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Walking After the End

From Alienation to More-than-human Reconnection in
McCarthy's *The Road*, Mandel's *Station Eleven*, and
Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*

Auteur : Juliette Cornil

Promoteur(s) : Véronique Bragard

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Date : 20/05/2025

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This thesis is not only the culmination of my studies but also a trace of my journey in understanding the world. I began my passion for literature with dystopian works, and now, it feels as though the world is turning into one. Somehow, I have become one of those fictional characters alienated by technology and the overconsuming society. Yet I try to slow down by walking in the forest and listening to the birds.

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“Walking, by somehow integrating the body, the mind and the inhabited place, civilizes the world.”

– Evening Standard in a praise of *Wanderlust* by Rebecca Solnit

“Walking, variable yet coexistent with human history, still holds a key to where we have been and where we are headed.” – Joseph Amato

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Introduction

Nowadays, walking has become trendy for sightseeing, earning money through apps that count steps, or photographing popular places for Instagram. In an increasingly fast-paced, digital and sedentary world, the very essence of walking has been lost. Yet walking has allowed humans to evolve and become who they are today. More than a means of movement, walking enables one to slow down, protest, meditate, escape, or reconnect with the inner self and the environment.

Walking has been the first form of transportation but often becomes the last in post-apocalyptic worlds. Such stories depict survival conditions stripped of the comforts provided by past infrastructures, systems, order or technology. Humanity is put to the test as it returns to walking. Even if travelling by foot in post-apocalyptic worlds is both dangerous and difficult, it also offers a new epistemology, a way to understand humanity and the world it inhabits.

This thesis explores the central and meaningful role of walking in three contemporary post-apocalyptic texts: *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy (2006), *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel (2014), and *The Marrow Thieves* by Chérie Dimaline (2017). To that end, walking is analyzed according to two primary functions: as a means to repeat or move away from alienated behaviors of the past, and as a way to reconnect with others, both human and nonhuman.

To do so, this thesis employs a qualitative, comparative methodology to analyze these three novels across four chapters. Each chapter integrates the analysis of multiple literary elements around walking within broader thematic and conceptual discussions. Central to the analysis is an ecocritical lens that interrogates the tension between ecological consciousness and capitalist structures, with additional insights from extractivist discourse, feminist theory and postcolonial studies where relevant. Through close reading and interpretive comparison, the thesis examines how the selected texts engage with questions about the environment, economic systems, and cultural dynamics. The comparative structure allows for an understanding of shared and divergent literary strategies, while attention to reader response offers insight into the potential interpretative impact of each text.

This thesis begins by establishing the theoretical and cultural framework of walking and the literary genre of post-apocalyptic fiction. It draws upon the theoretical contributions of scholars such as Amato, Solnit, Ingold, Rosa, and others. Their insights elucidate how walking not only shapes human identity and its modes of engagement with the world but also responds to the conditions of late modernity: the productivity, consumption and growth constraints

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desynchronize humans from their biological rhythms and disconnect them from the more-than-human world. Then, the section observes how walking as a significant motif in literature has been seen as a way of thinking and resisting various forms of alienation. Walking has received relatively little critical attention within the context of post-apocalyptic speculative fiction, even though the genre is suitable. The section thus explains why this thesis chooses post-apocalyptic rather than dystopian fiction for an ecocritical walking analysis, as it illustrates the fall of the digital capitalist system and depicts characters who are forced to walk through devastated environments. The theoretical section concludes by introducing the selected corpus of novels, providing an overview of their plots and narrative structures, with particular attention to their engagement with walking and ecocriticism.

The first chapter focuses on walking's ambivalence, as the novels' characters are either consumers or consumed. A comparative reading of the three novels reveals recurring symbols and figures that illustrate the persistence of capitalist structures within the new world and are analyzed in each subsection: a dichotomy of places between the road and the forest, the allegory of the zombie, or the recurring motif of hunting. Characters are either hunters or being hunted for their bodies, a dynamic that resonates with feminist, extractivist, and postcolonial criticism.

However, post-apocalyptic worlds are not solely sites of consumption and fear. The second chapter begins by analyzing how in the three novels, the paths the characters walk are metaphors for life, and walkers symbolize humanity itself. The characters' walking journeys thereby reflect processes of change and development. Comparing *The Road* and *The Marrow Thieves*, journeys are not linear but circular, as young characters follow the footsteps of those who came before them as pilgrims. Listening to inherited stories before learning through their own embodied experience on the path, they discern what should, or should not, be carried forward from the past.

The third chapter explores what the characters learn through walking: the value of solidarity over individualism. As a fundamentally social activity, walking becomes the connective thread among people, shaping identities and relationships through shared pace, mutual care, collaboration, and the intentional choice of walking companions. In *Station Eleven* and *The Marrow Thieves*, walking language conveys solidarity, while in *The Road*, it reflects an ongoing tension between compassion and individualism. The final section of the chapter introduces how walking also mediates human-nonhuman relationships. They either portray resonance, leading to a sustainable sense of interconnectedness, or they expose miscommunication, often rooted in alienation from exploitative behaviors.

The final chapter argues that, despite elements in the novels that portray individualism and alienation shaped by capitalist minds, the characters of all novels ultimately find ways to

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resist the accelerated pace of postmodernity by slowing down through the act of walking. Both the content and the form of these narratives embody a deceleration that invites readers and characters alike to reconnect with the nonhuman world. First, the chapter examines the decelerative techniques in *Station Eleven* and *The Road* that foreground slowness as a counterpoint to postmodern speed. Then, the chapter explores various motifs that enable all characters to slow down, return to their biological rhythms, and cultivate a deeper awareness of their surrounding environments.

While travelling through this thesis, allow yourself to be guided by the rhythm of the words. I hope that it will encourage you, reader, to go out and walk in nature afterwards.

Theoretical Framework

1. History of walking

Beyond its traditional function, walking can be explored through philosophical, spiritual or physiological approaches. This mode of locomotion constitutes a continuous and evolving dialogue between foot and earth, humanity and the world, body and mind. By examining a body in motion, one can see that walking through space may reveal a wide range of meanings.

