

What is the role of history in both of these texts? History and storytelling... is telling people about the past necessary for connecting with them? Do we have any sort of identity without our stories about the past?

In Zone One, people are unified by Last Night stories. They are all the same, and they bring people together. There is this common vocabulary, a unifying sort of vocabulary. What happened to you on the Last Night? Even though it is always the same, they find it necessary. There are three different forms of this story for Mark Spitz. The anecdote, then the obituary. He uses them on different people, depending on how long he thinks he must know them for.

Spitz and Mim: she seems to be the only person in his life he has a connection with. He connects with her in a way he hadn't with any of his past girlfriends. With them, he would start to view them as monsters after a time. This doesn't happen with her. Is this because of circumstance? Can they have a connection in this way if it hadn't been for the apocalypse? I don't think so... He knows he will share his Last Night story with her the moment he sees her. .

Station Eleven. Let's look at the connections between the travelling symphony members. How does this community form? Is it through shared experience? Shared interest? Are stories about the past necessary for them to come together in this way?

There is an interest in keeping the past alive. For both stories there is talk about and hope for the future. But is there such thing as the future without the past?

Spitz: content in the now, in the here, in the present. He doesn't care much about the past and does not believe in the future. What does it mean to not believe in the future? Is it possible to be human and not believe in the future?

What guides the travelling symphony, and the other survivors of the plague in station eleven? It seems like the travelling symphony is content in the present moment. Art—that is something that is something that is about the here, the now. I guess it's also about remembering... and unifying. Unifying, connecting the past with the future. Can you be human and live in the present moment? Or is are you always thinking about the past or the present?

Arguable Mark Spitz is not a real human, because he is so content in the present moment. But he also has hope...

What makes us human? Is it having a past, a story? Or is it about having a future? The stragglers are completely content in the now.

Mark Spitz is content in the current moment.

“She was talking to Mark Spitz. Shame rippled through him, the echo of a civilized self. He put it down. He was smiling because he hadn't felt this alive in months” (311).

“They had lost contact because the black tide had rolled in everywhere, no place was spared this deluge, everyone was drowning. Of course he was smiling. This was where he belonged” (312).

Both books are set in a post-apocalyptic time. A low in terms of human life, in terms of advanced civilization. The people in both settings are carried forward by stories, memories from the past, and by thoughts about the future. The future mirrors the past—they look towards the future through the lens of the past.

On the front flap of *Station Eleven*, there is a series of images—a coffee cup, lights, oranges, with the heading “what would you miss?” the characters in the novel are always missing the past, looking backward longingly. In *Zone One* the characters are similarly stuck in memories of the past or visions and hopes for the present. What about the present? What are we missing out on right now?

“In thirty seconds they will cease to exist, but for now they live in their moment of safety. Snug in sunlight, their lover’s hand warm and true and solid in theirs” (317).

Spitz is called a straggler because he is content in the present moment. Because he is not thinking about moving, about going forward, he is denoted to less than human. But the future is a parallel of the past. Just as he is not obsessed with the future, he is also not stuck in the past. He is in the present moment. Thus in many ways he is ahead of the others. Does he have it right?

In both stories the main characters are associated with movement. The *Travelling Symphony* never stays in one place for very long... it is always moving on. They are caught up in memories of the past and hope for the future. Same with the characters in *Zone One*. They are moving from one area in the grid to the next, pushed forward by the hope for a better future. Guided by the idea of a future government, a future civilization. The post-apocalyptic era is one of nothingness. Void of meaning. The meaning made is to be human. How can we be human without any connection to the past or future? To be human is to make connections, be self aware, achieve distance from the here and now.

Miranda does not believe in regret. She fully embraces the current moment, but she is separate from other humans in that she is on station 11.

Spitz is also detached from other people.
Spitz does not believe in the future.

To believe in human connections is to be detached from the present moment.
Both characters are present in the moment. Both characters do not fit in with the communities, the environments around them.

Both Miranda and Mark Spitz are outsiders.
Spitz intentionally resists any hope for the future, as well as any human connection.
240: hope = not on your own

A central character from each of these books is disconnected from the fast-paced, forward-looking society around them.

In *Station Eleven*, Miranda, wife of famous actor Arthur Leander,

Mark Spitz and Miranda mirror each other in that they are both disconnected from the fast-paced, forward looking society around them.

“The mistake lay in succumbing to the prevailing delusions. Giving into that pandemic of pheneie optimism that was inescapable nowadays and made it hard to breathe, a contagion in its own right” (16).

“The insipid slogan popped up in his head, insistent as malware—“We Make Tomorrow!”—and he flinched...Resist. He had to get all that crap out of his head or else it woud turn out bad for him” (30).

