Final Essay

You have read the novel *Station Eleven* depicting life after a pandemic that killed 90% of people on the planet. While some literary critics have started to grumble about post-apocalyptic-fiction fatigue, said Alexandra Alter in the NYT, publishers, agents and authors are betting that readers’ appetite for cataclysm is nowhere near sated. Dystopian series like “Divergent” and “The Hunger Games” have sold tens of millions of copies, while also attracting swarms of adult readers.

Where *Station Eleven* falters, said Sigrid Nunez in another NYT review, is in its imagination of disaster. Having accepted the science that says flu pandemics are highly probable in our future, Mandel chooses the worst possible situation, a plague that results in the immediate and total collapse of civilization. But the survivors do not think, act or speak like people struck by such a cataclysm. For the most part, they do not behave very differently from people living in ordinary, civilized times. Hunger, thirst and exhaustion are alluded to, but there is no penetrating sense of the day-to-day struggle of vulnerable human beings lacking the basic amenities of life. Also, although we are presented with a significant villain in the figure of the prophet, readers may wonder why few bad guys appear to have made it to Year 20.

Survival may indeed be insufficient, but does it follow that our love of art can save us? If *Station Eleven* reveals little insight into the effects of extreme terror and misery on humanity, it offers comfort and hope to those who believe, or want to believe, that doomsday can be survived, that in spite of everything people will remain good at heart, and that when they start building a new world they will want what was best about the old.

*Instructions:* Based on your knowledge of hunter-gatherer lifeways in the Paleolithic, reimagine how people’s social organization and behavior could have become, different from the social life described in the novel. That is, recreate life in North America after a proposed cataclysm in a fundamentally different way.

You could cite any of the articles that you read in the seminar, and also explore other texts available at the Knight Library. You could also refer to objects that you saw at the Museum of Natural and Cultural History, or displays at the Smithsonian’s Human Origins Exhibit. Myriam Rigby, curator of anthropology, [http://researchguides.uoregon.edu/prf.php?account_id=56193](http://researchguides.uoregon.edu/prf.php?account_id=56193) is available to assist you with your search.

Write a five-page long essay, double-spaced, using 12 point font. Include your name, the name of the seminar, and the title that you have chosen for your work. Do not forget the page numbers!