Walking as ways of being and relating

In the introduction of *On Foot: A History of Walking* (2004), Joseph Amato, American author and scholar, explains how “walking is talking” since the manner someone walks can reveal a lot about himself. The scholar explores what can be called the *communicative aspects* of walking. Considered as a language that conveys information about the walker's identity and life in general, one's way of walking is like a personal signature, a collage of different movements that gives information about who, why, how, and the conditions behind the walk (Amato 2004: 4). One can find, interpret and attribute meaning to different walking styles, gestures, and postures which can also give information about the personal and cultural identity, general mood and feeling of the walker (Amato 2004: 5,7).

Accordingly, Hartmut Rosa, a German scholar, sociologist and philosopher who dedicates a chapter on walking in *Resonance, une sociologie de la relation au monde* (2018) argues how, in the same manner, the voice and look express the world experience, the way humans move and place themselves in space also reveals both their behavior towards the world and how they perceive themselves in it (Rosa 2018: 82). Walking involves a general body attitude, the *hexis* (the body tone, the head posture, the direction and movement of the gaze, the way of standing and moving), which in the end expresses a subjective, cultural, posture to the world which is also itself impacted (Rosa 2018: 83).

The scholar Jo Lee Vergunst and the scholar and anthropologist Tim Ingold in *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot* (2008) align themselves with Rosa and Amato's positions. In the introduction, they demonstrate that the walking body is not only a source of physical and metaphorical means for its expression but also a source of cultural form: “Walking is not just what a body *does*; it is what a body *is*.” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 2 – italics in the original)

Vergunst and Ingold add that walking is a profoundly social activity: “that in their timings, rhythms and inflections, the feet respond as much as does the voice to the presence and activity of others.” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008:1) They explain this idea by referring to Marcel Mauss in his famous essay *Techniques of the Body* (Mauss 1979: 95-135) who was

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perhaps, as they say, the first “to put walking on the agenda as a serious topic for comparative ethnological inquiry” and to bring the concept of *habitus* as the key to understand the social formation of entire body techniques (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 2). They also introduce Pierre Bourdieu (1977) who placed the *habitus* “in the space of the body’s active engagement in its surroundings, in the ‘practical mastery’ of everyday tasks involving characteristic postures and gesture (...).” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 2) Walking was considered as a way of thinking and feeling. However, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1999) also considers this proposition in reverse, thinking and feeling would be ways of walking. Therefore, the same idea is built concerning human surroundings: “We walk because we are social beings, we are also social beings because we walk” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 2). Therefore, walking is “to make one’s way through a world-in-formation, in a movement that is both rhythmically resonant with the movements of others around us – whose journeys we share or whose paths we cross – and open-ended, having neither a point of origin nor any final destination.” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 2) Walking can thus reveal a lot about human identity, culture, and surroundings, but is also a way of influence and progression in a never-ending world in formation.

Consequently, walking is also a way to learn and grow. If walking is imagined as a visual activity while moving, whether it is for a short or long term, far away or in the neighbourhood, one gets to learn about the surroundings, about oneself, and about where one belongs. Rebecca Solnit, an American writer and philosopher, introduces a history of walking through cultures, periods and walking figures in her book *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (2001). She brings up the idea that a long walk can be a metaphor for human life. “If life itself, the passage of time allotted to us, is described as a journey,” Solnit recalls, “it’s most often imagined as a journey on foot.” (Solnit 2001: 73) This is why indeed, as the author adds, when we imagine ourselves, we imagine ourselves walking, the walker becoming thus a figure of humanity (Solnit 2001: 73). Walking enables humans to learn about themselves as well, reflecting on their nature, experiences and actions, but also shaping the space where they walk as well as their own senses of place. Walking is productive for the mind and the understanding of the world: “Every walk a tour leisurely enough both to see and to think over the sights, to assimilate the new into the known.” (Solnit 2001: 6) The walker learns by physical and mental experience of walking. One can link with the concept of the Way of Knowing introduced by Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst in *Ways of Walking*. Their idea is that the movement of walking is a way to know; walking enables true learning (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 5). Moreover, learning through walking is also possible when humans walk in the footsteps of those who have gone before them: “Since to follow a trail is to remember how it goes, making one’s way in the present is itself a recollection of the past. Thus, every move forwards (...) takes one back to old

haunts and pathways, the past and history.” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 17) Much like a pilgrimage, human growth and journey through life are shaped by the lessons left by those who walked before and by the wisdom embedded in the world they walk in.

Postmodern ways of walking: disembodiment and desynchronization

A historical review of walking reveals that its perception has varied over time. The industrial and then technological era has transformed Western perceptions, needs, and habits concerning walking. Postmodern society progressively changes humans’ ways of walking, and so of thinking and relating to themselves and especially their surroundings.

In *On Foot: A History of Walking*, Joseph Amato presents a history of walking where he recounts how it “went from occupying the center of human life to assuming a much-diminished place in it” (Amato 2004: 16). Walking passed from “the realm of necessity to that of leisure, and choice, from the commonplace and ordinary to the occasional, eccentric, and symbolic.” (Amato 2004: 16) This rupture, as the scholar states, has been observed in the aftermath of the Second World War where new economic, technological and demographic orders replaced walking with the car (Amato 2004: 18). Rebecca Solnit also mentions this era of new orders where the body became solely a “parcel in transit”, as it “does not move but is moved” (Solnit 2001: 28).

The change the body in motion is undergoing necessarily affects its speed and in return, this speed influences human bodies and minds. Hartmut Rosa claims that the logic of (post)modern society, which is based on permanent growth, continuous acceleration and densification of innovation has significant implications for the human body which is limited in terms of speed (Rosa 2018: 112). The body becomes too slow, and the human biological rhythms are no longer synchronized with modern speed (Rosa 2018: 113). According to Solnit, the multiplication and acceleration of technologies in the name of efficiency is eradicating free time and the category of doing nothing in particular by valuing the time and place for production and speed over those for the travel between (Solnit 2001: 10). Consequently, as walking is a deeply rooted human act, modernity profoundly influences the way of being in the world. Acceleration and productivity imperatives impact the human ability to think and its behavior towards himself, others and the environment.

