

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

---



Emily St. John Mandel is the author of five novels, most recently *The Glass Hotel*, which was selected by Barack Obama as one of his favourite books of 2020, was shortlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize, and has been translated into 20 languages. Her previous novels include *Station Eleven*, which was a finalist for a National Book Award and the PEN/Faulkner Award, and won the 2015 Arthur C. Clarke Award among other honours, and has been translated into 33 languages. She lives in New York City with her husband and daughter. - Author's website

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

---

1. On page 35, Raphael tells Walter, "Our guests in Caiette want to come to the wilderness, but they don't want to be in the wilderness. They just want to look at it, ideally through the window of a luxury hotel." Examine the meaning of Raphael's words, paying close attention to the ways in which this notion of curated reality permeates the novel. In what other instances is the truth framed in such a way so as to distort it?
2. Explore Paul and Vincent's relationship. What are their earliest memories of each other? How does their relationship evolve as both characters move into adulthood? Why is Paul compelled to pass Vincent's videos off as his own? Is either character able to achieve closure with respect to their relationship?
3. Discuss Vincent's five-minute videos. What meaning does she find in this practice? Why does she choose water as her primary subject? Consider, as you answer this question, her grandmother's words when she first gave the camera as a gift: "If you can't stand to look at the world directly, maybe it's possible to look at it through the viewfinder" (page 68).

4. Explore the theme of opportunity as it is depicted in the novel. What opportunities are available to Vincent? To Paul? To other young people in the early aughts? How does each character's access to opportunity—or lack thereof—affect their fate? Is there such thing as a “good opportunity”? Why or why not?
5. Discuss the concept of the “counterlife,” as Alkaitis experiences it. How is the counterlife different from memory? Which characters populate Alkaitis's counterlife, and who is conspicuously absent? Is the counterlife a source of comfort for Alkaitis, or does it pain him to think about it? Which other characters are plagued by the notion of what might have been, and how do they conceptualize it?
6. On page 293, Mandel writes, “There are so many ways to haunt a person, or a life.” Explore the motif of ghosts in the novel, paying close attention to what it means to be haunted. Who—or what—appears as a ghost in the novel, and to whom? What do these ghosts represent to the people who see them? Are the ghosts a welcome presence, or are they a source of terror?
7. When Oskar is cross-examined about his participation in the Ponzi scheme, he says, “It's possible to both know and not know something” (page 168). What do his words suggest about the interplay between loyalty, morality, and denial? Who else in the novel might make a similar claim of knowing and yet not knowing something?
8. Consider the role the financial crisis of 2008 plays in the novel. Which characters are affected, and how? What ways do they find to cope, and what do their lives look like in the aftermath? Are they able to move forward—and to find happiness? What do these outcomes suggest about the possibility of starting over?
9. Examine the intersection of success and morality in the novel. What constitutes success, and what conditions are necessary for one to achieve it? Which characters achieve success, and which characters fail to do so? Is success a corrupting influence? Consider, as you answer this question, Jonathan's company, Vincent's unofficial marriage, Leon's career, and Paul's music.
10. Explore Alkaitis's understanding of his crimes. What motivates him to defraud his investors, and why does he maintain friendships with some of them? Does he realize that what he's done is wrong, or does he believe he's been unfairly punished? Why does he insist that he acted alone in the perpetration of the Ponzi scheme?
11. Consider Vincent's decision to live onboard a ship after Alkaitis's crimes come to light. What does she hope to experience there? Is she ever fully able to leave her previous life behind? Does she find true happiness as Vincent Smith?
12. Examine Olivia's character. What draws her to Alkaitis, and what do these two characters represent to the other? How does Alkaitis's betrayal change the course of Olivia's life? Why do you think Vincent sees Olivia's ghost right before she dies, and what does this apparition suggest about Vincent's understanding of Olivia's fate?

13. On page 78, Mirella tells Vincent that “money is its own country.” What constitutes citizenship in the country of money? What are its customs? What other secret worlds and subcultures operate within the novel, and what social boundaries exist between them? Is it possible to move back and forth between these different worlds? Why or why not?
14. Explore the theme of interconnectedness as it is portrayed in the novel. In what ways are the different characters connected? Are they aware of these connections, or do their ties remain largely invisible? What qualities of the modern world facilitate these connections? Is connection a guaranteed cure for loneliness? Why or why not?
15. Discuss the conclusion of the novel, exploring, as you do so, the symmetry between Vincent’s death and that of her mother. How do you understand Vincent’s fate? Do you agree with Vincent that her mother’s death was an accident, as she asserts in the final paragraph of the novel? Why is Vincent able to come to peace with her mother’s death only after she herself dies?

