the day he begins acting on his desire to "shed his obligations" and possessions, gifting the paperweight Clark had given him and Miranda on their anniversary to Tanya after Miranda returned it to him, giving Kirsten one of the sets of the *Dr. Eleven* comics, and offering to pay off Tanya's student loans, totalling $47,000. He justifies his actions as he tells himself, "he didn't want possessions. He didn't want anything except his son" (322).

However, it is in regard to his past that we see Arthur successfully overcome his conflict with memory, a feat no other character in the novel (which obviously covers events far into the future beyond this moment) has achieved. In this, his (literal and metaphorical) final chapter, Arthur sits on stage holding King Lear's crown. As the performance continues, rather than channeling his regret and self-loathing, he "r[uns] through a secret list of everything that was good" (327). From simple beauties such as "the pink magnolias in the backyard of the house in Los Angeles," to memories from long ago such as "dancing with Clark when they were both eighteen, their fake IDs in their pockets, Clark flickering in the strobe lights" (327), to simply "Tyler" (328), these thoughts are able to keep the long list of regrets in his life from surfacing. This mindset has positively affected him throughout the day, as he notices "[t]he beauty of the pigeon's luminescent neck" (317), or remembers Miranda and "[t]he curve of her neck as she stooped over the drafting table, her absolute

concentration" (320). This also evidently gives Arthur hope for his own future, as he unabashedly blows a kiss to Tanya in public view as he walks to the stage for his final performance, neglecting all future consequences of doing so, only thinking to himself "why not?" (328).

Casting off the weight of regret provides Arthur confidence in a future the reader, ironically, knows won't come. However, until this moment in the novel – the last Act plot-wise, albeit the earliest in the storyline – the reader has seen no evidence of a character successfully negotiating their past. Miranda has spent her time running and hiding from her past, choosing instead to lose herself in her work. Kirsten never recovers her lost memories despite dedicating herself to doing so. Clark adopts an entirely new life and role within society after having "been sleepwalking" (164) his entire life. Lastly, Jeevan is shown to be unable to keep his thoughts and memories together in the early days of the apocalypse, breaking down, and in the post-apocalypse he can't justify teaching the past to the new generation.

Arthur is the first (if last in terms of plot) character attempt to come to terms with the past: to acknowledge it and seek to atone for it. He thus seeks to make amends for the past, prompted by his memories of wrong deeds and failed relationships. Memory is thus shown as a positive force, something that can catalyse change in the present. Softer, delicate memories inform his final thoughts. As the heart attack begins to claim him, he finds himself lost in a scene when "he was seven years old on Delano Island, [where] he and his brother had found a wounded bird on the beach" (329). As "Arthur cradle[s] his hand to his heart" he echoes the act of cradling the bird, so many years ago (329). Finally, as he dies, it is not regret about the past, or the lost years of his life that fill his mind in his final moment, but instead he admires how "snow was falling all around him, shining in the lights," thinking "it was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen" (329). The revelation that comes to Arthur in this chapter, about the importance of coming to terms with memory, is thus highlighted to the reader alongside him. Arthur, a character estranged from himself and the reader, finds happiness and peace in a resolution with his own conflicted memory.

In disrupting the linearity of Arthur's scenes and chapters, Mandel not only emphasises Arthur's self-alienation, but also places emphasis on his redemptive revelation, as it opens the final Act of the novel: he reconciles with the past. This suggests that the novel is less concerned with the apocalypse per se, or human survival, than it is on the workings of memory. Where Kirsten and Clark are hopeful for the future come the end of Act 8 after discovering a city in the distance powered by electricity, Act 9 starts with Arthur's discovery of beauty in remembrance.

Arthur's revelatory recall informs the final two chapters in the novel. In Chapter 54, Miranda "slip[s] somehow through the frame" of a panel of her *Dr. Eleven* comic as she lies on her deathbed. In this moment, the toxicity of her past and past relationships that otherwise inspire her artwork are unfound, cast off by Miranda. All she thinks of is a panel she is described sketching in Chapter 14 as she attempts "to convey the serenity of [her office] where she spends her most pleasant hours, the refinement of it" in her art (87). As she dies, she thinks not of the tragedy of the situation, but instead views it as "waking up from a dream" (330), an expression of acceptance and awareness of beauty similar to Arthur's own final moments as he reconciles with his past. The final chapter, Chapter 55, is focalised through Clark as he reads the *Dr. Eleven* comic himself for the first time. He happens upon a "scene of a dinner party on Station Eleven [in the series]," later realising it to be an interpretative portrayal of the night of Miranda and Arthur's third anniversary. Clark feels as though "he was *there*," as the details in the panel allow a perfect reconstruction of his memory of the night in which he and Miranda became aware of Arthur's infidelity. Despite the pain Clark would otherwise associate with these memories, it brings "tears to his eyes" (332), the act of remembrance in these final moments of the novel becoming beautiful rather than painful. This thus prompts Clark to remember Miranda's job in shipping, and to consider the pleasant possibility ships might still be "moving over the water" somewhere else in the world (333). Both the past and the future are united in this moment, as Clark's memories inform his hope for the future, while the structure of the novel achieves the same, uniting the first event depicted in the novel, Arthur's death, with the last chronological event to occur within the novel's final Act, Clark's hopeful vision for the future. Thus, the reader, alongside Clark, considers how the past informs the future. Arthur's final chapter, which begins the final Act, highlights the importance of reconciling with one's conflicted memories, an idea that is crucial to both Miranda's and Clark's final chapters in the novel and to the novel as a whole. The disruption in the novel's linearity allows for the reader to understand this alongside the novel's characters.

Above, I drew attention to Diletta De Cristofaro's article, "Critical Temporalities: *Station Eleven* and the Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel." In this, she argues that the apocalypse fictional genre innately confuses the reader's "sense of an ending" (11). She builds on the term, first used by Frank Kermode in his claim that people use narratives and the idea of narrative closure – "the sense of an ending" – to make sense of the fact we are stuck in time. In other words, he argues that we construct stories with a clear beginning, middle, and end to cope with our anxiety that we will not live to see the end of the world. Imagining an apocalyptic ending, then, enables people to

make sense of their lives. De Cristofaro writes "the narrative structures of the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel articulate critical temporalities that invite us to conceive of narrative, and therefore of history, *beyond the sense of an ending*" (De Cristofaro 19, my emphasis). She notes the "novel begins with the apocalyptic end, Arthur's death on 'Night One'" (20). De Cristofaro argues that the novel "does not bring any sense-making order" (20) to relieve or placate the reader, evidenced in Arthur's story and presence within the novel continuing past his own death. The delayal of Arthur's second chapter to the final Act confuses the reader's "sense of an ending." De Cristofaro offers the insight that "*Station Eleven's* structure encourages us to read for connections between pre- and post-apocalyptic fragments, rather than for an end that integrates the various moments. After all, this end – the death of Arthur, who ties together the various characters, and the apocalypse, which is the catalyst of the story – has already been given at the beginning of the narrative" (21). This implies that the resolution of the arc in Year 20 does not bring a satisfying conclusion to the story, as it doesn't integrate the themes from across the novel. However, I have argued that Arthur's death and coming to grips with his own remembered past concludes a theme that persists throughout the various points in the timeline and plot. While De Cristofaro attributes the need for the confused sense of an ending to *Station Eleven's* status as an apocalypse novel, believing it necessary to challenge "the teleological linearity of apocalyptic narratives" (19), it is my contention that this is a necessity not demanded of the genre but of the novel's thematic concern with memory. The characters in the novel struggle to make sense of their own lives, but this is hampered by, for example, Arthur's dissociation or Kirsten's amnesia. They are seeking a resolution that is not to be found in a chronological ending, but instead in their own past. The non-linear structure of the novel challenges the reader's own sense of an ending, inviting them to share the realisation, alongside the characters, that looking back is necessary for moving forward, psychologically.

Bangkok Wakes to Rain

> "Those October dates swallowed everyone who'd been there into history's giant unlit belly, and that history into silence. The forgotten return again and again, as new names and faces, and again this city makes new ghosts. Can the dead ever forgive?" (Sudbanthad 356).
>
> "The not remembering doesn't really work, does it?" – Nee to Sammy (170)

Introduction and Critical Context

Pitchaya Sudbanthad's novel *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* consists of episodic chapters, divided among four numbered parts, set in different times, ranging from the 19th century to an imagined late 21st century. What these chapters have in common is that the characters each depicts are unable to grapple with the past, whether their own or that of the titular city. The novel is concerned with the real city of Bangkok's past traumas and current fears, detailing military crackdowns and massacres such as the 6 October event (1976) and Black May (1992), and also predicts the city's future struggles with rising sea levels and effects of climate change (the real city faces a significant threat of submergence as it is only 0.5 to 1.5 metres above sea level and is sinking by approximately 1-2cm annually). Though there is less of a defined through line in terms of plot than there is in *Station Eleven*, several smaller storylines and character arcs stand out. For the most part, the novel centres around characters with some form of connection to a colonial teak mansion that is inhabited by various characters in different time periods. This functions to anchor the novel's action and characters across time. As the city evolves and transforms, so does the mansion. It is developed into the lobby of a high-rise condominium in the 1980s, before being claimed by the floods of Bangkok (or Krung Thep as it is called by some characters) in the imagined future, becoming a part of a "dense valley of buildings in different stages of decrepitude" (280).

The lives of key characters intertwine across the various time periods. Much like in *Station Eleven*, the novel is told in third person, but is focalised through a variety of characters' perspectives via free indirect discourse. Chronologically, the earliest setting is in the nineteenth century and

features Phineas, an American missionary doctor who travels to what was then Siam to spread the gospel and provide medical care. He struggles to navigate and adapt to life before Bangkok even develops, finding difficulty in accepting the local traditions and the rejection of his conception of logic. Another significant character is Nee, a student activist whose boyfriend Siripohng was murdered in the 6 October 1976 event and is unable to face or forget the horrors she experienced and witnessed that day. After completing a nursing degree, she comes to work as a receptionist at the condominium while also serving as a swimming coach to the wealthy tenant's children. Readers are also introduced to her sister Nok, who owns a struggling Thai restaurant in Japan, while grappling with her distance from and disconnection with the events that have befallen her sister and home. Samart (Sammy), heir to the original teak mansion, is a photographer who navigates his relationship with his culture after jumping from country to country during his upbringing while also dealing with his failing relationships. His chapters and story arc extend from the 1970s into the 2010s. Clyde is an American Jazz pianist whose storyline occurs between the 1970s and 90s. He features in chapters that detail the evolution of Bangkok into a bustling city in the years of, and after the Vietnam War. He plays gigs for Bangkok residents and U.S. servicemen stationed in or visiting Thailand during the war. He is hired by a wealthy woman, Khun Phen (who happens to be Sammy's mother), to play music to what she believes are ghosts that live in a wooden pillar in the teak mansion, in which she lives prior to its development into the condominium. He is also portrayed as dealing with his own 'ghosts'.

The chapters set in the imagined future centre on Mai, a young girl/woman adapting to new technologies in order to be successful, and who eventually uploads herself into a digital afterlife. Her age changes across the novel's shifting timeline from a young child in the early 21st-century to an elderly woman in the futuristic city in the latter part of the century. Readers also meet her friend Pig, whose story arc covers the same period as Nee's. Pig struggles with the decline of both Bangkok's landscapes and traditions as well as her own wealth, and her relationship with her son Woon who represents the next generation in the futuristic timeline. Teenage Woon shuts himself off from the world in the late 2030s/early 2040s in protest of climate change. As an adult, he works to preserve Bangkok's past, using technology to retrieve and digitally recreate artefacts from the now largely submerged city. These digital recreations are uploaded to the "Afterbody," a kind of virtual reality that allows people's consciousness to persist without their bodies as a form of afterlife. This imagined digital technology enables users to leave their physical bodies behind and 'upload' their brain into a virtual cloud-based place, away from the ravaged world. People not yet uploaded may

still visit the simulation however through designated portals, allowing characters like Woon to speak with an 'Afterbodied' Mai. Those who transition into this reality are alienated from actual sensory and tactile human contact and experiences, but 'live' without the encumberment of their aging bodies. Those who resist the transition, such as Pig, experience the ravages of age and the destruction of the city but feel the full weight of emotions and crucially, authentic memory. The novel's chapters are focalised through these characters and other minor figures surrounding them, as well as through non-human entities such as dogs and a flock of birds. The wide-ranging temporal scope of the novel and the multiplicity of perspectives employed enables the reader to experience a sense of the vast, multigenerational, and conflicted city. In this way, Sudbanthad draws on traditional Thai beliefs about the significance of karma and non-human agency. In some respects, karma structures the entire novel. This Buddhist (and Hindu) concept understands all beings and events to be bound together through a universal law of cause and effect. In one given individual's acts or thoughts thus 'ripple' on to affect the collective experience of others through time. In this sense, past, present, and future are intricately intertwined in a non-linear web rather than a straight line. The consequences of an act in the present may not be experienced for years or even centuries, expressed in the novel itself through the non-linear narration. Interestingly a psychological parallel to karmic interconnectedness is the notion of intergenerational trauma, the idea that traumatic experiences and (positive or negative) coping mechanisms are passed down from parents to children.[2] While a study of the full implications of these concepts lie beyond the scope of this thesis, the significance of karma and its parallels in trauma theory are important to my discussion of Sudbanthad's novel and inform my later arguments.

Due to its recent publication in 2019, critical commentary on *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* is sparse, with very limited discussion of the novel's non-linear structure. As with *Station Eleven,* I argue that this is a significant oversight. At the time of writing this thesis, most critical discussions of the novel focus on climate change and anthropocentrism. Early responses to the novel highlight ecocritical concerns with climate change and also comment on the significance of memory. While many mention the non-linear structure of the novel this is not explored at length, and several have suggested it should be read as a series of linked short stories.

These approaches are frequently found in reviews of the novel. Writing for *The Guardian*, Tash Aw says, "As the tides of Bangkok's history flow around [Nee and Sammy], the two are united

[2] See for example, Skybina, Connor et al., and Kalra et al.

by a sense of loss and confusion: how can they reconcile their pasts, even as they struggle to comprehend their city's headlong rush into the future?" Aw refers to the non-linearity as a "swirling, always surprising storytelling structure" and as "plotting pyrotechnics," and focuses on the themes related to memory, as he continues, "[t]he indelibility of memory – both individual and collective – forms the central pillar of this sprawling, multi-generational novel, where characters appear and disappear, only to reappear a hundred pages and several decades later." Reviewer Karissa states that the novel feels like "historical fiction and science fiction from one chapter to the next." Karissa continues,

> As the book moves into the near future, Bangkok and its inhabitants become the victims of climate change and flooding changes the face of the city and forces the inhabitants to move and adapt. Interspersed are sections focusing on the impact of such changes on the animals and the environment and these chapters are beautifully written. As the plot moves into the future, Sudbanthad does an admirable job of balancing old and new. We see the introduction of new technologies, many of which can improve peoples' lives. But we also see how these new technologies largely benefit the already wealthy and that the poorer population is still living at a subsistence level, often made worse by the flooding and environmental changes.

