

Samantha Eldredge

English Department

Mentor: Dr. Margaret Savilonis

Women in the Apocalypse: Power and Gender in Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*

*Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel and *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood both serve as different representations of how women in fictional apocalypses can exist and what that can mean. These novels, written by women, are similar in that they both focus on the epidemic as a motif and utilize a similar narrative structure, but each presents a different type of epidemic and depiction of women. Though there are many theories about what an apocalypse can actually be, generally accepted is Tessa Heffernan's theory from *Post Apocalyptic Culture*, in which she argues that the end is "the unveiling and revelation of the ancient truth of man, which promises to restore life, feeling, vitality, warmth, touch, the body, and sensuality to humanity—what has traditionally been associated with the feminine" (130). *Station Eleven* functions as a novel that represents women as they truly are: multifaceted. *Oryx and Crake*, in many ways, presents the complete opposite. Its female characters are pigeonholed into certain roles and serve as secondary characters at best. Despite these variations, both works resonate with apocalyptic theory as well as ecofeminist criticism; *Station Eleven* serves as a representation of how a natural phenomenon can decimate humanity, and yet women can rise just as the Earth does, while *Oryx and Crake* can demonstrate how both women and nature can play the submissive role in a literary work.