A disturbed relationship with walking reflects troubled times. Rebecca Solnit draws a parallel between disembodiment and the development of the suburbs in the United States. As a product of the revolution and of modern life, the suburbs are a site of consumption, productivity, and work (Solnit 2001: 251) and are not made for walking but for driving. The disappearance of pedestrian space thus transforms the perception of the relationship between bodies and

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spaces. Solnit also exemplifies this rupture with the treadmill, an invention made by William Cubitt in 1818 to punish people by walking as productive machines, which is now used as a sport machine in gyms. The treadmill is a walking device with which to go nowhere in places, where there is now nowhere to go or desire to go (Solnit 2001: 264). This is why Susan Bordo, an American philosopher and feminist theorist in contemporary cultural studies, states that if the body is a metaphor for human locatedness in space and time and thus for the finitude of human perception and knowledge, then the postmodern body is no body at all (qtd. in Solnit 2001: 28).

As a result, this productive and fast society has created disembodiment but also disengagement with the nonhuman world. “Eating, resting, moving, experiencing the weather, are primary experiences of being embodied”, recalls Solnit, “to view them as negative is to condemn biology and the life of the senses.” (Solnit 2001: 257). Disembodiment, as both Solnit and Rosa claim, goes along with alienation. Being alienated is a state of disownment and estrangement. Someone alienated is emotionally detached or feels that the world is meaningless. Social alienation is isolation from the environment and others, which can also be caused by technology. Even workers are alienated when objectified and separated from their human nature. Thus, if the moving bodies can be a primary experience of nature, the new technologies and spaces can bring about alienation from both human bodies and space (Solnit 2001: 257). Hartmut Rosa uses the example of the change in climate and time zone by air travel which is so fast that it imposes on human bodies a physical desynchronization (Rosa 2018: 113). Scholars also usually refer to the historian and journalist Wolfgang Schivelbush who explores in *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (1977) how the train – as a new technology – creates disembodiment by eliminating time and space thanks to speed and so the material world altogether because speed prevents from relating and engaging visually and sensually with surroundings (Solnit 2001: 257). Therefore, humans progressing in the postmodern world find themselves less walking, less thinking, and more disconnected from their own body, senses and environment.

Amato raises the question “What do we make of walking and this new humankind, which in the last two centuries sits, rides, and drives even more, walks less and walks more by choice than ever?” (Amato 2004: 2, 18). Fortunately, since walking is a matter of choice, it is also a means of protest, an act of resistance, not only to the ideology of speed but also to postmodern alienation. A return to walking may help to be aware again of the slow passing of time and space, to return to a state of presentness and reconnect with others, with senses and thoughts as well as the nonhuman world which does not accelerate.

2. History of walking in literature

The walking imagination in literature is coordinated with the history of walking. This section shows how authors use walking as ways of being and thinking as well. Moreover, also responding to the changes of modernity, literary works present subversive walking figures protesting alienation, speed, sexism and capitalism. Then, certain spaces on which figures walk have gained importance as, for instance, the road in the American imagination that has become a symbol of freedom, but also a place of consumption and gender inequality.

How literature conveys walking as ways of being and thinking

The links between walking and thinking have been explored in literature since the eighteenth century by romantic writers. A famous example is *Reveries of a solitary walker* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1782), where the author records “in detail the circumstances of his musing.” (Solnit 2001: 22) Rousseau is a precursor for another romantic writer, Wordsworth, as they both walk as a “means and an end – to compose and to be” (Solnit 2001: 107). Rebecca Solnit dedicates an entire chapter of *Wanderlust* (2001) to William Wordsworth who made, with his autobiographical poem *The Prelude*, his life’s work a long walk, equally punctuated by his steps and words, the characters he met and his resistance messages (Solnit 2001:106). Walking is a mode not of travelling, but of being for William Wordsworth who even chooses to wander and muse as the preliminaries for realizing his poetical vocation (Solnit 2001: 104, 106). Solnit adds how his work has the “musicality of songs” as “his steps seem to have beat out a steady rhythm for the poetry, like the metronome of a composer.” (Solnit 2001: 114) In *Marcher, une philosophie* (2008), Frédéric Gros, French philosopher, also associates the depth and softness of the breath and rhythm in Wordsworth’s swinging verse and Rousseau’s musical prose with footsteps. These two authors, according to Gros, are figures of Wanderer (or *Marcheur*) for whom walking is a celebration, to become present to and merge with Mother Nature (Gros 2008: 242). Walking for these romantic authors is therefore a way of being, writing, denouncing and reconnecting with nature.

In the nineteenth century, Henry David Thoreau, a naturalist poet and American philosopher, also combined both his passions, walking and writing, to protest. Living in a transitional moment where railroads, cars, and cities appeared, the author walks as a political act or as a “means to bemoan the passing of pedestrian country life and to protest emerging riding society” (Amato 2004: 150, 129). Thoreau protests through his writing while walking structures his thoughts via his observations, moving away from any logical argumentation, selecting a mode of speech he calls “journeyer” rather than that of a philosopher (Amato 2004:

143). Walking offers him the images and metaphors that “sparked his romantic ideas about humanity’s place in nature” (Amato 2004: 145). Thoreau posits how “an active mind on active feet constituted footing for knowledge of self, nature, society, and humankind” (Amato 2004: 148). Rebecca Solnit explains this reality between walking and thinking by the rhythm of the walk which “generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts.” (Solnit 2001: 6) Therefore, as Thoreau argues by his protests and writings, walking with the rhythms of footsteps may be a way to think and process thoughts, thus helping humans to understand and relate to the world in which they walk.