Somewhat critical of the quality of the novel, Michael Schaub writes equivocally of the structure: "The novel's structure is a tricky one, but Sudbanthad pulls it off pretty well – he wisely lets the reader make the connection between the stories." Jola Naibi praises Sudbanthad's handling of "the climate crisis dimensions of the story." She writes,

> I picked up this book, fully aware of its reputation as a work of ecofiction, and I was prepared to explore a fictional depiction of the complex conflict between humanity and nature. But the author does something different and admirable here: he brings the city to life, lets the reader fall in love with it, and then the environmental catastrophe, in the form of flooding, comes gradually, and then all at once, woven into the texture of daily existence rather than announced with trumpet blares.

For the most part, reviewers praise the novel and its complex structure. Zoë Apostolides, for example, writes "The first third of this remarkable novel reads like short stories; with its wide cast

and still wider timeframes, Pitchaya Sudbanthad's debut rewards close attention. Bangkok unifies his characters' lives and, in a climate of concern for the city's future, amid rising sea levels, so does water, with its fearsome power to transform, disrupt, slaughter and redeem." On the other hand, some readers are somewhat dismissive, especially of the novel's form. One such reviewer is Janice Ottersberg, who read the novel as "23 loosely connected short stories," and claims that while "[e]ach story is interesting in itself … it takes effort with lots of note-taking to make the connections between characters and placement in time." She expresses frustrations with the novel, writing,

> The only historical pieces are three brief stories about Phineas, an American doctor working at a Chinese mission in the 19th century. These have no connection to the other stories and don't fit into the overall narrative. The writing is accomplished, but the structure is messy and lacks cohesion in its execution. This book is more accurately defined as experimental literary fiction with science fiction elements. For lovers of historical fiction, this book does not deliver.

It is my contention that overlooking *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*'s narrative structure limits one's ability to grasp the thematic concerns of the novel as a whole. Moreover, while the shifting climate and landscape of Bangkok is a notable feature of the novel, focussing solely on this comes at the expense of the various storylines concerned with human tragedy and inner conflicts (of which there are many) results in a partial reading only. Attending to the non-linear intersection of the characters' storylines through and across time affords a deeper understanding of the novel's concern with the impacts of trauma and the ways in which traumatic events are remembered or repressed.

Klara Machata's article "More Than Rising Water: Representing Climate Change and Urban Transformation in *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*," highlights the ways in which the novel contrasts with western representations of climate change. Machata reads *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* "as an example of contemporary global Anglophone climate fiction which highlights the coexistence of heterogeneous experiences of climate change" in contrast with "Western crisis narratives" (Machata 1). She argues that Sudbanthad portrays climate change as an omnipresent and constant process of transformation, rather than a "unique and unprecedented event" (2). Her key argument is that:

> While the novel exhibits some features that are commonly found in Anglophone climate fiction, its complex form and narrative structure create a sense of the socially stratified

> nature and the omnipresence of environmental and urban transformation, which is often absent in Western crisis narratives. The novel illustrates the entangled nature of social, political and ecological concerns and rejects the totalising pretence of undifferentiated human victimhood in the face of climate change by drawing attention to a plurality of human and more-than-human realities. (1)

The article focuses on the ways in which climate change is reported and portrayed in western media and how it reflects systemic structural power imbalances, as "power and extreme inequality continue to inform climate change discourse and politics" (1). She notes that "mainstream discussions" gloss over climate change's "uneven distribution in time and space and its disproportionate impacts on certain communities" (1). Machata argues that *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* enters this discourse as "an example of contemporary global Anglophone climate fiction, which contributes to the shift away from the representation of climate change as a singular and monolithic crisis" (2).

Although Machata acknowledges the novel's "complex form and narrative structure" her argument tends to simply describe various aspects of the novel, focusing particularly on the representation of Bangkok itself. Part of the article is dedicated to the storyline involving Nee and wealthy Khun Pehn, her employer, and the different ways the two view tragedies such as the October 6 event. This discussion lacks any real connective claim to the rest of the argument, apart from the assertion that their different responses to events reflects the "socially stratified nature" nature of the city and its inhabitants' experience of "transformation" (5). Pehn's attitudes are set against Nee's traumatic recollections of Siripohng's murder: "Pehn justifies the cruel lynching of protestors and the spectacle that is made of individual victims to herself by considering the protestors as collective, bestial force that threatens the status quo and the wealth and prosperity she associates with Bangkok, thus denying them humanity" (5).

In another section of the article, Machata addresses the way in which the novel grants subjecthood to non-human entities, especially animals:

> Historically, animals have long been denied subjecthood, and many contemporary [presumably western] discussions of environmental crises exhibit a remarkable amount of anthropocentrism. Considering animals as narrative subjects in their own right, as frequently overlooked co-creators of urban places, allows Sudbanthad to provide a more nuanced perspective on urban transformation in *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*. (6)

That animals also experience the effects of climate "transformations," even in urban environments is true, but Machata does little more than observe the fact that in *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* animals are afforded sentience and share with humans "experiences of a city in transformation" (6). The multigenerational narrative of the migratory birds detailed in the chapter titled "Flight" clearly portrays the deleterious consequences of urban sprawl on non-human animal life. However, the assertion that "western" climate change media accounts and fiction rarely comment on such consequences and favour only stories of "human victimhood" is not developed adequately in relation to the overarching narrative of the novel.

Although Machata repeatedly stresses the importance of the "overlapping episodes" and the grand expanse of time traversed in the novel, she only acknowledges its non-linear structure in passing, in comments like these: "The richness, nonlinearity and polyvocality of the novel can be challenging, and at times, confusing for its international readership" or "animal focalisers ... are integrated into the narrative mesh and nonlinear structure of the novel" (6). The only comments she makes on the effect of this structure on the reader is to suggest that while it is "challenging, and at times, confusing," the complexity and polyvocality aids in the depiction of the "intermingling characteristics and the dynamic nature of urban environments" (6). Ultimately, the article fails to convince me that the novel functions to oppose western depictions of climate change that ignore social stratification and non-human animal perspectives, not least because no evidence is given of western climate change depictions. Moreover, Machata selectively ignores large sections of the novel that don't support this argument. While climate change is certainly one of the thematic strands in the novel, this is not the only, or – in my opinion – the most important concern Sudbanthad addresses. While Machata describes some of the novel's key scenes and storylines, such as Phineas' epistolary accounts of early Bangkok and the October 6 event, these are not adequately tied to her overall claim that the novel serves to counter western accounts of climate change. In my discussion of the novel, below, I argue that the significance of these events and acts are in their portrayals or reflections of different approaches to the acts or remembrance (or attempts to forget) in which all the characters are engaged, in one way or another. The effects of climate change – the largely drowned city – are the ultimate tragedy that forces the characters in the novel to engage with their own pasts. The non-linearity of the novel highlights the gaps and omissions that signal forgetting, amnesia, and repression, and conversely, the seemingly tenuous connections between disparate events and characters, across time, evoke the narrative connectivity enabled by remembrance.

Navigating their way through the non-linear structure of the novel, faced with significant lapses in time and action that hinder understanding, the reader experiences and emulates the struggle of the characters to construct a meaningful self- and collective- narrative of identity.

In her article "The Time Sea," Sarah Nuttall argues for the importance of the various water forms in both J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* and *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*, believing the "sea, rivers, and rain" act as "complex temporal and narrative forms" (13). In the brief section of the article dedicated to *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*, Nuttall asserts that the novel "bases its narrative around river flooding and subsidence" (17), noting that the novel is "increasingly suffused with wetness" (18). Providing an overview of Bangkok's current struggle with rising water levels, emphasising the flooding that occurred in 2011, Nuttall notes that "Sudbanthad draws on this climatic and historical event to write about urban deluge – and to imagine an amphibious city beyond" (18). After describing the city's gradual flooding as the storyline of the novel progresses, Nuttall turns to the final two chapters which "pull back from invocations of the amphibious city as an external place in favour of an internal one" (18), noting the instances of watery imagery evoked by the final focalising characters. This brief discussion of *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* fails to acknowledge any of the non-linear aspects of the novel's narration. This is particularly surprising because the final two chapters of which Nuttall writes are not set in the drowned Bangkok of the future but in a pre-flooded time. It is also mistaken to suggest the novel is "increasingly suffused with wetness." It would be more accurate to note that the chapters set in the imagined futuristic Bangkok portray an increasingly suffused city – but these are interspersed with chapters set in the past. These show a Bangkok unaffected by floods, such as chapters centred on Phineas, or are unconcerned with the flooding, such as Nok's chapters set in Japan or Sammy's in America. The omission of a discussion of these chapters, and the non-linearity of the novel as a whole, enables Nuttall to claim that "we read with the knowledge that cities are drowning, or come to drown" (19). I argue that the effect of the interjected chapters set in the past should be at the very least explored, and that the argument should not solely emphasise the topic of climate change. Selectively reading for the eco-fiction aspects of the novel ignores the tragedies that Bangkok – the city itself and its citizens, thought time – are forced to remember as a whole.

Pimpawan Chaipanit's article "Haunting Memories and Haunted Landscapes: Reading the EcoGothic in Apichatpong's *Cemetery of Splendour* and Pitchaya's *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*" analyses how the two Thai novels challenge nationalist discourse and criticise the socio-ecological exploitation of Thailand. Chaipanit proposes that *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* be viewed through an EcoGothic lens, a

term she defines as "the latest reinvention of the Gothic with a critical environmental theory angle" (53), or a "theoretical vision or a scholarly activity that explicitly promotes environmental activism" (54). She asserts that "EcoGothic tropes of haunted landscape and haunting memories are foregrounded to conjure up marginalised characters and settings" that have been suppressed in Thailand's "repressive and censorious climate" (51). Thus, drawing on Jacques Derrida's concept/neologism of hauntology or *hantologie*, she argues that the novel "explicitly discusses the ecological fate of the capital and its inhabitants through overlapping episodes of spectral memories and history that haunt a plot of land [the site of the teak mansion] in Bangkok" (52).

While the promotion of her EcoGothic reading is central, Chaipanit comments on "the non-humans with their muted voices and concealed presence" in the novel, identifying three such voices, in particular: "the big house by the river, the Chao Phraya River, and the animals" (58). She also notes the "original source" of the mansion within whose walls are intertwined the stories of an elite family, the poor and the working class: teak (58). One of her key claims is that the novel tracks "[t]he accumulation of wealth generated by … exploitation of the northern forests" and migrant labourers, which "concentrates in the downstream capital" (59). In the course of her discussion, she raises the importance of the a-chronological storyline and its relation with memory. She claims that "fictitious narrative, particularly one with an extensive and complex temporality, often engages in a discursive contestation between history and memory in the narrator's and character's voices. Precisely at this point literary studies intersect with memory studies, for what are narratives, fictional or otherwise, made of it not recollections and memories" (57). She submits that "[e]ach chapter is not chronologically arranged, but contains different character's episodic memories of their life events, chance meetings, public broadcasting, and a letter, all witnessing and constructing the ecological history of the city" (58). Interestingly, Chaipanit notes that "Pitchaya achieves the effect of disjointed social-ecological memories by presenting different points of view and juxtaposing the preterite and the present tense in both the story and the plot" (58).

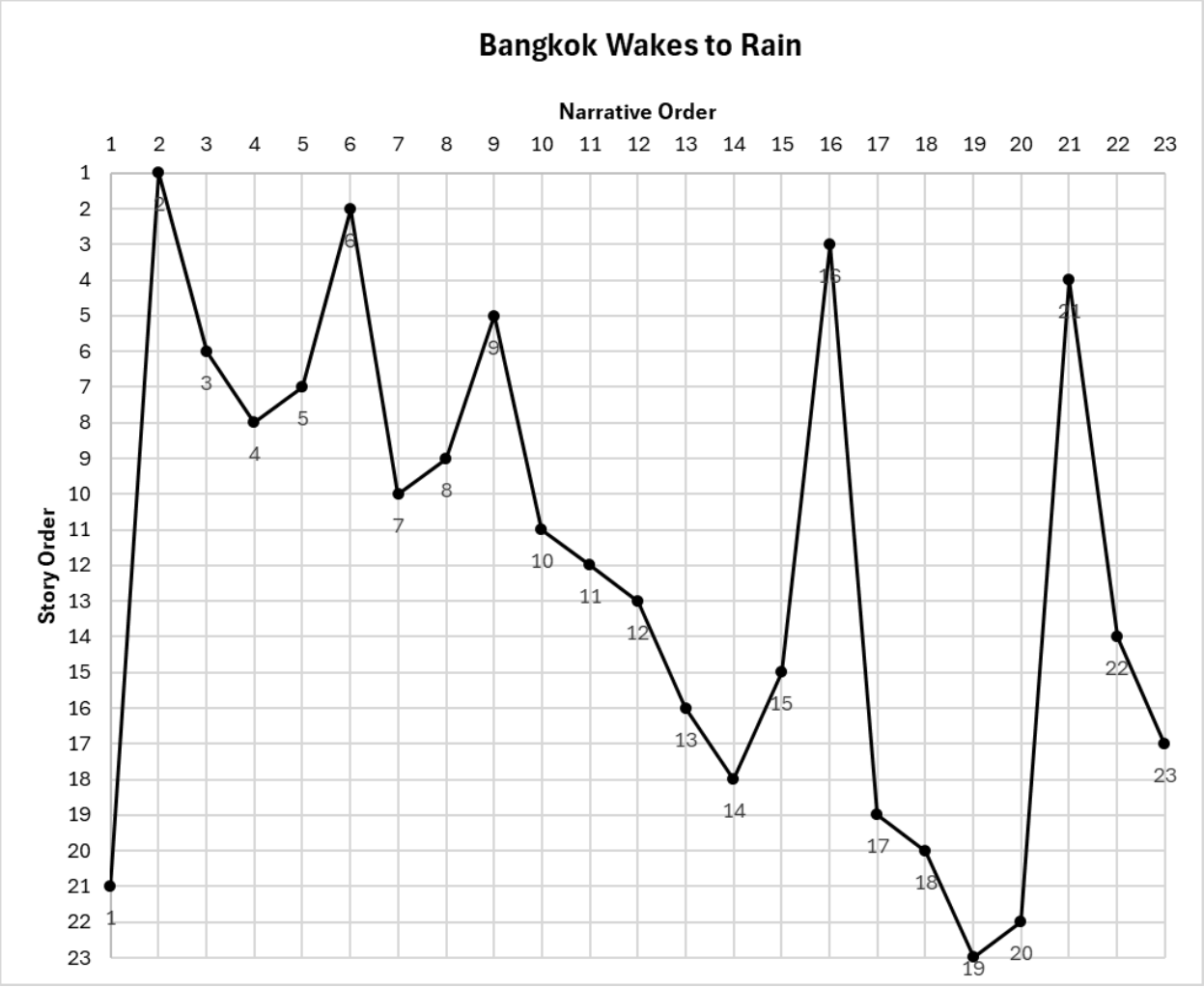
Chaipanit also discusses the significance of the "memory of the building and the land" (60) that is foregrounded towards the end of the novel, something I will explore further in my discussion of the novel. She concludes her discussion by claiming that

> Pitchaya, exercising his dark poetic justice, prophesies the true survivors of ecological disaster triggered centuries ago by the teak trade: the animals, the fish and the birds, the middle and working-class Bangkokians all organically survive in the depleted and flooded

> city, while the rich are only virtually alive to be haunted by the climate ghosts they have created. (62)

Chaipanit's is a rich and inventive reading. However, the ultimate goal of the article is to promote her EcoGothic interpretation with an emphasis on the real city of Bangkok and how it is 'haunted' by memories of its exploitative past. In emphasising these aspects of the novel she glosses over its narrative structure. I will develop further Chaipanit's suggestive but ultimately unexplored comments on the novel's complex temporal thematics, especially the 'haunting' of memory, by paying close attention to its non-linear structure when advancing my analysis of *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*.