“He wasn’t like the rest of them, the other sweepers, the soldiers up the island, or those haggard clans in the camps and caves, all the far-flung remnants behind their barricades, wherever people struggled and waited for victory or oblivion. The faint residue of humanity stuck to the sides of the world. You never heard Mark Spitz say “When this is all over” or “Once things get back to normal” or other sentiments of that brand, because he refused them.... This is what he had learned: If you weren’t concentrating on how to survive the next five minutes, you wouldn’t survive them” (32).

the apocalyptic novel is preoccupied by distance from the present moment, the presnt state of things. Those who survive an apocalypse are pushed forward by memories of the past as well as hope for the future... The past and the future are in many ways the same in their minds. There is no contentment in the now. The now represents disaster, destruction, emptiness.

Miranda. She is alive before the apacolyptse. She is also detached from the present moment. Her mind is always on Station Eleven. The people surrounding her are always thinking about the future.

There is a duel parallel between these characters. For one thing, they are both disconnected from the people, the communities around them. Spitz refuses to let himself connect with others. He has a barrier up.

Spitz pre apocalypse also has a barrier up.

Arguably, if Miranda survived the apocalypse she would be in a similar mind space as Spitz.

The apocalyptic novel tells a story about what happens after a schism—after time starts over, and places, at least as they are familiarly known, disappear. When time and space abruptly stop. And start over.

These novels explore the human inability to live in the present moment through their depiction of two

By depicting protagonists who are disconnected from the world around them as a result of their contentment in the present moment,

Mark Spitz, a “sweeper” who works everyday clearing out skels (zombies) from buildings in post-apocalyptic Manhattan, refuses to think about the future. While the society around him, called the “Pheonix Republic” is focused on reconstruction and hope for the future, Spitz focuses on the moment at hand. “You never heard Mark Spitz say “When this is all over” or “Once things get back to normal” or other sentiments of that brand, because he refused them.... This is what he had learned: If you weren’t concentrating on how to survive the next five minutes, you wouldn’t survive them” (32).

“The mistake lay in succumbing to the prevailing delusions. Giving into that pandemic of pheenie optimism that was inescapable nowadays and made it hard to breathe, a contagion in its own right” (16).

The “pheenie optimism” is “inescapable,” is it a “contagion,” words that reflect the epidemic. For Mark Spitz, it is more dangerous to buy into the hope than it is to potentially become contaminated.

“The insipid slogan popped up in his head, insistent as malware—“We Make Tomorrow!”—and he flinched...Resist. He had to get all that crap out of his head or else it would turn out bad for him” (30).

“In their separate warrens, these different parties toiled over the future with their instruments: “We Make Tomorrow!” Why else were they in Manhattan but to transport the old ways across the violent passage of the calamity to the safety of the other side? If you don’t believe that, Mark Spitz asked himself, why are you here?” (59).

“violent passage of calamity” = the current moment. No reason to be in this moment, to be here, unless you are trying to get across it, to bring something from the past across it. That is what everyone else is doing...there is nothing else.

“He had nerve damage: input could not penetrate. The world stalled out at his edges. Sometimes he had trouble speaking to other people, rummaging for language, and it seemed to him that an invisible layer divided him from the rest of the world, a membrane of emotional surface tension. He was not alone” (66).

“Normal meant “the past.” Normal was the unbroken idyll of life before. The present was a series of intervals differentiated from each other only by the degree of dread they contained. The future? The future was the clay in their hands” (81).

“He thought immediately of when he was six, not only because of the similar tableau before him but because of that tendency of the human mind, in periods of duress, to

seek refuge in more peaceful times, such as a childhood experience, as a barricade against horror” (88).

“It was a new day. Now, the people were no longer mere survivors, half-mad refugees, a pathetic, shit-flecked, traumatized herd, but the “American Phoenix” (99).

Shift from individual to collective. Shift from a time of disorder, of nothingness, to newness. To a new day.

“The stragglers posed for a picture and never moved again, trapped in a snapshot of their lives” (102).

“Buffalo will tell you that the plague converts the human body into the perfect vehicle for spreading copies of itself... But what’s up with this aberrant one percent?”

“They’re mistakes...They don’t know what they’re supposed to” (120).

Similar to Mark Spitz. He is not looking towards the future, not thinking about reproducing himself. He feeds off of himself. Link between the self and the present moment.

“Personally, I like them. Not supposed to say it out loud, but I think they’ve got it right and we’re the ninety-nine percent that have it all wrong” (121).

Yet there is a disconnect between this insight and his next words, when he goes back into talk about the future, about reconstruction, etc.

“What we have here in Zone One is not a suicide mission. Just a bunch of stragglers. Welcome to the team” (123).