Modernist literary texts also explore the link between walking and thinking but move away from the romantic natural space for the setting of a bustling city. The *Flaneur*, a figure of peripatetic urban walker, appears at the *fin-de-siècle* in Paris. This wanderer figure emerges in Charles Baudelaire’s poetry and Walter Benjamin’s critical writing to create a vision of walking as an act of dissent with the disembodied and accelerating rhythm of society. Presented as a dandy walking with a turtle to slow down and observe what is usually not seen, the *Flaneur* creates new poetry from the margins of everyday life. Frédéric Gros reads the *flaneur* as juxtaposed with three conditions: the city, the crowd and capitalism. Indeed, this figure is walking in a nineteenth-century city close to a “jungle”, but far away from nature. In the industrial city, the *flaneur* walks through a crowd made of anonymous individuals whose movements are hostile, representatives of a “civilization nouvelle” (Gros 2008: 236). Moreover, Walter Benjamin talks about a reign of merchandise to illustrate how everything in this modernist society, even humans, becomes an object to be consumed (Gros 2008: 237). However, the *flaneur* is, as Gros argues, subversive to these conditions. The figure is not opposed but overcomes and resists this ambivalent modernity (Gros 2008: 238). First, the *Flaneur* is subversive to speed by slowing down his body, his eyes and so his spirit (Gros 2008: 239). Slow walking enables mental agility, while haze dulls the mind. Thus, the figure is also subversive to *affairisme* as he resists the ambient productivism and observes, his spirit constantly awake (Gros 2008: 240). Finally, the *flaneur* is subversive of all consumption since he does not consume nor is consumed, but rather practices urban foraging, or even theft (Gros 2014: 180). Thereby, the figure of the *flaneur* goes, as Gros poetically says, beyond the atrocity of cities to grasp their passing wonders (Gros 2008: 241).

The *Flaneur* appears alongside other literary modernist techniques like the stream of consciousness. This narrative mode emerges from walking authors who gave up the research of the right word and found meaning in the free flow of thoughts. The two representative examples are *Ulysses* by James Joyce (1920) and *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf (1925)

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where, as Rebecca Solnit points out, “jumble of thoughts and recollections of [the] protagonists unfold best during walks” (Solnit 2001: 21). In these novels, the noisy and crowded metropolitan streets are playgrounds for peripatetic walking and the imagination. Virginia Woolf herself connects walking in the city with thinking, as she would have “settled down into a rhythm of walking, thinking, reading and imagining that would be the pattern for much of her life, where walking became the fuel that sustained and fired all her mental activities.” (Andrews 2020: 165) In this way, modernist literature reimagines walking as an act of subversion, introspection and artistic innovation amid the new human experience in the urban setting.

In the twenty-first century, the stream of consciousness and the *flânerie* are challenged by the standardization of brands and aggressive crowds, sounds, cars flooding and preventing any surprise or pleasantness, the only places still available to the *flânerie* being conditioned on the injunction to buy (Gros 2008: 242). New subversive walking characters hence emerge as seen for instance with the narrator and protagonist of the contemporary novel *Open City* by Teju Cole (2011). Writing the thoughts and observations of a young Nigerian psychiatrist aimlessly walking in New York and Brussels, Teju Cole seems to have been inspired by the figure of the *Flaneur*. This post-colonial figure of the *flaneur* walks in less known but no less important sites of memory like an African Burial Memorial. An “ambulatory automatism” counters a new emerging discourse which exalts mobility and tourism as “exceptional, admired travel, a heightened form of travel” (Hacking 1999: 52 qtd. in Vermeulen 2013: 54). The Belgian scholar Pieter Vermeulen in his article “Flights of Memory: Teju Cole’s *Open City* and the Limits of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism” (2013) analyzes the ambivalent character of *Open City* who illustrates both figure of *Flaneur* and another less well-known walking figure, the *Fugueur*.

Introduced by the Canadian philosopher Ian Hacking in *Mad Travelers: Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illnesses* (1999), the *Fugueur*, related to *vagabondage* and the “unbearable boredom of modern life”, is analyzed by Vermeulen as the dark counterpart or pathological figure opposed to the *Flaneur* (Vermeulen 2013: 42, 52, 54). The *Fugueur*, or mad traveler, is characterized by “impulsive uncontrolled travelling with confused memories” (Hacking 1999: 77 qtd. in Vermeulen 2013: 54). The American Psychiatric Association defines the *Fugueur*’s walk as a sort of “dissociative fugue” probably related to traumatic, stressful or overwhelming life events (qtd. in Vermeulen 2013: 54). The fugue is thus one new subversive way of walking caused by the disorientation created by this accelerating and compelling postmodern society. Nathalie Le Roux, who analyzes how travel can become pathological, explains the *fugueur*’s walk as it is not a way to reconnect with the world around like the *flaneur* would do (Le Roux 2021). On the contrary, the *fugueur* walks to escape from an alienated world

and most of all from his own identity. The fugue as a disconnection of reality can be translated in narratives like *Open City* through a fugue of voice. The suppression of the character's identity is shown via his unreliability as a narrator, but also by the motif of the walk to run away from an uncomfortable conversation or the absence of his opinion balanced with the omnipresence of that of the encounters he makes on his way. However, the character collecting encounters he listens to turn pedestrians on the street into objects to consume.

The imagination of walking on the road: Marxist and gendered alienation

Over time, walking in urban public spaces is presented in literature as a socially constructed act shaped by speed, consumerist values but also gender dynamics. When walking becomes a performance of consumer identity and the freedom to move is unequally distributed, it raises questions about disembodiment and alienation in literature. Women's bodies are portrayed as alienated by a male-dominated road as a symbolic place of consumption that sexualizes and exposes them as objects of consumption.

Just as the relationship to walking has changed over time, so has the relationship to the path on which humans walk. Until the end of the eighteenth century, walking was difficult and dangerous, which is why humans travel on foot out of necessity and not for fun. The paths then transformed into roads as travelling and means developed in the nineteenth century, enabling humans to have more control, landmarks and order. The roads became very symbolic in literature, especially in the American culture as demonstrated in a great number of novels and movies where the road remains central as a physical space. The symbolism of the path also changed when the car appeared. The automobile emerged in novels as a symbol of freedom, independence, and sometimes life struggles, playing a role in a cultural revolution seen in literature. A sign of new mobility, and more security, it was also associated with acceleration and consumerism. The road in turn became a place of discovery, freedom, and desire to escape this new consumer economy and suburbia. However, whether it is to escape or stay in the suburbs, humans leave aside walking to enhance driving. The road as a symbolic place is no longer pedestrian but directly related to the car and organized around speed, production and consumption. Therefore, narratives began to illustrate crowds to represent alienated characters working to produce and consume, separating them from their human nature to illustrate them as parts of a digital capitalist society.