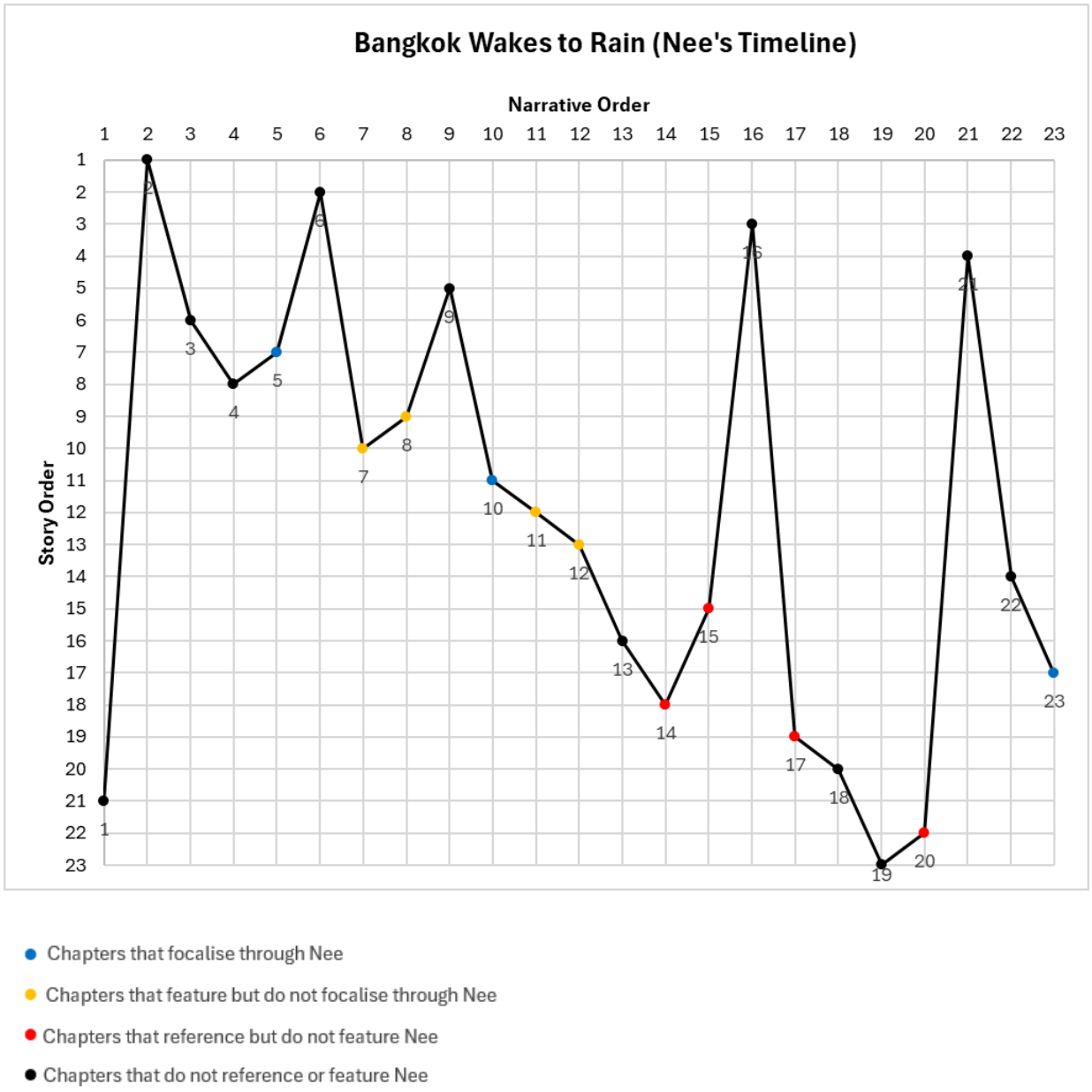
The Timeline and Plot Structure of *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*



(Fig. V: *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* Plot and Story Order)

Fig. V displays a visual representation of the storyline of *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*. As with my similar figure for *Station Eleven*, the x-axis details the narrative order, or the plotted events as presented in the novel, which in this case is approached chapter by chapter. The y-axis depicts the story order, or the events in the story as they occur chronologically.

The process of constructing this timeline proved to be very different to the construction of the one for *Station Eleven*. *Station Eleven* is centred around a clearly defined moment within its narrative's history – the outbreak of the deadly contagion that decimates most of the world's inhabitants – and many of the chapters signal their temporal relationship to that moment. However, in *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* characters and events centralised in some chapters bear no relation to events and characters in other chapters, aside from thematic connections that only become apparent some way through the novel. Despite this, the novel is very much concerned with the real city of Bangkok and its history, and thus portrays many real historical moments/events with defined dates, and this enabled me to chronologically organise the events/incidents portrayed in different chapters. In some chapters the reader is directly told which year in which events relayed take place. This is the case in Chapter 8, "Monsters," and Chapter 10, "Impasse," for example, which include orienting dates: "This was 1983" (122), and "She'd added two new funeral books to her unfortunate collection just this year, and they were only partway through 1992" (149). I was able to extrapolate the date for other chapters either because reference is made to real world events such as the Vietnam War or the Thai Baht dive of 1997, or the age of a character is provided/implied. However, once the story progresses into an imagining of Bangkok's future, references to concrete dates dissipate, and the timeline is much harder to plot. For these chapters I have relied upon the extrapolation of characters' ages and the chapters' relationships to one another.



(Fig. VI: *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* Nee's Timeline)

Unlike in *Station Eleven*, the episodic nature of the chapters in *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* means that the temporal relationship between each chapter is often negligible. It is for this reason, no doubt, that some readers refer to the novel as a collection of short stories, as in the review mentioned above by Janice Ottersberg, who reads the novel as "23 loosely connected short stories." Nonetheless, individual character's timelines are made very clear, in that the progression of their stories are largely linear, and the very few instances in which they are not have very little bearing over

their overall arc. This can be seen in Fig. VI, which displays the timeline of Nee, the most prominently featured character. Nee's timeline throughout the novel, aside from characters alluding to or quoting her in the future, is shown to be entirely linear, with the only exception being Chapter 8, "Monsters," where her temporal appearance isn't of much import as the chapter focuses on her sister Nok. The condition of Bangkok itself is very well established in each individual chapter featuring Nee, thus the reader is not required to be alert to relationships between these chapters as they are clear. The reader's orientation is also assisted by the book's overall forward progression in time.

Much like in *Station Eleven*, there are chapters that prove difficult to place 'in time,' either due to some form of time lapse and/or lack of a temporal anchor. The former occurs very obviously in Chapter 5, "Outpour," Chapter 7, "Uprising," and Chapter 9, "Flight." "Outpour" is the only chapter that explicitly includes a flashback, which spans from 1973-1976, starting midway through the events of the chapter. The chapter details Siripohng's beginnings at university and then progresses to the October 6 event in which he is killed. "Uprising" portrays the construction of the condominium, which spans at least 5 years. "Flight" offers a transgenerational account of a flock of birds, with the only allusions to human time being the mention of the construction of Thailand's first highways and the later development of Bangkok's skyscrapers. As no chapters, apart from "Outpour," include any explicit flashbacks, I have placed all chapters in the year when the action it narrates first occurs. I have followed this process for these three chapters that span a great deal of time. Various other chapters occur within the period of time these chapters occupy however, such as Chapter 4, "Birthright," which occurs in 1974, during the time "Outpour" takes place (1973-76). For the purposes of a visual reconstruction of the timeline, I have placed these chapters after the chapters their events are contained within in the above figure ("Birthright" is thus placed after "Outpour").

Overall, the deviation from a linear structure isn't as marked as in *Station Eleven,* with the forward progression of time being much more prominent through the novel. There are 9 instances in which the transition from one chapter to another moves backwards in time, with the remaining 12 chapter transitions moving forward. Of these 12, however, only 3 move onto the next chronologically ordered chapter, far fewer than in *Station Eleven*. Further, as seen in Fig. IV's representation of Nee's personal timeline, individual character arcs also trend forward in time. In the remainder of this chapter, I will argue that interruptions in the linearity of the chapters encourage

the reader to experience the gaps and absences, "the breach in the mind's experience of time" (Caruth 4), that is characteristic of trauma.

Nee's Struggle with Trauma

As Fig. VI shows, Nee stands out as a central protagonist. She serves as a focaliser in three separate chapters, and whilst other characters focalise the narration more frequently, her influence is evident in many other characters' chapters and storylines. She and Nok are sisters, and it is Nee who prompts Nok to evaluate her own morals when faced with the decision about whether to confront her controversial patron, a former Thai military colonel who was responsible for the massacre of pro-democracy protesters – one of whom was Siripohng. After the fall of the dictatorship he served, he adopted the name Khun Chahtchai and fled to Japan, where he'd become a regular at Nok's restaurant. Nee is also connected to Khun Pehn, with whom she becomes friends despite their age difference, and after the latter's passing, Nee dates her son, Clyde, becoming another name in his list of failed romances. Nee's influence is also evident in chapters beyond her final chronological appearance and her assumed death, as we learn that she taught Mai to swim in the condominium's pool. During her time as Mai's swimming instructor, Nee uses a recurring phrase "It is only so,"[3] and later Mai remembers Nee saying it "during a lesson, after a sparrow that had broken its neck against a sky-filled window fell dead into the pool" (7). Mai "[clings] to the words as if they were a lifeline thrown to her" (7) and repeats them as a kind of mantra when coping with loss and traumatic memory. Mai's frequent use of the phrase leads to her friend Pig picking it up and adopting it as her own. Aside from Phineas (who remains largely unconnected to any main character), Nee sits at the center of the web of relationships that connects every recurring character to one another. While Nee's own timeline, as seen in Fig. VI, is for the most part chronologically ordered and consistent, how the book warps the timeline around her chapters affects how readers interpret her and her perspective.

[3] This is a translation of the Thai idiom ***mai pen rai***, which can mean "it's all right" but in the novel suggests a more stoical acceptance, "this is how things are, and we must persevere." This links with the concept of karma evident throughout the novel and the idea that human acts, choices and decisions are bound to larger, enduring cyclical forces that structure the universe.

Nee is first introduced in Chapter 5, "Outpour," a chapter that portrays the (real-life) student-led protests, against authoritarianism and the corrupt military junta that controlled Thailand, that took place in Bangkok during the 1970s. The chapter is initially focalised through Siripohng, a young university student from a small farming village, who becomes increasingly involved in the protests in 1973. Afterwards, he meets Nee, and the two begin a romantic relationship. Three years later they are engaged in the protests leading up to the 6 October event – a massacre that took place at Thammasat University – acting against the return of exiled former Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn. It is here where Siripohng expresses concern for Nee's safety:

> He didn't tell her that he feared nothing for himself. Ever since the protests three years ago, he had been waking from nightmares. In those dreams … as he looked over his shoulder to see the men behind him, their faces obscured by shadow, he worried for the woman he loved. They would also come for her, he was sure. (81)

Nee responds negatively to his fears, "hiss[ing] at him" when he tells her of his worries. She is, we are told, "mad at him for giving her own cowardice the excuse to scratch at her" (84). Through Siripohng's perspective, we come to understand Nee as brave and fierce, acting against the tyrannical oppressing government, despite her own fears. Come October 6th, however, the focalising perspective shifts to Nee, and we see that Siripohng's fears were not unfounded as the student protests are met with hyper-violent retaliation. Siripohng is fatally shot twice below the ribs, and Nee is forced to leave him drowning in his own blood as she "couldn't bear to stay" (87). Nee then flees to the river to hide, and watches as students are dragged to the trees and hung while other students' bodies are piled into "heaps made jagged with legs and hands" that "blackened" as petrol is poured on them and they are burned (87-88). She seems to fully dissociate from the world around her, as "she felt like she was somewhere else, watching a terrible silent movie" (88).

It is here the effects of the non-linear storytelling are first felt by the reader. At this point in the novel "Outpour" appears the most impactful chapter, especially in relation to Bangkok which the novel's title foregrounds. The first chapter, "Visitations," is vague and mysterious, and it is unclear who is narrating. An unnamed child or elderly woman traverses a busy street in an unnamed city and enters the lobby of a building in a scene that isn't revealed to be within the Afterbody until the end of the novel. The next chapter, "Arrival," is set in Ayutthaya, central Thailand (or rather, Siam), in a pre-Bangkok era, distancing the reader from the titular city in terms of time and due to

the foreign perspective provided by the American Phineas. Similarly, Chapter 3, "Cadence," is told from an American Clyde's point of view, whilst the following chapter, "Birthright," is set in England. Thus none of the first four chapters deliver on the expectations that title creates: that the novel will be centred around Bangkok itself. "Outpour," the fifth chapter, is the first chapter to not only provide the perspective of a character from Bangkok (or Thailand) and be set in Bangkok itself, but also details historical real-world events that have shaped the city and its culture. As a result, "Outpour" is presented as a pivotal chapter and the start of a throughline for an otherwise disconnected novel, emphasised by its position as the final chapter of Part One. The reader is thus likely to anticipate a continuation of this storyline in the chapter that follows, or, given the nature of the novel's disconnected characters and story threads up to this point, at least a representation of the lasting impact of the massacre. However, Chapter 6, "Falling," instead returns the reader to the 19th century. This chronological reversal denies the reader information about the impacts of the events portrayed in "Outpour," about what happens to Nee after having witnessed the murderous actions of the soldiers, and so frustrates any forward trajectory for the Bangkok protest plotline. Instead, "Falling" picks up Phineas' storyline where "Arrival" left off.