There is irony here: stragglers are solo. They are not a part of a team. He is using this word improperly. He does not seem to understand its full implications.

127—personal barricades. Lieutenant describes large scale barricades. Moving outwards and protecting oneself from the outside world. The outside world = the zombies. But for Spitz, the outside world = human connections. = community. And also = hope.

All humans have personal barricades. Are all humans like Mark Spitz, in that they resist connection, resist hope? But even Spitz is incapable to do it fully. He does not fully succeed. He tries. He puts effort in. Similar to the zoning mission. They try to block out the zombies but ultimately fail. What does this have to do with living in the moment? It is impossible to truly block out hope? There is a tension...

“Up out of the ash, reborn” (148).

“He liked her immensely, despite her belief in Buffalo” (154).

“He was a ghost. A straggler.... But what kind of straggler would he make? What did he love, what place had been important to him?” (192).

Even stragglers are defined by love and connections and the past.

“That’s why I like stragglers. They know what they’re doing. Verve and a sense of purpose. What do we have? Fear and danger. The memories of all the ones you’ve lost. The regular skels, they’re all messed up. But your straggler, your straggler doesn’t have any of that. It’s always inhabiting the it’s perfect moment. They’ve found it—where they belong” (196).

Stragglers are completely present in an ideal moment. But they also have love and attachment. They have no sense of time. They live in heavens of possibility (197). Even stragglers are consumed by possibility. But it is a perfection to them.

“Hope is a gateway drug, don’t do it” (222).

“This is the American Phoenix. You’re never on your own” (240).

The community of the American Phoenix deprives people of genuine connections.

“A part of him thrived on the end of the world” (245).

“If there’s nothing out there, what’s the point? There’s here. Have to keep on moving, honey. You stay in one spot, you’re just another straggler” (247).

“Their mouths could no longer manage speech yet they spoke nonetheless, saying what the city had always told its citizens, from the first settlers hundreds of years ago, to the shattered survivors of the garrison. What the plague had always told its hosts, from the first human being to the have its blood invaded, to the latest victim out in the wasteland: I am going to eat you up” (304).

“In thirty seconds they will cease to exist, but for now they live in their moment of safety. Snug in sunlight, their lover’s hand warm and true and solid in theirs” (317).

“It was happening again: the end of the world. The last months had been a pause, a breather before the recommitment to annihilation. This time we cannot delude ourselves that we will make it out alive” (318).

“There was no other reality apart from this: move on to the next human settlement, until you find the final one, and that’s where you die” (320).

“The world wasn’t ending: it had ended and now they were in a new place. They could not recognize it because they had never seen it before” (321).

“They live out their lives under flickering lights, aware at all times of the fathoms of ocean above them, resentful of Dr. Eleven and his colleagues who keep Station Eleven moving forever through dark space. (Pablo texts her: ?? *did u get my email???*) They are always waiting, the people of the Undersea. They spend all their lives waiting for their lives to begin” (86).

This mirrors the people in Zone One. They are spending their existences preparing for the future, longing to go back or go forward, longing for distance from the timeless, endless, expanse that they are moving through.

“You’re always half on Station Eleven... about I don’t even understand your project. What are you actually going for here? (87). You don’t have to understand it. It’s mine.

Her project = solitude. She is content in the present moment. Linkage between present moment and detachment from others.

“I could throw away almost everything, she thinks, and begin all over again. Station Eleven will be my constant” (89).

I repent nothing.

She is moving in a sphere, like the people of the Undersea... they were forced to throw away everything.

95—she doesn’t publish it. She doesn’t have many friends...she does it just for herself. She mirrors doctor 11, who has few friends (100)

“I stood looking over my damaged home and tried to forget the sweetness of life on Earth” (105).

After her marriage ends, Miranda goes back to the company and gets a job that involves travelling. She leads “a life that feels like freedom....whispers “I repent nothing” into the mirrors of a hundred hotel rooms from London to Singapore...a life where the moments of emptiness and disappointment are minimal...until she isn’t sure where she stops and her job begins, almost always loves her life but is often lonely, draws the stories of Station Eleven in hotel rooms at night” (107).

But for now she is on the floor and station eleven is all around them.

Arthur—a sleepwalker. Nothing ever jolts him awake. (164).

“The focus of the work had gradually shifted. For years Dr. Eleven had been the hero of the narrative, but lately he’d begun to annoy her and she’s become more interested in the Undersea. These people living out their lives in underwater fallout shelters, clinging to the hope that the world they remembered could be restored. The Undersea was limbo. She spent long hours sketching lives played out in underground rooms” (213).

“He found he was a man who repented almost everything, regrets crowding in around him like moths to a light” (327).