Moreover, representations of walkers in the literary and imaginative traditions of walking have predominantly been male, thereby inviting more than a critique of Marxist alienation but also a feminist critique of gendered alienation. In Chapter 14 of *Wanderlust* by Rebecca Solnit named "Walking after Midnight: women, sex, and public space", the author

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examines women's sexuality through the field of walking. She states how walking figures in literature have always been men because they always had an easier time walking down the street than women (Solnit 2001: 233). Walking is to think, to be free, to learn through new places, but women have often been controlled and contained because they are associated with a sexuality which prevents them from walking freely (Solnit 2001: 43).

Women's freedom and security to walk have always been a public matter. In Greek, Solnit reveals, women's sexuality was under the control of men via the architecture: "In order to keep women 'private', or sexually accessible to one man and inaccessible to all others, their whole life would be consigned to the private space of the home that served as a sort of masonry veil." (Solnit 2001: 236) The sexualization of women, and how public it is, creates an implicit threat of sexual harassment and intimidation that has limited women's ability to walk where and when they wish (Solnit 2001: 234). This control on women's bodies is even visible through the language. As Solnit claims, women walking in public suffer from an invasion of their private parts literally but also verbally: *streetwalkers*, *women of the streets*, *women of the town*, and *public women* are all walking denomination associated with the figure of the prostitute while the equivalent phrases for men have a completely different meaning (Solnit 2001: 234). The sexualization of the language even touches the vocabulary of the very act of walking: women who dare to walk freely are *strolling*, *roaming*, *wandering*, *straying*, "all terms that imply that women's travel is inevitably sexual or that their sexuality is transgressive when it travels." (Solnit 2001: 234) Therefore, women who are walking are seen as bodies to be sexually consumed.

In the nineteenth century, since women were portrayed as too frail or pure to avoid being sexually "compromised" in urban life if they did not have a specific purpose, women "legitimized their presence by shopping, proving they were not for purchase by purchasing (...)." (Solnit 2001: 237). As women could not be subversive to consumerism, "incapable of being sufficiently detached from the commerce of city life" (Solnit 2001: 237), they would be considered as unable to be *flaneur* figures in literature. Therefore, walking belongs to men as revealed in the literature by the absence of women as important walking figures except for the single purpose of representing their sexualization through an axis of desire and the male gaze. For instance, as Solnit chose to illustrate this point, the women in Baudelaire are The Prostitute, The Beggar, or The Beautiful Stranger who are only phantasms men run into while walking, and not deep or even developed characters (Solnit 2001: 204). Again, someone walking in the road, and especially a woman, is seen as an object of consumption: "Window-shopping and people-watching have become indistinguishable activities; one may attempt to buy but not to know them." (Solnit 2001: 204)

However, some female authors found different ways to circumvent the male walking figures and reclaim aimless and free walks women have been deprived of. Virginia Woolf is a model of the female gaze in literature, especially in walking, freeing herself from patriarchal constraints, and fleeing into the city, before writing down the inspiration, feelings and sensations that autonomous and free walking has given her. Let's remember how this feminist figure called for women's independence and privacy with *a room of one's own* (1929). In conclusion, the path as a symbolic space on which characters walk says a lot about the walkers. In narratives, the road with cars are places of consumption and productivity alienating literary characters to be consumers or workers and only introducing male walkers as women are alienated sexualized bodies in the background.

3. Walking in post-apocalyptic fiction

The novels considered in the context of this dissertation – *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, *The Marrow Thieves* by Chérie Dimaline and *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel – have all been categorized as dystopian fiction. This chapter explains what the dystopian genre entails and why the post-apocalyptic genre has been chosen as the most suitable to analyze walking. In a post-apocalyptic world, society has fallen which compels characters to return to travel by foot, slow down and observe the environment to survive. Analyses of walking in post-apocalyptic fiction are scarce although walking is central in most of them, particularly in the three selected novels.

The vision and setting of dystopian and post-apocalyptic fiction

Several terms can be used to categorize dystopian fiction to emphasize different specificities while several subgenres focus on different settings. First, dystopia is a term coined by John Stuart Mill (1868) and derived from utopia, which Thomas More coined (1516) with his eponymous work. In *The Language of Dystopia* (2022), Jessica Norledge explains the origins of Dystopia: “The word ‘utopia’ is taken from the Greek ‘οὐ’ (ou-) ‘not’ and ‘τόπος’ (topos) ‘place’, translating into English as ‘no-place’ or ‘nowhere’.” (Norledge 2022: 2) However, the meaning most generally associated with dystopian fiction is taken from the Greek word ‘eutopia’, or ‘good place’: ‘εὐ’ (eu) ‘good’ and ‘τόπος’ (topos) ‘place’ (Norledge 2022: 2). The term ‘Dystopia’ is thereby the opposite of the second one as it means a ‘bad place’ and the contrary of utopia would be the real world (Norledge 2022: 2). The dystopian genre therefore means any work describing a new dark, nightmarish version of society or world.

Nowadays, dystopias can be found under the term ‘speculative fiction’, or as Margaret Atwood defines it, a fiction where readers explore “another kind of other world – our own

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planet in a future” (Atwood 2011). However, the author recalls that it is not the same as Science Fiction. Even if speculative fiction and Science Fiction share the idea of “[extrapolating] imaginatively from current trends and events to a near-future that’s half prediction, half satire”, the first differs from the last because “everything that happens in [speculative fiction] is possible and may even have already happened” (Le Guin qtd. in Atwood 2011). In other words, Le Guin defines the plots of speculative fiction as “things that really could happen but just hadn’t completely happened when the authors wrote the books.” (qtd. in Atwood 2011) Moreover, Margaret Atwood associates her conception of speculative fiction with the term *Utopia*. She made up this word by combining utopia and dystopia – “the imagined perfect society and its opposite” – seeing each containing a latent version of the other (Atwood 2011). Combined, they are “these not-exactly places which are anywhere but nowhere and are both mappable locations and states of mind” (Atwood 2011). Most dystopias indeed contain utopian ideas and hope. Margaret Atwood exemplifies this statement with her post-apocalyptic novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003) which is both dystopic – almost the entire human race is annihilated – and utopian – a new community of quasi-humans’ lives without the threat of dying from the same plague as humans did. Therefore, this thesis aligns itself with Atwood’s view on Speculative Fiction as well as the idea of *Utopia* when analyzing the dystopian corpus. The three novels indeed offer worlds that could soon become reality and combine both devastation and hope.