It is also notable that the transition to "Falling" from "Outpour" is the first major instance of non-linearity in the novel. Between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, as well as Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, the plot goes backward in time. These instances of non-linearity are largely negligible to the reader however. Chapter 1, as noted previously, is vague and lacks any defined temporal indicators aside from modern architecture, which suggests to the reader that an understanding of the timeframe in which the chapter occurs is unimportant. While the events in Chapter 4 occur one year after those detailed at the start of Chapter 5, the span of time covered in Chapter 5 means that Chapter 4 concludes two years before the end of Chapter 5, thus obscuring the break in chronology. Thus, up until "Falling," the reader is likely to have read the novel expecting the subsequent chapters to build chronologically on the established plotlines. Sudbanthad's decision to withhold information about the aftermath of the 6 October event may then be unexpected or unsettling for readers. Just one chapter later, in "Uprising," however, the narrative returns to late-20th century Bangkok, and Nee reappears as a central character. Given the limited narrative discourse between "Outpour" and "Uprising," the reader may expect the events depicted within "Uprising" to occur a short time after "Outpour," with "Falling" serving as a brief interlude, and that both the narrative impact of "Outpour" and the impacts it has on Bangkok will be revealed. However, the chapter makes no reference at all to the protests and massacre described in "Outpour." No date or time markers are

provided in "Uprising" either, intensifying the feeling of disconnection between the two early chapters set in later 20th century Bangkok. However, using dates provided in later chapters in which Nee appears and the time that passes within the chapter itself, it is possible to determine that the events depicted in "Uprising" begin about 1979 – 3 years after those in "Outpour" – and end somewhere in the mid-1980s.

Rather than explore a Bangkok changed by the events of the massacre, "Uprising" focuses on the construction of the novel's central condominium in the city. The first part of the chapter is set during the early days of the process, focalised through a dog scavenging for scraps among the scaffolding. The perspectives and plot are very much removed from the politics and occurrences of the 6 October event, denying the reader of any preconceived notion of cause and effect. The focalising perspective changes repeatedly as the apartment complex is constructed, as the reader gains insight to various construction workers involved in the project. When, near the end of the chapter, Nee reappears in the novel, events are not focalised through her but through Duang, a manager at the newly opened condominium looking to hire Nee as a receptionist. The reader is thus not privy to any of Nee's thoughts, only to what she says to Duang. Nee tells her that "[I …] only finished the [nursing] degree because I didn't want to disappoint my mother," and that she felt the "need to do something else" (113). Despite the traumatic events of "Outpour," none of Nee's actions or shifts in attitude are attributed to lasting trauma or stress, nor are the events referenced. Given the short span in plot generated by the manipulation of chronology, readers may believe that Nee has made an effort to quickly forget these events, to sweep them under the rug, as unhealthy as that might be. The behaviour displayed by Nee correlates with behaviour in the real world city of Bangkok as observed by historian Thongchai Winichakul. Whilst the Bangkok featured in the novel is a fictional representation of the city, the novel's concerns regarding Bangkok's past and the import placed upon the city by the title justify the use of a historian's observations about the real world city. Winichakul believes that the massacres of the October 6 event remain unresolved. He also suggests that the title attributed to the event itself, the October 6 Event, as well as the other non-committal names of other struggles in Thailand in the late 20th century, indicates that these events are situated "on the edge between recognisability and anonymity, between history and the silenced past, and between memory and forgetfulness" (Winichakul 266). The silencing or evasion of the past Winichakul speaks of here is very evident in Sudbanthad's fictional city: Nee and those around her do not speak of the October 6 event. The trauma of the massacre – which readers have 'witnessed' through Nee's eyes in "Outpour" – is repressed. The consequences of this repression – and of

characters' attempts to repress traumatic memory more generally – are, I argue, central to the thematic thrust of the novel. This attempt to deny or disregard trauma soon proves futile and brings with it harmful, self-destructive consequences.

Nee also features in the following chapter, "Monsters," a chapter focalised through her sister Nok. In the chapter, it is revealed that Nok, prior to the events of "Outpour," moved to Japan, and with her husband opened a Thai restaurant, serving her mother's recipes. After struggling financially and resorting to substituting ingredients in her meals for lesser alternatives, a regular customer known as Khun Chahtchai offers to help with money. Upon accepting his aid, Chahtchai uses a mysterious source of wealth to provide Nok with all of the ingredients she couldn't afford, restoring her restaurant to its former glory. However, it comes to Nok's attention that Khun Chahtchai is an alias, and that in reality he is the Colonel responsible for the 6 October event. This proves conflicting for her, as she recalls "her mother had taught her to never forget generosity," and despite the harm Chahtchai had caused Thailand and her sister's peers, she justifies her acts to herself, asking, "Nee was alive though, wasn't she? Was there any reason to be personally upset at Khun Chahtchai now?" (Sudbanthad 134-35). Nok is unable to confront Chahtchai until after Nee learns of Nok's transactions with him. She is hurt that Nok would continue serving him, especially with their mother's recipes (136). Nee confronts Nok and Nok refuses to continue serving Chahtchai. However, the damage to their relationship is long-lasting and never fully resolved, as Nee refuses to answer Nok's calls until almost a decade later. Only here, in this chapter almost halfway through the novel, is the 6 October event and its aftermath acknowledged. Nok, living in another country, has no first-hand knowledge of the events and is removed from their impacts. All she has seen, and by extension all the reader has seen, is that the students shun Chahtchai for his involvement and Nee feels betrayed by Nok for serving him. Once more, and crucially, the reader is not privy to Nee's own knowledge, thoughts, or feelings about the student uprising and massacres as the chapter isn't focalised by her. Like many not directly engaged or impacted by the event such as Nok, the reader has no insights into its impact on those who were present and witnessed what happened on the day. In this way, Sudbanthad ensures that the trauma remains unspoken. The non-linear narration further emphasises this erasure. The events detailed in "Monster," the chapter in which the sisters become estranged, occur chronologically before Nee's interview with Duang at the condominium in "Uprising." In the course of this chapter we learn that "Nee had been running the sundries shop" (123) and her mother is alive, both of which are no longer the case in "Uprising." Whatever trauma Nee may feel is not revealed to the reader because to Nok – who is focalising the narrative – Nee

doesn't appear to display any negative effects, or because Nok is herself too far removed, literally and psychologically, from the events and consequences of the student protests and massacre. Due to Sudbanthad's narratorial choices, the reader is kept at the same distance as Nok, understanding something terrible has occurred but unable to fully fathom the impact of it.

The next chapter in which Nee appears is Chapter 10, "Impasse," which occurs two chapters after "Monsters," but 9 years later within the storyline. "Impasse" alternates between Nee and Pehn as focalising characters, and is the first time since "Outpour" that the reader gains insight to Nee's thoughts. The chapter is set in a Bangkok once again rife with violent protests, implied to be 1992's Black May, 16 years after the October 6 event. Nee is shown to have some of the defiance her younger self had in the face of danger, however, her outlook is bleaker, even resigned. For example, when the chapter opens, while walking through the city she thinks to herself, "If anyone thought it fine to shoot a middle-aged woman walking in discomfort, let them. It wasn't her first time staring down rifles" (146). However, signs of post-traumatic stress, from her prior involvement in protests, break through her exterior. She distances herself from involvement in the protests and has become jumpy, shuddering "when some shophouse resident slammed window bars shut" and thinking "she could hear guns reporting from every direction" despite there being no true gunfire (146). These thoughts and behaviours are in direct contrast to her attitudes towards the protests described in "Outpour," where Siripohng proved unsuccessful in stifling her active role and enthusiasm to bring about change.

The opening scene of the chapter is the first instance in the novel in which the reader is given insight into the direct effects of the protests and massacres on a Bangkok citizen. Directly talking about protests that parallel the events in "Outpour" and showing the effects it has had on Nee, albeit indirectly, sets up the expectation that "Impasse" will finally confront the 6 October event, and its aftermath. But, as the chapter progresses, there remains a sense of distance between Nee and her past. Despite the parallels presented to both the reader and Nee, the 6 October event isn't directly mentioned until the end of the chapter, and more importantly, neither is Siripohng. The closest reference occurs when Nee, via free indirect discourse, is shown thinking that the current (1992) events "[r]efreshed terrors from 16 years ago" (147), which serves to emphasise the gap between now and then, furthering the divide between "Impasse" and "Outpour." When ordered chronologically, "Outpour" and "Impasse" would only be 4 chapters apart, occurring 7th and 11th in order, respectively, which is shorter than the 5 chapters that separate them in the novel's structure, as "Outpour" is Chapter 5 and "Impasse" is Chapter 10. Though this difference is minor, both the plot

and chronological timeline are attempting to accentuate the lapse in time between the two events, emphasising the gap between them. This also puts the readers in Nee's shoes; the non-linearity creates a larger gap and Nee's refusal to directly acknowledge the events cause the reader to 'forget' or 'repress' the experience of the massacre as presented in "Outpour."

While Nok acknowledges the October 6 event in "Monsters," she doesn't relay the shock and sheer horror of the day because she did not experience it, as Nee did. As a result, the reader's 'memory' of the events, as described from Nee's perspective in "Outpour," are not revived. Sudbanthad's withholding of Nee's thoughts about and memories of the day in subsequent chapters also has the effect of 'repressing' the trauma of the events in the reader's mind. Time and again, in interactions with other characters, Nee appears to have forgotten or dismissed the day of the massacre. For example, in Chapter 10 (set at the time of the 1992 protests), when Nee arrives at Pehn's house and Pehn says that she "hope[s] it wasn't too bad out there, my dear," Nee replies, "[t]he city was just a little quieter, that's all" (150), masking her earlier response which had been to feel that the current unrest "[r]efreshed terrors from 16 years ago," making her fearful for her life. Another example of evasion or refusal to speak of the past is seen when Mrs. Reinhardt, Pehn's neighbour, resorts to baking cakes and offering them to her neighbours as a way to process and distract herself from the protests, despite Pehn noting "the anxious terror peeking from behind the woman's friendly eyes" (153), and later Nee after Nee briefly alludes to the 6 October event as she affirms the protests will get worse as she's "seen it before," elaborating no further on the topic (156). This is further amplified later in the chapter when Pehn considers the ramifications of her own inaction during the past student protests. Pehn avoided taking part in these due to her social conservatism and fear about the potential impacts on her wealth and social circle. Although she acknowledges (to herself) her own lack of understanding of the 6 October event and is shown to reflect on her own compliance in the continuation of a cycle of violence, she does not articulate this to Nee. All she can bring herself to do is offer Nee the use of her radio to interfere with police communications, another distraction from the issues around them.

The chapter thus emphasises a habitual and recurrent response of many of Bangkok's citizens to the horrific historic events, and even contemporary ones: silence, evasion, and the attempt to repress and forget. This refusal to engage with the impacts of the past is mirrored and foregrounded by the novel's chronology: chapters detailing appalling events, cruelty, and violence to humans and non-humans are cut short without resolution. The chapters that follow offer neither

consequences nor learnings, but introduce new scenes and events, from the past and future, that are unrelated and provide a distraction from the chapter just read.

However, the final scene focalised through Nee in "Impasse" breaks this cycle. Near the end of "Impasse," Nee recalls a dinner with her friends where she, in passing, mentions a lack of sleep to her friend, due to the fear of bombs dropping as they did in the protests. She notes it is a "quiet admission meant for a friend she could be honest with," evoking the sense of privacy and silence regarding the topic (162). A person behind her overhears this however, and relates to this very problem, suggesting that Nee "give in and go back to that night," in memory, to confront her trauma (162). Nee's response is only given in the reportage of her thoughts: "*But wait*, she wanted to say to the woman. *What if someone's waiting for me at the football field? What do I say to him?*" The reader is aware that Nee and Siripohng, like thousands of other students, were camping on the football field of the occupied university campus when the 1976 military crackdown began. The reported thoughts here seem to imply Nee is terrified of confronting the memory of Siripohng who is metaphorically "waiting" for her. This small flashback to the dinner also occurs without a segue, springing up seemingly from nowhere as if the attempt to forget it has failed. This indicates that, much like how the reader has 'shelved' the details of the 6 October event, provided in "Outpour," at the back of their mind while reading subsequent ostensibly unrelated chapters, Nee too has attempted to bury her memories of the day and refused to confront her trauma. It is of note that Siripohng is not named in her thoughts: she is afraid of a male "someone" who may be waiting for her. It is revealed that even internally Nee refuses to confront the full loss of her lover and is unable to think his name.

Nee appears in the next chapter, "Heirloom," too, although the chapter provides very little insight into her thoughts and interiority as the chapter is focalised through Sammy and concerns itself with his struggles instead. Between the two chapters, Pehn, Sammy's mother and Nee's friend, passes away, and thus Sammy visits her condo in the chapter to make arrangements for Pehn's belongings, which Nee facilitates. The two become close quickly, due to their shared bond with Pehn, and soon start a relationship. However, Sammy is unable to commit to the relationship and promptly leaves when Nee implies she may be pregnant. Despite the focus being on Sammy's difficulties, the relationship between the two suggests Nee is willing to move on from Siripohng in order to be with Sammy, though her feelings in this regard are never explicitly stated, and once again Siripohng remains unnamed. However, the extent of her inability to commit in the relationship is evident in Sammy's concerns about the emotional distance between them, even in the throes of

intimacy. He detects a "growing vacancy between them as their bodies entwined," and thinks Nee seems to have "retreated into a separate room within herself" (175).