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/567284/the-glass-hotel-by-emily-st-john-mandel/9780525521143/readers-guide/>

## BOOK REVIEWS

---

### Booklist

*/\* Starred Review \*/* Mandel follows her breakout dystopian hit, *Station Eleven* (2014), with another tale of wanderers whose fates are interconnected, this time by a Ponzi scheme rather than the demise of most of the world's population. Beautiful young bartender Vincent Smith (named for poet Edna St. Vincent Millay) has no illusions about the relationship she enters into with Jonathan Alkaitis, an uber-wealthy investor more than twice her age. Vincent leaves her job at the remote Hotel Caiette to move into Jonathan's mansion in Connecticut and pretend to be his wife, attending dinners with his investors. Mandel reveals early on that Jonathan's business dealings aren't above board, but even with this information front and center, she still manages to build nail-biting tension as things start to go wrong for Jonathan and his associates. Mandel weaves an intricate spider web of a story, connecting the people whom Jonathan and Vincent's lives touch and irrevocably change, from Vincent's feckless brother to the small group of colleagues abetting Jonathan's scheme to the people whose fortunes are decimated by Jonathan's machinations. A gorgeously rendered tragedy. **HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY:** The phenomenal success of *Station Eleven* has set high expectations for Mandel's new novel, and both books been optioned for television series. -- Kristine Huntley (Reviewed 1/1/2020) (Booklist, vol 116, number 9, p35).

### Publisher's Weekly

*/\* Starred Review \*/* Mandel's wonderful novel (after *Station Eleven*) follows a brother and sister as they navigate heartache, loneliness, wealth, corruption, drugs, ghosts, and guilt. Settings include British Columbia's coastal wilderness, New York City's fashionable neighborhoods and corporate headquarters, a container ship in international waters, and a South Carolina prison. In 1994, 18-year-old drug-using dropout Paul Smith visits his 13-year-old half-sister, Vincent, in Vancouver. Vincent has just lost her mother and acquired her first video camera. Five years later, in the wilderness north of Vancouver, Vincent tends bar at a luxury hotel where Paul works as the night houseman. Paul leaves after writing on a window in acid marker a message even he doesn't understand. Vincent relocates to the East Coast and what Mandel calls the kingdom of money to play trophy wife for investor Jonathan Alkaitis. When Jonathan's Ponzi scheme collapses, he goes to prison, where his victims' ghosts visit him.

Finished with Jonathan and the affluent lifestyle and ignored by her best friend, Vincent takes a job as assistant cook on a container ship. Paul, meanwhile, has set Vincent's old videos to music. The videos have helped Paul, despite a lifelong drug problem, tap into his creative gifts. Using flashbacks, flash-forwards, alternating points-of-view, and alternate realities, Mandel shows the siblings moving in and out of each other's lives, different worlds, and versions of themselves, sometimes closer, sometimes further apart, like a double helix, never quite linking. This ingenious, enthralling novel probes the tenuous yet unbreakable bonds between people and the lasting effects of momentary carelessness. 200,000-copy announced first printing. Agent: Katherine Fausset, Curtis Brown, Ltd. (Mar.) --Staff (Reviewed 11/11/2019) (Publishers Weekly, vol 266, issue 45, p).

### Kirkus Reviews

/\* Starred Review \*/ Mandel's wonderful novel (after Station Eleven) follows a brother and sister as they navigate heartache, loneliness, wealth, corruption, drugs, ghosts, and guilt. Settings include British Columbia's coastal wilderness, New York City's fashionable neighborhoods and corporate headquarters, a container ship in international waters, and a South Carolina prison. In 1994, 18-year-old drug-using dropout Paul Smith visits his 13-year-old half-sister, Vincent, in Vancouver. Vincent has just lost her mother and acquired her first video camera. Five years later, in the wilderness north of Vancouver, Vincent tends bar at a luxury hotel where Paul works as the night houseman. Paul leaves after writing on a window in acid marker a message even he doesn't understand. Vincent relocates to the East Coast and what Mandel calls the kingdom of money to play trophy wife for investor Jonathan Alkaitis. When Jonathan's Ponzi scheme collapses, he goes to prison, where his victims' ghosts visit him. Finished with Jonathan and the affluent lifestyle and ignored by her best friend, Vincent takes a job as assistant cook on a container ship. Paul, meanwhile, has set Vincent's old videos to music. The videos have helped Paul, despite a lifelong drug problem, tap into his creative gifts. Using flashbacks, flash-forwards, alternating points-of-view, and alternate realities, Mandel shows the siblings moving in and out of each other's lives, different worlds, and versions of themselves, sometimes closer, sometimes further apart, like a double helix, never quite linking. This ingenious, enthralling novel probes the tenuous yet unbreakable bonds between people and the lasting effects of momentary carelessness. 200,000-copy announced first printing. Agent: Katherine Fausset, Curtis Brown, Ltd. (Mar.) --Staff (Reviewed 11/11/2019) (Publishers Weekly, vol 266, issue 45, p).

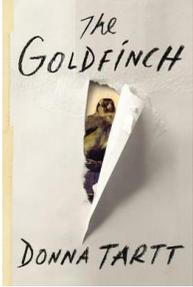
## READALIKES

---



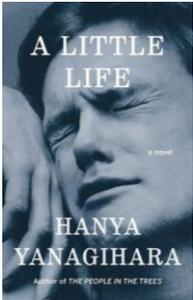
### ***Everything is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer**

Hilarious, energetic, and profoundly touching, a debut novel follows a young writer as he travels to the farmlands of Eastern Europe, where he embarks on a quest to find Augustine, the woman who saved his grandfather from the Nazis, and, guided by his young Ukrainian translator, he discovers an unexpected past that will resonate far into the future.



***The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt**

Taken in by a wealthy family friend after surviving an accident that killed his mother, thirteen-year-old Theo Decker tries to adjust to life on Park Avenue.



***A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara**

Moving to New York to pursue creative ambitions, four former classmates share decades marked by love, loss, addiction and haunting elements from a brutal childhood.