More precisely, the dystopian novels under consideration are categorized and analyzed in this thesis as post-apocalyptic fiction, a genre of speculative fiction that often translates the fear and sense of emergency created by postmodern society. The concept of apocalypse in literature is complex. In *The Apocalypse in Film, Dystopias, and Other Visions about the End of the World* (2016) edited by Karen A. Ritzenhoff and Angela Krewani, the scholars retrace the history of the Apocalypse representation. Originally, the Apocalypse is the religious concept of the destruction of the Earth by God with the final judgment where good people are resurrected, and the sinners go to hell (Ritzenhoff and Krewani 2016: xii). However, with time, the Apocalypse’s concept became more of an allegory, a rhetorical figure “enabling us to speak in the present in terms of the past – and structure our fear of the life-threatening catastrophe.” (Ritzenhoff and Krewani 2016: xii) Thus, the religious apocalypse became a structure “to express our fear of an ending and to give expression to politically threatening situations that we could not understand otherwise.” (Ritzenhoff and Krewani 2016: xii.)

In the twentieth century, the very ideas of God and His punishment have moved into the background to be substituted by modern technology which became the main threat that doesn’t differentiate the good and the bad anymore but hits all human beings (Ritzenhoff and Krewani

2016: xiii). Different apocalyptic subgenres emerged such as the American disaster films based on the fear and trauma of terrorism, wars, or ecological disasters that focus more on the changing global climate and geopolitical relations (Ritzenhoff and Krewani 2016: xiii). In *The Culture of Disaster* (2012), the scholar Marie-Hélène Huet approaches the Disaster – another term to consider the Apocalypse – not as a fundamental rupture of time, but as the “premise of modern thought” (qtd. in Bozic 2017: 251). She argues that since the 18th century, a “pervasive anxiety about catastrophic events” has risen to a sense of emergency (Huet qtd. in Bozic 2017: 251). The Apocalypse symbolizes nowadays the possible outcome of contemporary climate and geopolitical and psychological crisis. Hence, the post-apocalyptic fiction is for readers a warning representation of hell after the collapse of society.

Post-apocalyptic fiction, as a subgenre of dystopian fiction, is more appropriate than a totalitarian dystopia to focus on walking as a way to move away from postmodern society to reconnect with nature since the characters have lost their way of living and return to walking. Even if dystopias also tend to criticize the past society through a new world, the setting where the characters evolve is less appropriate for a walk analysis. In *Memory and Utopian Agency in Utopian/Dystopian Literature, Memory of the Future* (2020), Carter F. Hanson while retracing the history of utopia and dystopia under the scope of memory, explains how the city has been first chosen as the favored place for these fictions. Basing his argument on *Utopia* by More, the author justifies this choice because of the architectural and urbanistic nature of the city, making it an ideal space to create a more “desirable and consistent social alternative” to what currently exists, or in other words, the primary structure for envisioning ideal governance and social order (Hanson 2020: 14). The city’s role as a centralizing structure of power and society makes it a lasting characteristic of utopian but also a dystopian design. There is thus usually no place for natural environments and ecology in these utopian or dystopian city settings. For instance, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1932) shows a technologically advanced utopian society where the desire for materiality is central to mass production, buying, and wasting.

Yet, in the 20th century, dystopian fiction started presenting community resistance against the centralized power of these totalitarian societies that find itself on the outskirts of the city and so in a more natural environment. This spatial resistance takes place in a lot of young adult novels like the dystopian novel *Uglies* by Scott Westerfeld (2005) for instance. The novel starts in a high-tech totalitarian city but quickly moves for a large part of the novel to landscapes. The protagonist, Tally, must survive in the wild and find an eco-resistant community whose intention is to make the totalitarian society structure fall. However, most dystopian fictions still concentrate on societal organization, enclosed systems or confined spaces and therefore shows characters necessarily more sedentary and away from nature. In

contrast, post-apocalyptic fictions are directly set in landscapes and roads and so, similar spaces of open paths. The genre is ideal for an ecological and decelerating approach to walking because the focus is no longer on technology, imposed government or system which goes wrong, as there is usually no system anymore. Whether it is due to an epidemic, a climate crisis or some catastrophe because humanity went too far, the last humans remaining must walk in an environment partially or totally destroyed.

The shared scope of walking and post-apocalyptic fiction

My choice for the post-apocalyptic fiction is therefore tied with the walking field. Walking is inherent in a post-apocalyptic world. Sedentarism is almost impossible, and the characters' way of living returns to a nomadic one. The reasons are multiple: to find food, to escape bad guys and violence, to search for a loved one or simply to still feel alive. Characters also have an instinct to find or rebuild a home. In her article "Is There an End to It? Fictional Shelters and Shelter Fiction", the scholar Solveig Nitzke explains how "heroes and victims alike [in post-apocalyptic fiction] look for shelter", creating a sense of security, "and, most often, the protagonists succeed in finding or building a place that allows them to survive." (Nitzke 2016: 79) However, even if certain post-apocalyptic novels present static narratives of people surviving in shelters, most of it has their characters walking for their survival as cities and landscapes often offer few buildings still standing or safe shelters. In "Landscapes of Loss: The Semantics of Empty Spaces in Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Fiction.", the scholar Martin Walter analyzes the spaces of post-apocalyptic narratives. He explains that most of these narratives demonstrate how "the process of turning the new, empty spaces of the apocalypse into safe and sedentary spaces is frequently shown to fail, necessitating a cycle of continual movement." (Walter 2019: 142) Walking in a post-apocalyptic setting is the norm and the only way to survive and stay safe.

Walking literature and post-apocalyptic fiction are also united in their idea of continuation, resilience and subversion. First, the post-apocalyptic genre supplies a rupture with the contemporary reality, but also a way to find hope by moving forward into a future that, despite an end, still goes on. Post-apocalypse stories have been omnipresent in cinema, literature and video games with, for instance, the movie *I Am Legend* (Lawrence 2007), the successful TV series *The Walking Dead* (2010-), the young adults' novel series *The 100* (Morgan 2013) or the video game franchise *Fallout* (1997-). These post-apocalyptic fictions have all raised a question: is it really The End, if there is still something to represent? Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction or non-fiction rarely imagine total annihilation. James Berger, a scholar who specialized in Apocalypse and dystopia, conceptualizes the term

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apocalypse in three senses: the actual imagined end of the world; a catastrophe that resembles the End but is only the end of a way of living or thinking; and a destructive moment that has an explanatory function (Berger qtd. in Bozic 2017: 250) Therefore, the end in post-apocalyptic fiction is not the end. There is always enough left to imagine some continuity and therefore a new beginning which exemplifies human resilience to live and hope. Consequently, the message conveyed by the post-apocalyptic genre aligns closely with that of walking that is also a symbol of resilience and determination to move forward through life. By envisioning a continuation beyond the apocalypse, these fictions invite readers to imagine the persistence and adaptability of walking human even in the aftermath of catastrophic events.