"Far," the chapter following "Heirloom," continues Nok's story, once again portraying Nee from an outsider's point of view. As in "Monsters," Nok is only able to make assumptions about Nee's inner life and emotions. The two sisters, after 10 years of silence, reconnect and become much more involved in one another's lives, with Nee taking the trip to Japan multiple times to meet her nephew. Despite their tentative reconciliation, Nok has "no idea if her sister [is] happy or, at least, fine," as Nee only responds with her phrase "*It is only so*" when Nok asks if anything troubles her (188). Nonetheless, Nok offers an interesting insight:

> Nok hadn't lost Nee to a bullet or the Chao Phraya's currents in 1976, but having chosen this life in Yokohama, she could claim no part in helping her sister in the years after. Given their estrangement of several years, Nok hadn't even been a spectator. Nee had survived the loss of her lover and of many friends as well, but only to endure a city that barely remembered the events that had caused it – an unpublicized ceremony once a year, a small plaque there. Did that make Nee cling to her horrors even harder? That was very much the kind of thing Nee did: taking on what no one else wanted to do – this remembering. (188)

While the more common response to trauma is for individuals to forget, or attempt to do so via the repression of memories, Nok here claims that Nee actively takes on the duty or responsibility of remembering what the city and its inhabitants appear to have forgotten, suggesting that it is Nee who carries the weight of the past. This invites a new interpretation of Nee's silence about the 1976 massacre, and her inability to face the past: Nee doesn't *want* to come to terms with what happened, as doing so would mean no longer carrying the weight of "this remembering." Indeed, she might forget, and so lose even the memory of Siripohng. This idea is suggested again, much later, in the final chapter of the novel when Nee thinks:

> The more terrible memories manifest as more than an ache. She feels them alive and aflame within her, and she can't just abandon them to oblivion. She must tend to them. She feeds them with her heart. (355)

So while we might read the non-linear narration and gaps in the narrative as a reflection of the amnesia or repression experienced by Nee (and other victims of trauma), the muddled chronology of the novel might also impose on the reader the role of a guardian of the 'memory' of the 6 October event which was experienced vividly in reading of the visceral and brutal events described in "Outpour." This is the case, at least until the twelfth chapter, "Far," which concludes the second part of the novel and occurs, structurally, at the novel's center. The other chapters up until this point have offered the perspectives of characters unaffected by the protests and their aftermath, by virtue of being from another time or being an outsider, such as Phineas, the birds, or Clyde, or they have offered the perspectives of characters unable, or unwilling, to truly grasp the true extent of the massacre's impacts, such as Pehn, Nok, or Sammy. At this point in the novel, Nee hasn't directly confronted or talked about the events in "Outpour," which thus renders the reader as, apparently, the only agent who takes on the task of "this remembering." Like Nee, the reader carries the burden of a memory that has not been psychologically 'processed' in the way that Wiespape et al., quoted in my introduction, suggests: "Individuals who have experienced trauma may display fragmented memories and decreased narrative cohesion, resulting in trauma narratives that are disjointed and poorly integrated into the larger picture of their lives" (Wiespape et al. 150). Traversing the novel to this point, the reader has been required to (attempt to) collate "fragmented memories" (in the form of the disparate chapters and perspectives and stories they offer) and "integrate" these into some larger, cohesive narrative about Bangkok which, it seems, has tried to bury its own past.

"Far" thus brings a close to Part 2 and the first half of the novel, and Nee doesn't reappear, directly, until the final chapter of the novel. There are, however, references made to Nee by other characters. Sammy thinks about her when reflecting on his life and the various women he has loved, and Mai recalls Nee as her swim instructor while she lived at the condominium, adopting Nee's catch phrase "*It is only so*" as her own. These references to Nee are minimal however, and in the case of Mai, omit Nee as the source of the phrase. It is almost as if Nee, along with her traumatic memories of the 6 October event, are silenced in the second half of the novel, which mimics Bangkok's residents' attempt to bury the past.

The final chapter, "Home," is the 23rd chapter in the book; if the narrative sequence was chronological, the chapter would be 17th. During the intervening chapters since her last appearance, the reader is likely to have 'shelved' Nee as they focus on all that is relayed in Chapters 13-22. Which focus on Bangkok and its slow submergence. Starting with the chapter "Deluge," the focus of the second half of the novel shifts towards portraying life in Bangkok as the rising sea level claims parts

of the city. "Deluge" portrays the start of this process, where small suburbs would begin to flood, which escalates until "Netherworld," where Bangkok has adopted a new identity entirely, known now as "Krung Nak." "while it would otherwise occur 17th chronologically. Therefore, in order to facilitate the forgetfulness in the reader, the chronology of the novel twists to delay her appearance as much as possible, making the reader bury the past alongside the citizens of Bangkok, or testing the reader's role as Nok highlighted, as one who takes on the role of remembering in spite of the chronology. There is only one notable instance in which the *memory* of Nee is evoked during this time however. Chapter 17, "Birds," focalised through Pig, concludes Part Three and centres on her struggle to communicate with her son Woon, who has locked himself in his room in the condominium and refuses to speak with anyone as a part of his own form of protest against climate change. In this chapter, Pig recalls a time she and Mai attended a publicised exhibition at a university campus, one section of which was dedicated to a memorial of the 6 October event. Pig is overwhelmed by the display, and Mai is able to console her by saying, "[i]t is only so. It will not be so" (267). This is the only reference to the student massacres in the chapter, which is notably the only chapter to do so without also directly featuring Nee. Although Nee is not physically present in this chapter, Mai's use of Nee's phrase as a direct result of being faced with the display, suggests that Nee's experiences of the massacre continue to influence others, well beyond the event itself. Until this chapter, neither Nee nor the 6 October event had been referenced since the end of Part 2. This scene once again reminds readers of events they might have all but forgotten – just like the people of Bangkok. The evocation of Nee, via Mai's repetition of her characteristic phrase, as well as the exhibit itself, directly evoke the traumas depicted in "Outpour" which are likely to have been *almost* forgotten by the reader, but here introduce an uneasy sense of recall.

Nee last appears in Chapter 23, "Home," the final chapter of the novel. I have suggested that the non-linear narration throughout Parts 3 and 4 has distracted the reader, simulating a 'forgetting' that is yet haunted by an unresolved past. The chapters leading up to "Home" in Part 4 are set in the 19th century, the late 20th century, and the latter part of the 21st century. None of these chapters are concerned with the 6 October event or those lost in the massacre, or reference Nee, aside from a brief mention of her in one line when Mai erratically jumps from memory to memory in her Afterbody simulation: "She's [Mai] young, her leaf-sized feet slapping water behind Khun Nee's encouraging shouts" (318-19). Ordered chronologically, "Home" would only occur four chapters after "Far," the last chapter to have featured Nee and prominently reference the 6 October event, but the non-linearity has inflated this gap and it occurs 11 chapters after "Far." As a result, the

readers are likely to have partially forgotten the massacre, brutally detailed so many chapters before (despite the small reference in "Birds"). If "Home" had been placed earlier in the novel, following a linear timeline, the effects of the reader's 'forgetting' would be greatly diminished. "Home" is very short, less than five pages in length, but concludes the novel with a powerful account of the cost and pain of Nee's remembering, which contrasts the suggestion that she has forgotten due to traumatic amnesia and repression. In the chapter, Nee returns to the apartment complex to swim in the pool long after having left her job there as a swimming instructor. She is much older, as we learn that she has a son and a late husband, and that she feels "[j]oints creak between bones" while swimming, and when she comes to reflect on the 6 October event, she thinks, "[i]t's been so long, almost fifty years now" (355). But the narrator tells us "she can still see the day play out like a terrible movie" (355). While swimming, the reader is finally privy to her confrontation with the events narrated in "Outpour." And here, she names her lover, repeatedly, something she has not done in previous chapters:

> She can still hear Siripohng mumble to her, the bullets having torn through him, the blood gurgling from his mouth, urging her to get up and run.
>
> Siripohng. Siripohng. Sometimes she wants to believe that if she says a name so many times, anyone can be brought back to life. Siripohng, Siripohng. (355)

This is the first time since "Outpour" that readers hear Nee, or even the narration, speak Siripohng's name, and she does so repeatedly. The reader is invited to see what Nee has carried with her, but has been unable to articulate, what she appears to have buried and forgotten but never has – just like, it is implied – the residents of Bangkok. She muses on the pretence of forgetting: "After awful things happen, she's found that a woman has to make herself appear inviolate, so that she can live the good life expected of her and be a productive, contributing member of the society" (355). She shows she is aware that Bangkok as a city has done the same not only in relation to the lives claimed by the student massacres, but also the various other darker events in its history:

> Few remember names like his anymore. Faces have been made ashen. Those October dates swallowed everyone who'd been there into history's giant unlit belly, and that history into silence. The forgotten return again and again, as new names and faces, and again this city makes new ghosts. ... Doesn't matter that the bullet holes have been filled and the walls

> painted over. Truth lingers, unseen like phantoms but there to rattle and scream wherever people try their hardest to forget. (366)

Following the horrors of an event like that which occurred on 6 October, Nee suggests, in order to get on with life, the people of Bangkok and the nation itself 'paint over' the past. They "try their hardest to forget" and force "history into silence." But the "truth lingers," and old ghosts remain to haunt: "still there'll be a lingering ache underneath, made more palpable as her years begin to wear thin. The more terrible memories manifest as more than an ache. She feels them alive and aflame within her" (355). Nee challenges and refutes the attempt to silence history by evoking Siripohng's name, again and again as she swims, just as she had "muttered [it] into clasped hands after giving alms at the temple" (355). Although she does not overtly speak of the past events that haunt her, she is able to say her lover's name, evoking him and remembering the man she loved. Previously, Nee only referred to Siripohng as "him," further burying her feelings beneath her phrase "It is only so." Here, in the final chapter and final scene of the novel, Nee allows herself to think not only about Siripohng, but other "ghosts from her past, such as "her poor late husband," "Khun Crab," "Kuhn Mahm," and "Uncle Fah" (356). Thus, the core theme of facing the past comes to light, facilitated through the non-linear narrative's encouragement of the reader to forget – and then remember. This chapter, occurring last in the non-linear narrative, records Nee's painful epiphany – one which would have occurred half-way through the novel if narrated chronologically. The effect is to make the reader feel the force of repression all the more strongly, delayed as the emotional climax has been until the very end. The novel has veered away from detailing the effects of the 6 October event, providing only brief acknowledgements of its horrors throughout, and has thus discouraged the reader from lingering on it. The novel has also buried Siripohng's name which has not been mentioned since Chapter 5, "Outpour." Nee acknowledges "[f]ew remember names like his anymore," and the reader experiences this un-remembering of his name as the non-linear narrative progresses (355). When his name is finally spoken, again and again, Nee's epiphanic moment of recall is extended to the reader simultaneously. Here, the novel's antagonists are revealed as silence and time, for Nee, Bangkok's citizens, and the experience of the reader.

Memory of the Non-Human

Throughout the novel there are recurrent portrayals of agential non-human entities. These non-human interlocutors persist across the various iterations of Bangkok portrayed in the novel, and as I will argue, contribute to the non-linear structure of the narrative. The presence of the non-human is evident as early as Chapter Two, "Arrival," as after Phineas arrives in Ayutthaya and receives a package from the locals, he notes how "[t]wo clay figures – a man and a woman – had also been left to serve as ghost servants for a chest of enema tubes. It did not delight him that his patients held him in similar esteem as their witch doctors, men who entered into trances to speak the tongue of spirits or who claimed to be able to send ghostly imps to strangle adversaries" (13). Most often, as seen here, the non-human entities takes the form of ghosts or spirits, further seen when Pehn tells Clyde that he'll be "playing for the spirits" that live in one of the pillars in her mansion as they are unhappy with her (31), when Pig expresses her fears of becoming "a wandering ghost" after death, with no one "thinking to make alms or offerings for her" (315), or when Juk (a construction worker building the condominium) leaves chicken "out for the ghosts" (102). Two chapters, "Uprising" and "Flight," feature sections focalised by non-human animals. In the former this is a stray dog, whose perspective on the city is primarily sensory as it scavenges for scraps in the streets of Bangkok. In the latter, the focalisers are birds who provide a panoramic perspective on the development of the city in which they must adapt behaviours to survive in the growing concrete terrain. These non-human entities, be it ghosts or animals, inform the plot on a variety of levels, revealing a view of the city that is vastly different to that of its human inhabitants.

Come the end of the novel however, the distinction between human and non-human begins to be blurred and questioned by the characters themselves. In the novel's imagined future, a new technology is developed: the 'Afterbody,' a simulation that preserves the consciousness of the user beyond death, allowing them to 'live' indefinitely in a digital recreation of the world, unencumbered by their failing bodies. The Afterbody is a virtual world created from the accumulated collective memories of real-world places – in Bangkok's case, places that are disappearing due to the rising water that is swallowing the city. It is also an attempt to preserve history which might be lost through forgetfulness or death of those with memories of the past. We learn that Mai has chosen to upload her mind into the Afterbody's host server. Pig and Woon are still able to interact with her through specialised portals that allow them to enter the virtual space as well, as are others who have not yet 'uploaded.' During one such interaction, Pig questions Mai's humanity:

> "[H]aven't you [Mai] already kind of part-way left [died]?"

"I'm still me, and I'm still here, Pig."

"Are you?" (312-13)

The reader comes to learn that the physical locations and artefacts in the Afterbody, such as a beach in Cornwall at which Mai and Pig meet, have been "scanned at some point by the seeing machines" (310). These are implied to be the same machines Pig's son Woon uses in Chapter 19, "Crossings." He scans various artefacts – old letters, statues, artwork, and so on – in an effort to preserve them before they are claimed by the rising ocean. These are implied to be a development of the technologies Mai herself had been using to find cracks in the foundations of structures earlier in the novel. However, the more intimate and sensory details, such as the sensation of "gritty sand between toes" are "each a memory someone has deposited in the public map room," with Mai noting to Pig "that none of this is mine" in reference to the memories of the beach at Cornwall (310). It is later suggested that the Afterbody may also pull and digitally preserve memories from unwilling subjects. For this reason, Mai refuses to enter the old apartment where she had lived with her parents in fear of "unlocking archive settings to bring back the spectres of her parents" (314).

This realisation about the nature of the Afterbody encourages the realisation that the storyworld of the novel itself exists within the Afterbody, persisting in a timeless state that allows free movement, between 'archived' memories, through time. The novel's fragmented chronology supports such an understanding, and mirrors Mai's own 'random' shifts in time, via recollection, in "Partings": she first appears as a child at a "morning assembly with Pig and the other children," then shifts to a pool when she's older, hearing "Nee's encouraging shouts," then "step[s] through the cold foamy surf" of the beach at which Pig and Mai meet in the Afterbody, then to seeing the "silhouette of the Empire State Building." All these events, or sensations, are provided in one extended paragraph, each a different memory from her life, occurring out of order, offering a microcosm of the way people experience time in memory and also the non-linearity of the novel as a whole (318-19).

The question this then poses is who – or what – is remembering each event in the novel and travelling between them? This question is answered as Mai experiences a "memory" that can't be traced to any donor. Frequently, just outside of the Afterbody's recreation of the condominium, Mai experiences a "roar … as if the building has come down on them," although this registers to Mai as "not the kind of sound an ear might hear" (316). This event leaves a "shadow" on the ground, which Mai believes to be "a shadow of a child" (317). These events call back to "Uprising," in which a

young worker named Gai falls to his death from the scaffolding of the under-construction condominium, after which he is quickly forgotten. Mai can attribute "no source for this" event, and concludes that it "might be a memory, just not human memory," one pulled from "this building, this ground" (317-18). This prompts Mai's assertion that "places remember us" (318).