As seen in the previous chapters, walking is also an act of resistance and critique of postmodern society which aligns perfectly with the warning function of post-apocalyptic fiction. These fictions illustrate how the earth can become an open hell for people to walk in if nothing is done to change the current crises and accelerating world. As just argued, the apocalypse in literature is not the end of the world but a collapse, a dividing moment that creates a before and an after. James Berges argues that to represent a “true apocalypse”, this break “must in its destructive moment clarify and illuminate the true nature of what has been brought to an end” (Berger 1999: 5). Post-apocalyptic fiction usually provides the elements that led to a collapse and that are still inherent to humanity, even after it, to denounce them. A devastated world often exhibits traces and leftovers from the old one and characters repeat some old behaviors. Martin Walter accurately explains that “visualizations of post-apocalyptic *terra incognita* provide the means of producing a new and fragmented spatiality by renegotiating seemingly natural, everyday social practices” (Walter 2019: 135), the societal norms thus challenged. However, the scholar argues that “once the apocalypse has become reality, the overall temporal structures of society (and thus arguably also its ideologies) are shown to remain intact.” (Walter 2019: 135 – brackets in the original) Therefore, even if there is a rupture, setting a narrative in a post-apocalyptic world brings the characters back to walking while still representing some ideologies and structures of the past society to be denounced. As already seen in the first chapter, walking is a way of knowing by walking on the path of those who walked before and thus learn, or not, from human errors. By reading the narrative of walking characters in a post-apocalyptic setting, readers acknowledge the current postmodern path and are warned by the consequences of contemporary human actions.

4. Introduction to the corpus

To denounce a more and more static, fast, digital, and consumeristic world, how do post-apocalyptic novels readapt the dystopian warnings through the scope of walking? The three novels under consideration in this thesis do not align with motionless post-apocalyptic narratives that take place in a bunker but depict a plot focused on walking characters. The walking field is omnipresent through vocabulary, imagery, and metaphors, as plot devices, being necessary for survival. The theme of walking in these novels is also accompanied by questions, convictions and messages. After summarizing these novels, this chapter closes on their ecological perspectives that come with the scope of walking.

The Road and its characters who walk against all odds

The Road is a post-apocalyptic novel written by Cormac McCarthy in 2006. It has been adapted into an eponymous film (John Hillcoat, 2009) and, recently, a graphic novel by Manu Larcenet (2024). The novel won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction as well as the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and has made a mark, now rooting in post-apocalyptic fiction as a reference. *The Road* has indeed been seen as one novel – or even the one – truest to the representation of the post-apocalypse.

As Stephen Joyce, a Danish scholar, recalls in his article “The Double Death of Humanity in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*”, the novel emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century when the genre of post-apocalypse is unusually prevalent in pop culture, moving away from the typical apocalyptic narrative and taking a turn for existential questions in very harsh worlds (Joyce 2016). *The Road* follows the journey of unnamed father and son in a barren world looking for food and escaping cannibals. Humanity has fallen to its lowest, defying all ethics and morality. The suicide, to which the wife and mother of these two men succumbed, is a solution in a world where the characters must always expect to die at any moment, in solitude, without a home to return, no tomb, just nonsense. Their choice to keep walking despite everything thus equals the choice to continue living. The novel engages existential questions as the meaning of life in a post-apocalyptic world, but also what it is to be good or evil in a world where humans think they are forced to commit the worst acts to survive.

These questions are why the novel is connected to the 9 September attacks. Stephen Joyce mentions how the political use of apocalyptic rhetoric to characterize 9/11 provoked a cultural backlash by implying a division of the world between good and evil and has played a role in the development of the post-apocalyptic genre that has begun to question the “messianic certainty and Manichaeic worldview of apocalyptic rhetoric.” (Joyce 2016) *The Road* deals

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with the religious and Manichaeian conception of the Apocalypse since the true reason the two characters are walking is because of the father's faith in his boy as a godlike figure. Seeing the boy as the last walking prophet who carries the fire, the character embodies the last leftovers of goodness in humanity. Named as "the ultimate pessimist" (Adams 2009), Cormac McCarthy still adds some vestigial hope in the novel – although discreet in the face of massive despair – which stays inherent in human nature and especially in the heart of the boy.

The story starts around ten years after the collapse of the world which has been mostly devastated by fire and still is. The world has lost all color as everything is ashes and grey. If the cause of this Apocalypse was a nuclear bomb, the cloud probably accumulated to make this dark atmosphere without any light. The weather and climate have consequently changed with constant rain, cold and snow. A massive extinction has occurred to animals and humans while bones and corpses become a normal part of the environment. The last plants are only ashes soon to fall on the ground. The father and son choose to walk on the endless road, therefore observing the waste and remains of concrete of the past society. The leftovers of capitalism scattered all over the devastated landscapes of *The Road* again remind the ruins of the two towers that were the symbol of capitalism. Consequently, *The Road* has been massively analyzed from an ecological perspective.

However, the novel has not yet been analyzed from the perspective of walking, although central and supportive of ecocriticism as well. Since the catastrophe destroyed everything, there is no building to stay in, no societal order to be secured in and no travel means other than walking. The last humans become refugees on the road. Throughout the novel, the man and the son are walking, resting, looking for food, running, and so on. As a lot of words vanish with the loss of their referent in a more and more emptied reality, the vocabulary around walking does not run out, but on the contrary, is enriched. Moreover, they are running from the capture of those who hunt them, but also from the cold, hunger, diseases or loss of hope.