One interpretation may be that Bangkok – the city itself, its artefacts, the ground, its landmarks – has deposited its own memories into the Afterbody. Even more startling is the implication that Bangkok itself has the agency to explore its own Afterbody, a further extension of the idea that non-human entities have sentience, as previously detailed. The novel's title invites such an interpretation, according the city agency in the verb "wakes." The title is ambiguous, however, or multiplicitous in its meaning. "Bangkok" may refer to the inhabitants of the city rather than the bricks and mortar city per se. However, clues embedded within the text encourage the former reading, for example when Nee thinks "this city makes new ghosts" in Chapter 23, when considering the harm the repression of trauma causes (356). Likewise, the children A, B, and C, in Chapter 18, "Netherworld," personify landmarks in the submerged city, claiming "[e]verywhere worth knowing has a name like Uncle Victory [or] Auntie Rainbow" (275), in reference to the Victory Monument and the Rainbow Bridge. A, B, and C belong to the underclass of the city, those who remain living on, alongside and even beneath the rising water. The wealthy elite live in houses moored on stilts or other architecturally innovative buildings, above the water.

If we accept that the novel's storyworld reveals the collective memory of the non-human place, Bangkok city, this helps to explain how events that take place in chapters devoted to earlier times, long before the development of the Afterbody, are able to be incorporated within the Afterbody much later in time, and so, too, in the novel as a whole. These memories can't have been deposited by people themselves, as characters like Gai and Phineas die long before the Afterbody is developed, with no one who remembers them well enough still remaining to deposit accounts of their interiority. In the chapter that relays Gai's death, it is suggested that this event is insignificant to the inhabitants of the city: "by the next week, few in Krungthep thought of the boy. The city's eyes had shifted to fresher news of deaths and mayhem" (112). It appears that it was insufficiently notable to be archived in the Afterbody, too. And yet a shadow of the boy *is* retained. In a lecture on the novel, Adam Grener develops further the idea of the city's sentience. He notes that clay pots make significant appearances in both Phineas's chapters set in the 19th century and much later, when Woon is scanning artefacts to be digitised in the Afterbody, and he suggests that "Phineas is only in the novel because the clay pot that Woon breaks is something that is linked to Phineas," further

implying that if "the scanning of the objects reveals everything that's encoded in those objects that has some connection to a human being, that's one way Phineas could logically be brought into the world of the novel [read as a metonym for the Afterbody]" (Grener). Even Nee's age in "Home" would suggest her death before the creation of the Afterbody, thus her own thoughts would be unable to be deposited to the memory banks. Understood this way, it is possible to see the novel itself as a collection of memories in Bangkok's Afterbody, and the fragmented chronology represents its own 'mode of thought.'

This understanding invites a reframing of the various plot threads within the novel, and their chronology within it. Throughout the novel, the reader is presented with a traumatic event, only for the next chapter to look towards a different event in another time, evading the anticipated exploration of the effects of that trauma. As discussed earlier, this is very evident in relation to the 6 October event: the student massacres appear to be 'forgotten' in subsequent chapters. We also see this in the chapter "Falling," where Phineas witnesses a man named Bunsahk fall off of a swing during the traditional Brahmin Triyampawai Ceremony (called the Swing Ceremony) taking place at Bangkok's famous Giant Swing. The Siamese natives refuse to let Phineas treat the injured man, leaving Phineas to assume Bunsahk will die, which he feels responsible for. The following chapter, "Uprising," includes no reference to this tragedy, and instead opens with the obscure perspective of a dog centuries later, denying the reader, as is probably the case for Phineas, the ability to process this trauma. "Uprising" features its own trauma in the death of Gai, which in turn is only briefly acknowledged and only ever receives recall in the form of the "shadow" in the Afterbody. I have argued, above, that the residents of Bangkok seem unable to process their history and traumas, attempting to repress and forget these. This idea could be extended to the city itself. Bangkok – either a separate entity or a manifestation of its collective inhabitants and their (often repressed) memories – in exploring its past in the Afterbody, does not dwell on any particular or individual tragedy, moving between ostensibly discrete events from the past, as if at random, obscuring the tragedies. Yet these traumas remain, unresolved and festering, at the city's core.

This changes in the fourth and final part of the novel, however. Bangkok appears to come to terms with the past, or at the very least acknowledges the need for this, just as Nee does in the novel's final pages. The first three chapters of Part Four, continuing the overall forward progression in time seen throughout the novel, presents Bangkok nearing the end of the 21st century. Bangkok has become almost fully submerged by flood waters brought about by climate change, with the central condominium now a part of a "dense valley of buildings in different stages of decrepitude"

(280). In these three chapters, the storyline of Mai and Pig, the most prominent characters aside from Nee, concludes. The two discuss the implications of death and how they will be remembered, and move towards a dark spot on the concrete, which is implied to the reader to be Gai's ghostly shadow. Neither know anything about it and haven't found any newspaper records that refer to it as they "went with the floods" (317). Pig asks, "Is this not from someone's memory?" and Mai replies, "that's the thing: there is no source for this. … The shadow is here at this spot, part of the scan at the time, yet also not here" (317). She then says, "I suppose that it's an error or artifact that the system never detected. I also think that it might be memory, just not human memory" (317). Pig asks, "Who's doing the remembering?" (317). Mai replies, crucially:

> "Here. This building, this ground."
>
> "Thay can do that?" [asks Pig]
>
> "I wish I had a better explanation, but I think that maybe, yes, they do, even when we don't. Places remember us." (317-18)

This idea – that Bangkok, this *place* may be actively 'remembering' – reverberates through the remaining three chapters of the novel. In these, the novel turns back in time, returning to Phineas's storyline in the 19th century in Chapter 21, "Return." Occurring fourth chronologically, the chapter is epistolary in form as Phineas writes to his brother about events that have befallen him recently, in particular, his near-death experience after having contracted cholera. While sick, Phineas dreams he is lost in what he describes as a "Netherworld" (328) (the title of the first chapter in Part 4 of the novel), a place that fills him with a confusing sense of feeling "utterly lost and, in the same heartbeat, delighted by my return somewhere" (327). It is after this experience that Phineas chooses to remain at his current station in Siam, a place he originally found hostile and barbaric, in order to aid the city's growth and medicinal needs.

The title of the chapter, "Return," and the feeling Phineas expresses of simultaneously feeling lost yet that he is returning somewhere, suggest why this chapter has been pulled so far from the narrative's temporal past into the futuristic final Part. Occurring twenty-first in the novel's structure as opposed to fourth (when it occurs chronologically), the chapter suggests that Bangkok is "returning" to its origins. The other chapters comprising the Part Four depict a Bangkok estranged from its roots, drowned and destroyed, to the point it has adopted a new name, "Krung Nak" (276). The contents of Phineas' letter to his brother, and the return to the 19th century, enables

the reader to contemplate what led to the city's dystopian future, and reflects Bangkok doing the same. In returning to Phineas' memories, the implied sentient Bangkok is escaping its contemporary (if futuristic) bleak and drowned state and is confronting or acknowledging its own past. This is further hinted at in Phineas' final thoughts, penned in his letter. Phineas asks his brother if he recalls a scene from their youth, and the letter ends, as does the chapter, with the phrase, "[w]hat I would give to see us then" (331). This last sentence in the chapter in effect reflects what has taken place in the chapter itself. Bangkok *returns* to this moment in its past, its earliest days, in order to make sense of its present, with the chronology of the chapter prompting the reader to do the same, as the reader is asked to make sense of why this chapter occurs as late as it does.

Chapter 22, the penultimate chapter, "Upstream," is the second and final chapter to feature Clyde Alston. This chapter, set in 1997, occurs only a few decades after Clyde's first appearance in "Cadence," but in terms of chapter arrangement its appearance covers the largest gap in the novel's structure. While his music has been referenced by other characters in the novel, such as Pehn and Woon, he himself has not made an appearance since Chapter 3, nineteen chapters earlier. In "Upstream," Clyde is recovering from an incident on stage that has left him in need of medical assistance for a short period. Clyde reminisces on his relationship with his old boyfriend Morris who he'd left on bad terms, while also making it clear his own fame is fading as he struggles to make ends meet as a musician, being reduced to performing on "Fridays at an off-Sukhumvit piano bar popular with the jumble of farang expats on ever-extending visas" (342). As discussed earlier, the people of Bangkok and by extension the sentient Bangkok itself has trouble voicing distressing names from the past (Nee says of Siripohng "[f]ew remember names like his anymore" (356)). Clyde, while not inherently tied to a traumatic event like Siripohng, proves to be another example of this evasion or silencing. Clyde's early first appearance takes place when the reader is still being introduced to what they are likely to interpret as 'important' characters and, as a result, are likely, at this stage in the novel, to anticipate his centrality in what follows. Yet he fades away and is almost forgotten until he resurfaces later in the novel. The large gap between his two appearances reflects how Bangkok, both the city and its citizens, have forgotten him, while also simulating this same forgetfulness in the reader by providing distractions in the form of other plot threads and characters. I suggest by 'recalling' Clyde so late in the novel, in "Upstream," readers are urged to see the necessity of bringing old names back to life, a reflection of what Bangkok as a sentient being is doing via exploring their Afterbody memories. This idea of recalling and reintegrating the past into the present is also suggested in the plot of the chapter itself as Clyde's caretaker Lucky seeks out Morris' music

at Clyde's behest. After she downloads Morris' music and begins to listen to it, the "music closes her eyes" (350) and she seems to be transported to Central Park, almost as if listening to Morris play in person. She seems to glean insight to his past through his music, and imagines having a conversation with him in response to his song:

> *Does it hurt to look back to what you and Khun Clyde had?* She thinks to ask him. *But this song's not about that,* he replies with his trumpet. *I want to know,* she thinks back. *Why does it matter?* he asks. *Just tell me,* she thinks. *Fine, here you go,* he plays. *Wait for it. There.* His trumpet comes to a quick halt, and the drums accompanying him rush through to explode inside her head. (351)

The content of this conversation suggests the pain in confronting the past in memory, a key thematic concern raised in the book: "*Does it hurt to look back*," asks Lucky (351). The apparition of Morris is unwilling to answer, avoiding the question much like how characters such as Nee, Pehn, and Sammy have expressly enacted the same kind of evasion in prior chapters and how Bangkok turns away from one trauma to the next without resolution: "*What does it matter,*" Morris asks. Ultimately his answer is provided when the track ends, arriving in the form of a cacophony of music that "explode[s] inside [Lucky's] head" (351), expressing not only the pain of reflection but also the interconnectedness between characters who have never met but share memories of a person or place, in common.

I also suggest, that in reading the novel as Bangkok actively exploring its memory via the Afterbody, that this chapter invites readers to consider the attempts of the city to resolve its sublimated traumas, something that Nee does, too, in the final chapter of the novel, "Home." Here, Nee, as discussed earlier, is shown to have never forgotten the 6 October event or her lover. Swimming in the condominium pool, she recalls him and his death, uttering his name in a painful internal incantation:

> It's been so long, almost fifty years now, yet she can still see the day play out like a terrible movie. She can still hear Siripohng mumble to her, the bullets having torn through him, the blood gurgling from his mouth, urging her to get up and run.
>
> Siripohng. Siripohng. Sometimes she wants to believe that if she says a name so many times, anyone can be brought back to life, Siripohng, Siripohng, she's muttered into clasped hands after giving alms at the temple. (355).

The reader has been denied this insight throughout the novel: Nee never forgot; she has carried her trauma within her for half a century, not speaking of it, but recalling it viscerally in an endless loop.

Bangkok, the city, appears to be doing the same. Readers are left with an image of the city's endlessly looping recollection – evidence in the book we have just read and are about to complete. The city has not forgotten, either:

> Few remember names like [Siripohng's] anymore. Faces have been made ashen. Those October dates swallowed everyone who'd been there into history's giant unlit belly, and that history into silence. The forgotten return again and again, as new names and faces, and again this city makes new ghosts. (356)

The novel itself is a testimony to the city's perpetual remembering: the "forgotten" are remembered, their fragile connections across time slowly becoming evident as the narrative plunges backwards and lurches forward in time, and so they return, "again and again." The city recalls the dead and lost, evoking their memory in the very chapters of the novel, those who once lived, continually making "new ghosts" to trouble the "giant unlit belly" of historical erasure.

As she swims, Nee's thoughts turn away from the trauma and those who have been forgotten however, as she is "[p]ropelled by the hopeful certainty natural to the most stubborn and the most desperate, [and] pushes on blindly, the pool's edges invisible to her" (356-7). There is a hopefulness in her embrace of these memories:

> She can only hope to swim on and touch the other end of the pool, or maybe her fingertips will stop her at a rock she's never known to be there – a large, grayish protrusion rising from the water like an emerging moon. When that happens, she'll recognize that she's reached the shores of a Krungthep other than the one she's known. (357)

Here, Nee is shown drawing on memories of the past to inform a future Bangkok, on where both herself, and Bangkok, "doesn't feel lost" (357), in moored by the dystopian destruction brought on by climate change or scarred by past traumas.

Nee recalls a folk tale her father would tell her about a mysterious village in the mountains, described as an "in-between place" where "a day would turn out to be decades in ours" (357). The novel concludes this way:

> She wonders what might happen if she doesn't heed the advice of her father and the elders [to leave the village quickly and quietly, not to linger there]. She imagines her outstretched hand feeling the heft of that gray rock.
>
> She's pulling herself up from the water and lying on her back. She's listening to the waves, as they arrive one after another at the rock, and will go on arriving long after her. When she's here, she doesn't feel lost. (357)

This mysterious village alludes to the Afterbody itself, as it is an "in-between place," between life and death, and is unbound by time, as Mai is shown freely shifting between memories in her past. Nee's recollection here, and the literal act of returning to a past scene in the timeline, evokes that the city she herself is currently in is just another of the many ancestral ghosts who is remembered. Bangkok, too, is a ghost, Krung Nak having taken its place, leaving the city to explore its own memory within the Afterbody.

The novel itself has provided the reader with a simulation of Bangkok's exploration of memory. The sense of 'return' Bangkok expresses in coming back to the familiar version of itself as in "Home" is once again instilled in the reader, as not only is the reader returning to a familiar character in Nee, but the Bangkok and world portrayed in "Home" is the closest reflection of the Bangkok known at the time of the novel's release (2018). Through an extrapolation of Nee's age, and the chapter's temporal relationship to the chapter "Deluge," the reader is able to infer that "Home" occurs just before the effects of climate change take hold of the city. Or, in other words, it is the next chapter to occur in the reader's own timeline. Chapter 13, "Deluge," is the first chapter to depict the shift into a flooded Bangkok, thus the first chapter to diverge from what is familiar to the reader and delve into speculative fiction. "Home" makes reference to a green snake that has "wrapped itself around a tree branch giving shade to a couple of lounge chairs" in the indoor pool room (354), a strange behaviour also displayed in "Deluge," where snakes are described as "coloniz[ing] tree branches and replac[ing] leaves with their wriggling bodies" in an attempt to "seek higher ground" (195). The temporal relationship implied between the two chapters would thus place "Home" in a world familiar to the reader's own. Not only is the Bangkok in "Home" the last version

of the city in which it is familiar to itself, but it is also the last version that is familiar to the reader. This chapter represents a step into the unknown for the reader, a mimicry of both Nee and Bangkok's reaching "the shores of a Krungthep other than the one [they've] known" (357). In breaking the linearity of the story to present this chapter last, the novel simulates this same paradoxical experience of 'returning' to a place that is 'lost'. The structure of the novel has encouraged the reader to experience a sense of this constant 'return' to the 'lost' past, in order to inform an understanding of the future, just as the characters (and the city) have done in an attempt to overcome their trauma, a core thematic concern that has resonated throughout the novel.

Conclusion

After having read *Station Eleven* for the first time in 2021, the questions surrounding the chronology consumed every part of my brain committed to literary studies. As a result, many of my own fictional writings have included some form of non-linearity, becoming a staple of my authorial style that I hope to master and perfect. Yet, I still find myself unsatisfied with the justification of this choice to construct non-linear plots. While yes, admittedly, the stories would be far more boring without this complex structure, as the majority of the suspense and intrigue comes from the a-chronological structures, I find that the non-linear narration in these stories, for the most part, fail to connect to or amplify any themes I am attempting to convey in my works. This very dissatisfaction is what has driven me to search for a deeper understanding of the non-linearity in these novels, in the hope that I will be able to utilise this aspect of narration in my own stories.

The fragmented chronologies in both *Station Eleven* and *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* prove to be excellent examples of fictions in which the complex interplay between narration, content, and theme is crucial to the overall meaning of the text. *Station Eleven* encourages – even demands- of the reader that they commit to the same process of meaning-making, across and through time, in which the characters themselves are engaged. I have argued that in order to navigate the complex chronology presented in the novel, the reader must construct their own timeline of events, mimicking how Kirsten attempts to restore her amnesiac memories; the reader's own discoveries and moments of understanding when narrative threads come together coincides with Kirsten's own moments of realisation and revelation. At the same, the plot's chronology *shows* Arthur's self-dissociation, and the reader experiences a similar sense of alienation from him, unable to access his interiority after the first chapter in which we gain insight to his thoughts and past from his perspective.

On the other hand, *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* asks of the reader a different kind of engagement, as rather than demanding a reconstruction of the timeline, the non-linear narration instead simulates in readers the challenges of engaging with traumatic memories and asks of them to confront the erasures and silences within the city's history. The reader, alongside both Nee and the city, is unable to 'resolve' the trauma of the 6 October event as after the chapter that details the horrific massacres of that day, the narrative appears to 'forget' the tragedy, much like the people in the city. Other tragic events and characters are ostensibly forgotten by both the narrative and the city, such as Clyde, the musician of dwindling fame, and Gai, the young worker who fell to his death during the

condominium's construction. This results in the sense that the tragic memories of such traumatic events have been repressed by the city's residents. Due to the a-chronological structure of the novel, the reader also 'shelves' these narratives and memories, as Nee and the other characters appear to have done. It is ultimately revealed that Nee carried the burden of remembrance however, as throughout her life she has kept the memories sublimated while others have moved on or denied the impacts of the day of the student massacres. The final part also comes to suggest that much like Nee, the titular city itself has taken on this burden, depositing its own memories into the Afterbody simulation, preserving the names and events that would otherwise be forgotten. The novel implies that Bangkok is a sentient repository of jumbled recollection, inviting the suggestion that the novel itself is a metonym for Bangkok's Afterbody. The chronology thus encourages the reader to return to forgotten events and names alongside the city itself.

The non-linear structure of both novels, then, simulates within the reader the experience of memory and forgetting as felt by the characters – Kirsten's puzzling together of her past, Arthur's inability to understand how he has landed where he has in his life, Nee's self-imposed role of remembering what others cannot, and the sentient Bangkok's collation of all that has been. Memory, the act of remembrance or forgetting, sublimation or dissociation, is embedded within the core themes of both novels, and non-linear narration encourages the reader to engage with their memory to understand the various narrative strands. If, as Ricoeur asserts, "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (*Time and Narrative: Vol 1* 3), both novels encourage readers to experience how narrative time makes fictional events "meaningful" and how "time becomes human time through narration.

I must acknowledge the fact that *Station Eleven* and *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* invite engagement with the themes of anthropocentric apocalypse. This has been the most dominant way that critics have engaged with and analysed both novels. I do not dismiss such approaches, but have argued that such concerns, alongside the wider concerns of the 'realist' sections of the novel, are amplified and interrogated in both novels through the use of non-linear narration, something few critics have addressed. There is certainly something to be said for the relationship between non-linear narration and dystopian tales, not least because apocalyptic events clearly demarcate a 'before' and 'after,' the gap between which can be explored via non-linear narration. However, this remains beyond the scope of this thesis.

I must also acknowledge certain ideas left unexplored in both novels that I believe merit further study, but also remain beyond the scope of this thesis. In *Station Eleven*, there are of course three other primary characters whose storylines I do not analyse: Miranda, Jeevan, and Clark. While I do briefly touch on aspects of their storylines, I believe there is much more to be said of the three of them and how their chronology is represented, especially in regards to Miranda as the creator of the *Dr. Eleven* visual novels, a crucial mise-en-abyme element of the wider novel. There are also various artefacts, such as the *Dr. Eleven* comics and the paperweight,that are highlighted because they appear in multiple narratives set in different times and these warrant further discussion. *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* also features other characters with complex relationships to time and memory that I believe deserve attention, such as Sammy, Mai, and Pig. The former experiences discontent with the way his life has panned out (not dissimilar to Arthur in *Station Eleven*), whilst the latter two evidence different levels of difficulty in adapting to the rapidly changing environment of Bangkok. There are also other themes tied to temporal issues, as seen in characters like Woon and Lucky who use music as a medium to explore history and time, as well as the constant presence of bodies of water persisting across the various time periods depicted in the novel.

I believe the basic frameworks that I engaged with in analysing these novels are applicable to all manner of non-linear narrative, regardless of genre. While the scope of this thesis is limited to an exploration of how the non-linear narration in the two novels amplifies and informs their thematic concerns, I hope to build on and expand ideas I have explored in this thesis in the evaluation of a much wider body of non-linear narratives. As I mentioned in my introduction, I originally intended to discuss and analyse the complex narrative structure of a third novel, that being David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, but I decided not to do so. Apart from space constraints, I found the achieved effect of non-linear narration in that novel to be vastly different to that in *Station Eleven* and *Bangkok Wakes to Rain*, though I believe the disparity between the ways in which non-linear narration is used in these different novels, and the effects on the implied reader, begs further analysis. The scale of this study would of course warrant a much larger analysis, far beyond the scope of what I have done in this thesis. However, it is my intention to see this research through.

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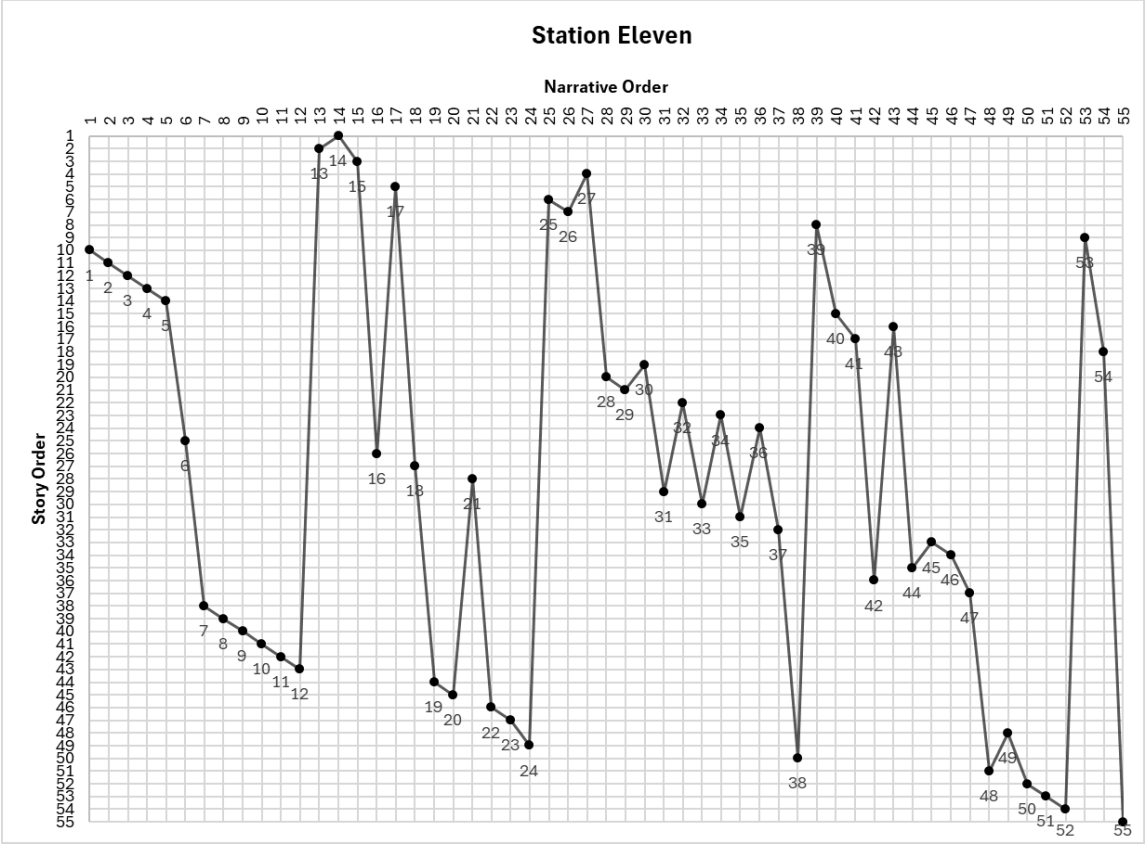
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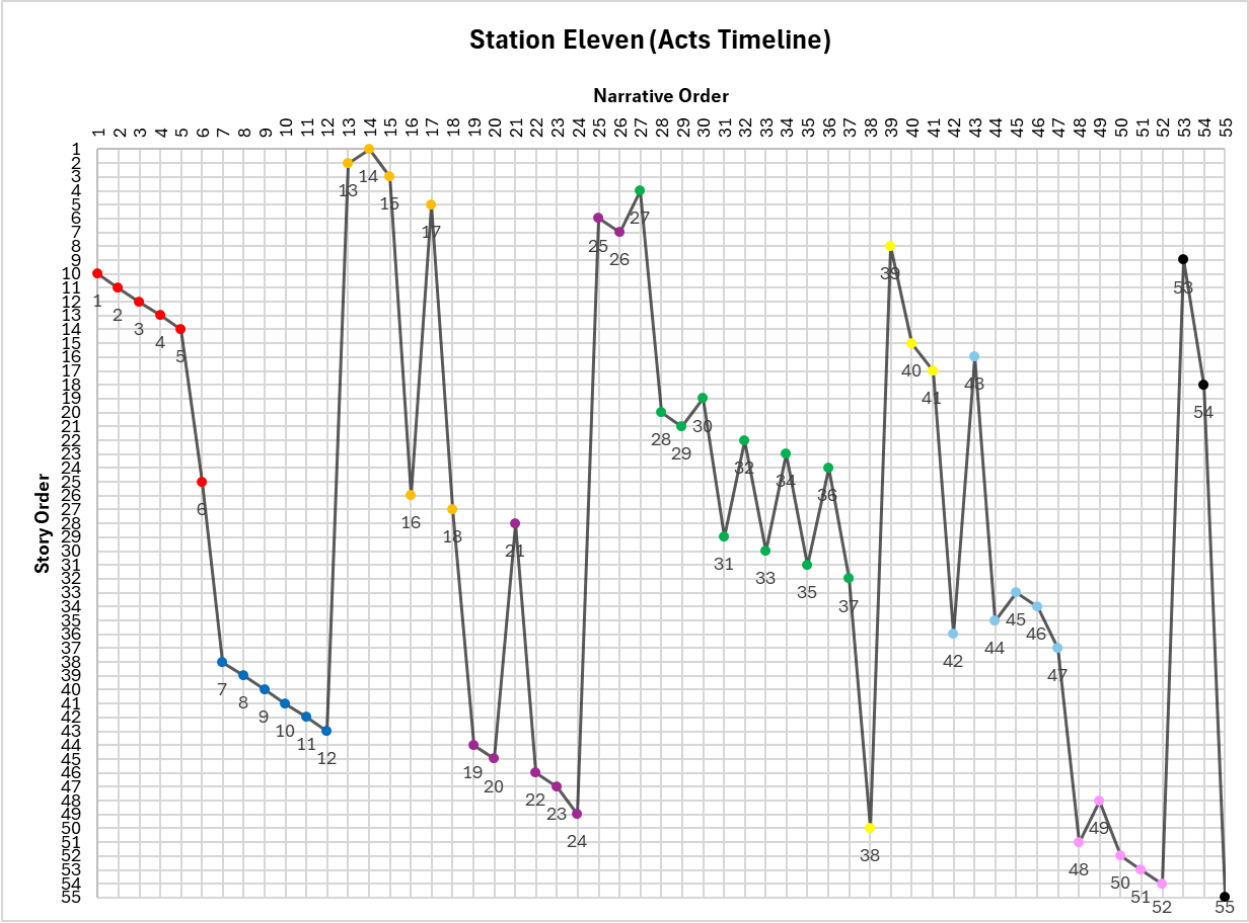
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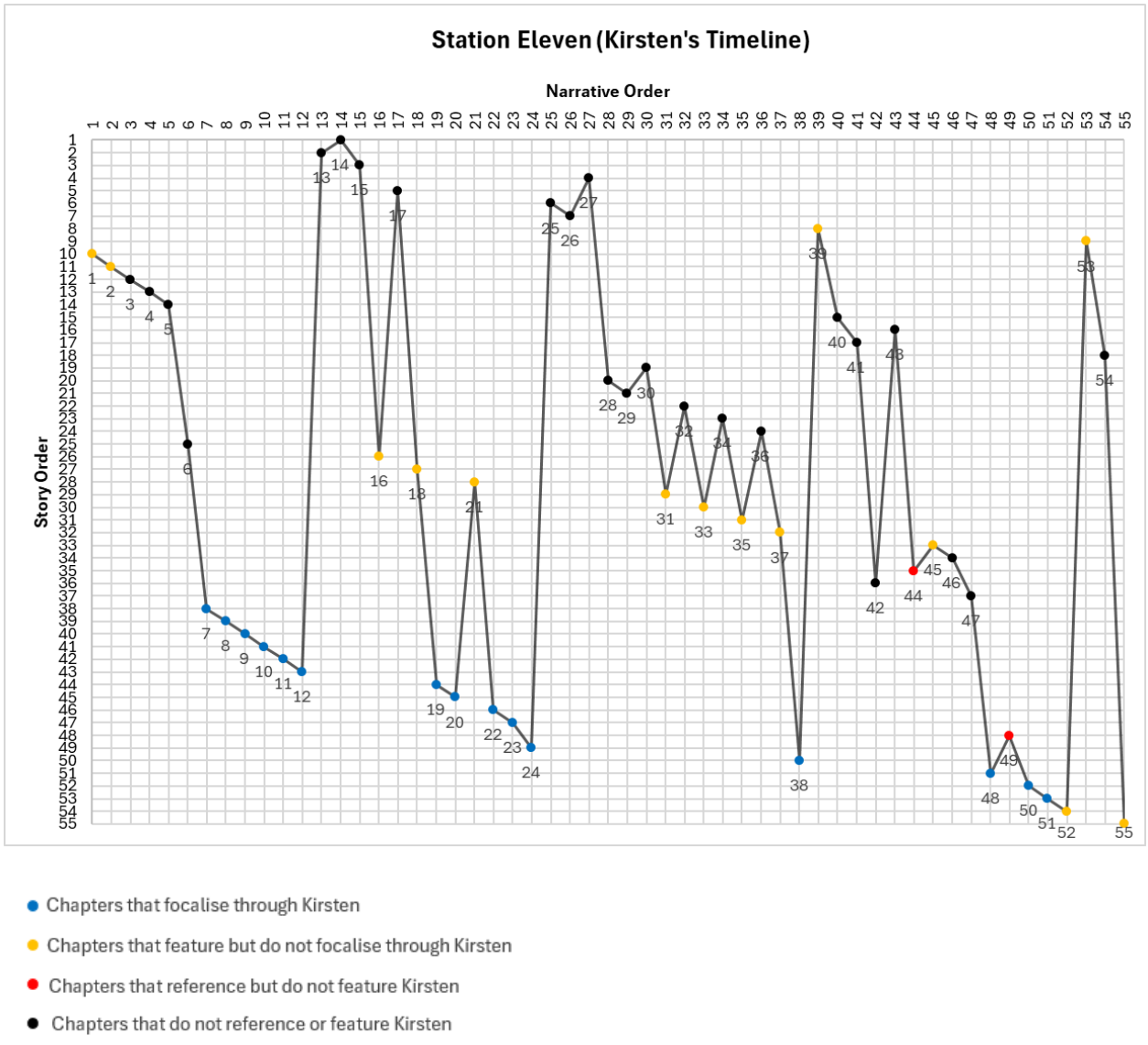
Figures



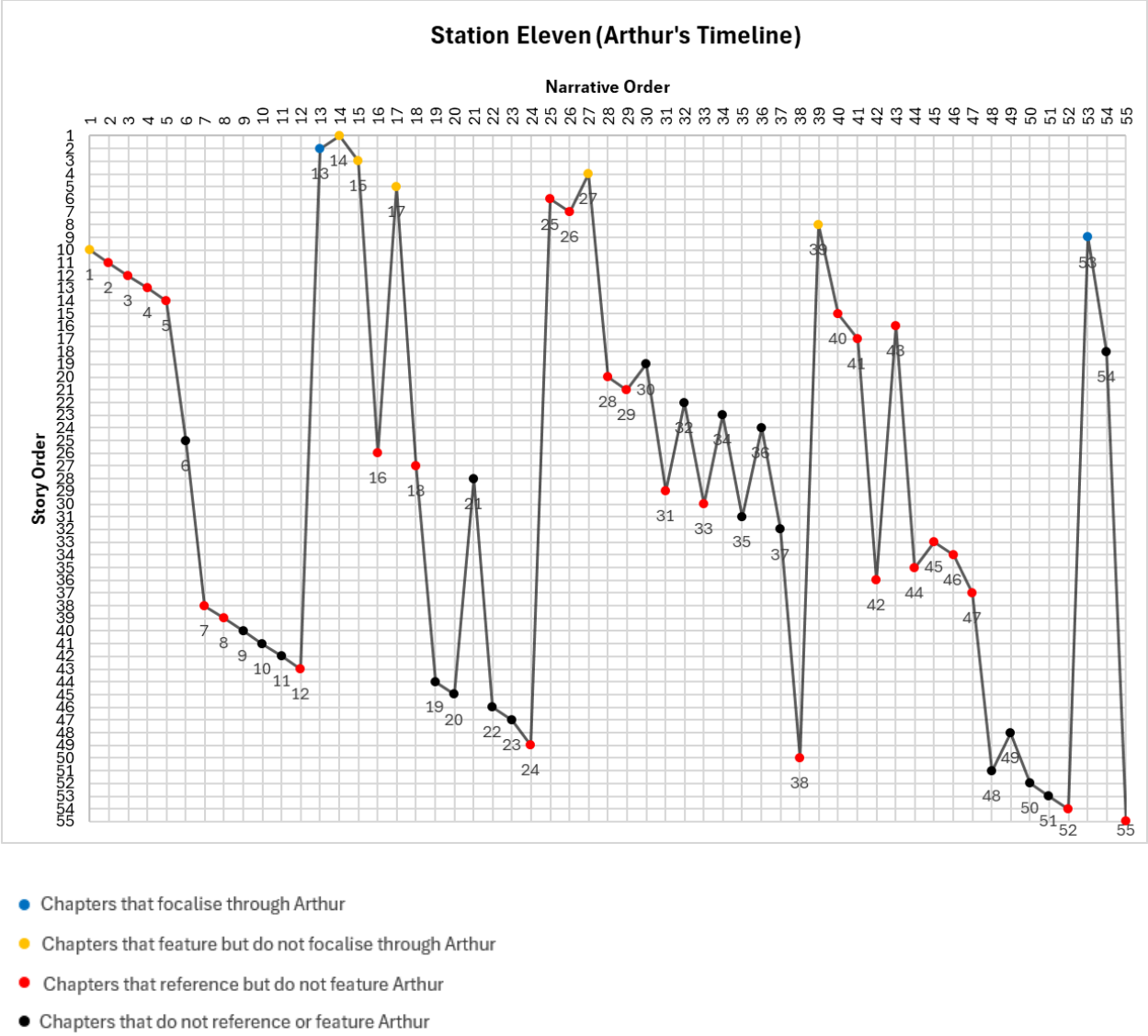
(Fig. I: *Station Eleven* Story and Plot Order)



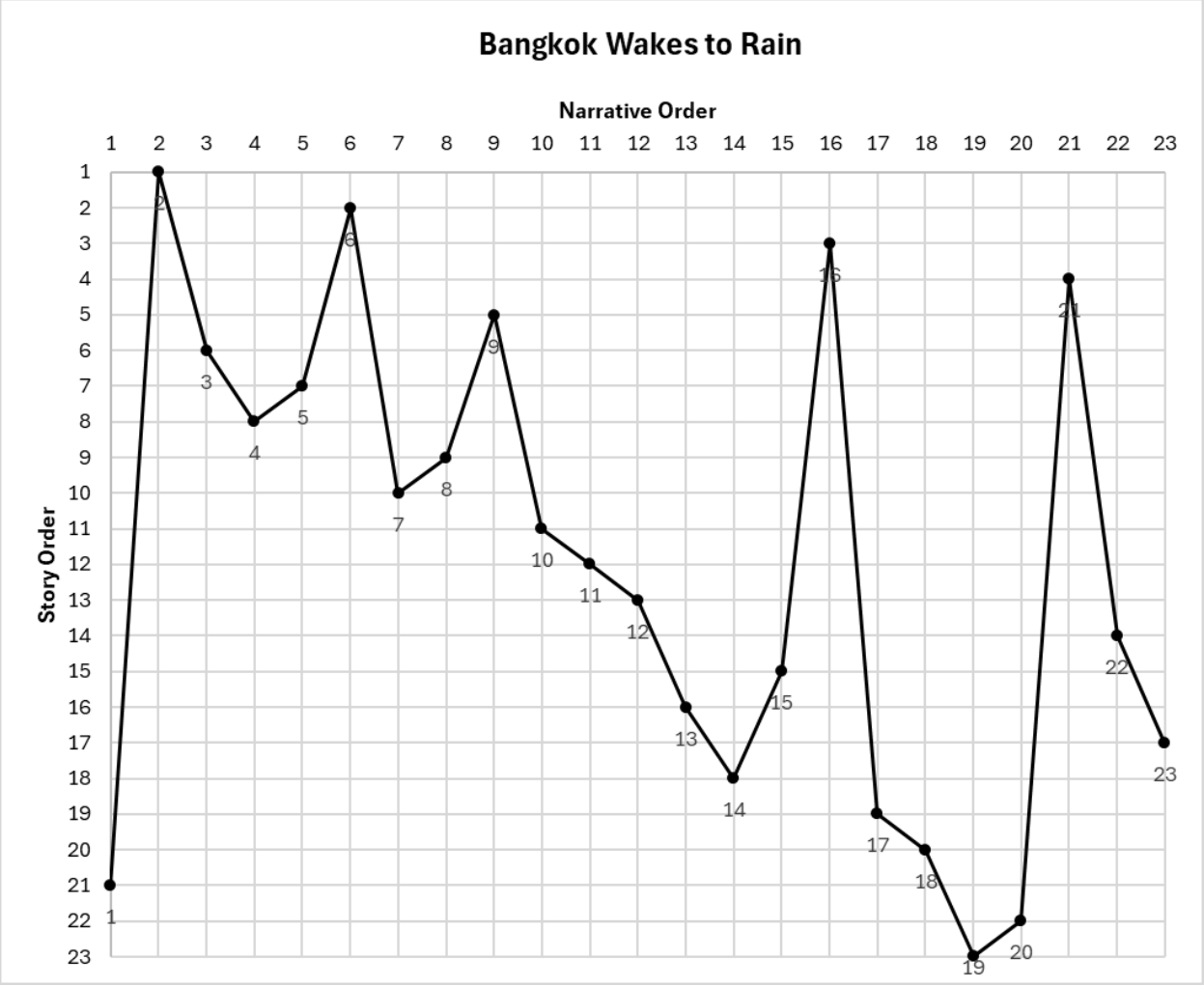
(Fig. II: *Station Eleven* Plot and Story Order by Act)



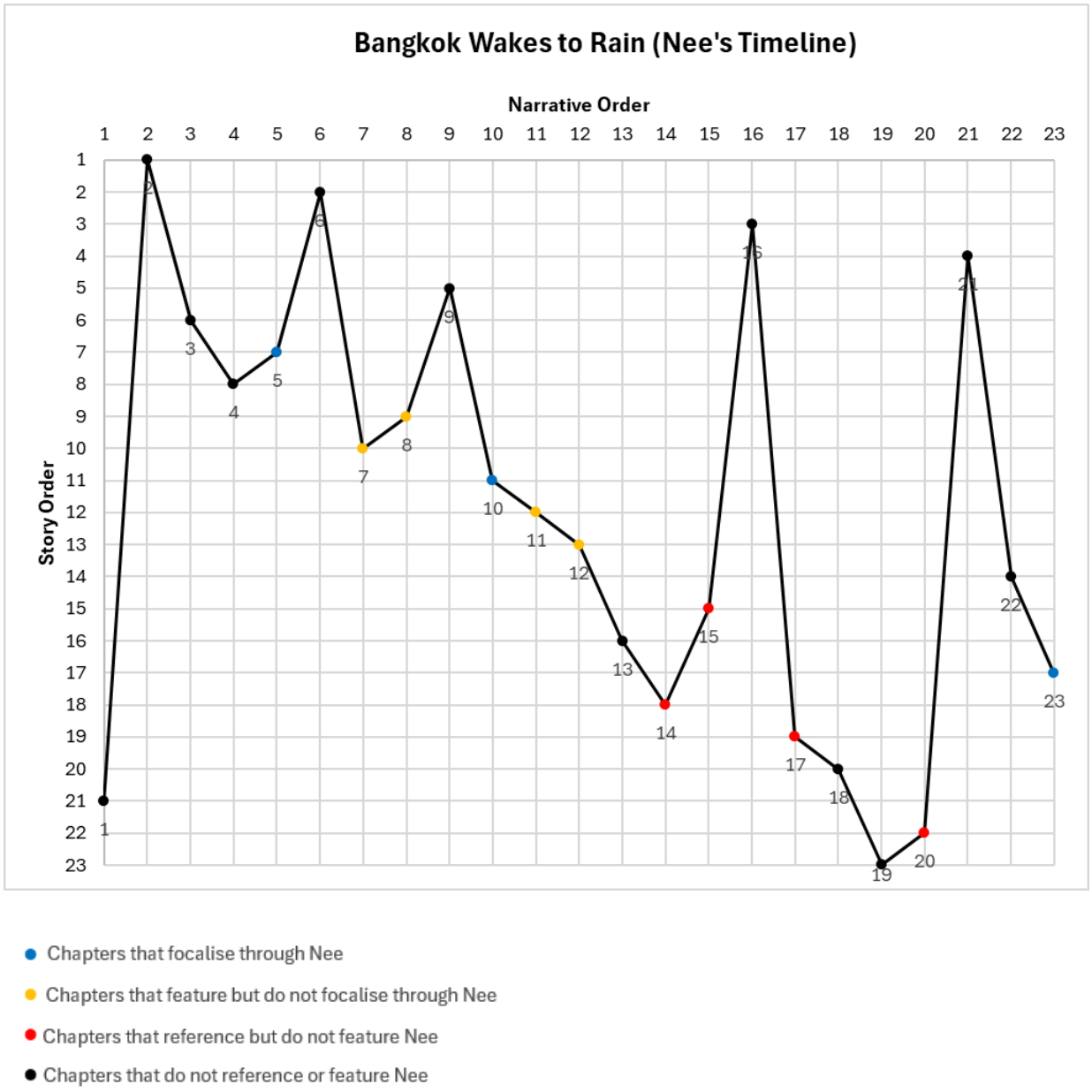
(Fig. III: *Station Eleven* Kirsten's Timeline)



(Fig. IV: *Station Eleven* Arthur's Timeline)



(Fig. V: *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* Plot and Story Order)



(Fig. VI: *Bangkok Wakes to Rain* Nee's Timeline)