The father and son encounter various people on the road of their life – individuals of all walking and consumption identities: cannibal hunters tracking them, a thief who steals their precious shopping cart filled with survival equipment, Ely the old man bait, looters... all of whom represent the "bad guys". They are also subtly followed by those they consider "good" who observe their actions, morality and humanity. These ethical qualities are constantly tested as the father and son struggle to survive and move forward. In the end, the boy is the only one left with impulses of solidarity and benevolence. He believes that survival does not depend solely on isolation and self-interest. That is why, after his father's death, he continues walking to "carry the fire" and ultimately joins the ethical community of the "good guys" living inland.

The Marrow Thieves: walking with the nonhuman world

The Marrow Thieves (2017) is a young adult dystopian novel written by Chérie Dimaline, a Canadian author from the Métis Nation of Ontario (constituted of an Indigenous People). A sequel has been published in 2021, *Hunting by Stars*, continuing the story. The present study will however focus on the first one only. The author delivers a narrative from her Cree and Metis perceptions. While acknowledging how different North American Indigenous nations are according to languages, protocols and cultures, *The Marrow Thieves*' narrative offers one point of view that unites all Indigenous communities to deliver a message of solidarity to the rest of the world (Henley 2017). Although the novel is classified as young adult literature, it conveys relevant ecocritical messages and provides an interesting cultural perspective.

Central to *The Marrow Thieves* is a dystopian world in which climate change and human negligence have wrought devastation and hopelessness. A disaster affected the land and its inhabitants turning the world into a similar state of post-apocalypse. First, the environment is heavily destroyed after the water has been poisoned during "wars for the water" and a "Melt" caused by too many extractions and rising waters. Multiple natural disasters then followed; tsunamis, changes in shapes of countries, but also abnormal weather changes, constant rains and mixed seasons. The animals suffer from extinction, unnatural migrations and mutations. Next to this disaster, another apocalypse is depicted, focusing on the fall of humanity. The post-collapse led to the disappearance of half of the human population from diseases, as a plague. However, individuals have clung to their self-centric perspectives instead of reviewing their priorities towards the collective and the earth's well-being. The humans that are left are still trying to work and live as before, but it is impossible as their lives have been impacted too much. They lost family and loved ones, the ability to reproduce sleep, and dream. This situation created depression and suicidal states. Consequently, the last humans started ironically to seek nothing more to survive than to regain the ability they lost to dream – and so to hope – even if it meant turning against other humans.

The loss of hope leads to violence and segregation against the last people still able to dream: the Anishnaabe, Indigenous People of North America. The characters of this novel must run from the "dreamless ones" who decided to capture them to siphon the dreams off their DNA in their marrow:

Hope is the backbone of our survival, and it's the core of our strength. Our grandparents survived residential schools and still brought through the stories, still carried our language, still made sure that we had ceremony and it was because we had that hope

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that there was going to be survival and revival. So I think dreams are the epitome of the hope that we carry. (Dimaline qtd. in Henley 2017)

As explained by the author, the dreams in their backbone are a metaphor for the hope inherited through their culture which survived annihilation. To be punctured or “harvested” like plants, they are forcibly taken to schools based on the old Canadian Indian residential school system. The novel makes a parallel with History colonials annihilated their culture, language, and heritage. The author uses the dystopian genre to “draw explicit parallels between the imagined horrors of a fictional future and the true historical horrors of colonialism and residential schools” (Ozirny 2017). The novel can thus be classified as *Indigenous futurism* – a term coined by the Anishnaabe Dr. Grace L. Dillon inspired by the preexisting term “Afrofuturism”, “weav[ing] in traditional knowledge and culture with futuristic ideas and settings.” (Muzyka 2019) Chérie Dimaline denounces the continued colonial exploitation of the Indigenous People with *The Marrow Thieves* where the schools are new death camps in a dying environment and a collapsing societal structure. Moreover, the consumption and objectification of Indian bodies can be interpreted as an ironical illustration of the non-ecological perpetuated behaviors that led to the collapse of this world.

The Marrow Thieves follows the journey of Francis, or French, a teenage indigenous boy. As the novel begins, the character comes across a survival group made of indigenous people from different tribes that becomes a new family along the way. In this postapocalyptic situation, all Native North American nations find themselves in an unstable world making movement and walking necessary to survive. In the moving community, two Elders take care of the young. First, Miigwans, a wise old man, lost his lover, Isaac, and now leads the members of the walking group. He teaches them survival skills and tells them the Story of their people, that is their origins and what they have gone through in History. Then, Minerva is the old woman of the community. At their stops, she teaches the young women of the group the language and ancient words as well as their warning myths. The instability of the changing natural environment keeps the community migrating north to reunite in the sacred “old lands” in the hope that it settles down one day. However, the reason the characters start to walk is because they must flee from Recruiters, hunters of this new world, into the forest to stay alive.

Like most dystopian young adult novels, the government is seen as the enemy, which can be biased given the current capitalist-led society. However, this novel is more complex than just a fight between the government and discriminated minorities. The narrative does not focus on the dystopian societal structure and government but on the walking travel of the Indigenous characters into a dangerous post-apocalyptic world. The reader follows the day-to-day travel of the protagonist several years after the start of the decline through his perspective and experience

as a teenager. As Cherie Dimaline explained after the release of her novel, she wanted the readers to experience with the characters, to “walk beside them through hardships, through running away, through being hunted, through the idea of the residential schools, even in telling their backstories and where they’d been.” (qtd. in Dundas 2017) Although the point of view is that of a teenager, the novel allows to investigate how young Aboriginal people learn and reconnect with their heritage and responsibilities by walking in the forest. The characters retrace the path of their ancestors and therefore reconnect with the nonhuman world that is too neglected.

Station Eleven: from the postmodern world to a walking world

Station Eleven (2014) is a novel written by Emily St. John Mandel, a Canadian writer. This dystopian fiction was well received and adapted in 2021 as a TV series (Patrick Somerville HBO). The novel was noted for its redesign of the post-apocalyptic genre. By taking up the foundations, the writing keeps an interesting distance from fiction and films of the successful genre and the effects of popular culture through its complexity in structure, characters and language (Rosen 2018).

The novel can be associated with the pandemic fiction or “outbreak narrative”. Humankind suffers from the outbreak of the Georgia Flu. The fast violent epidemic kills a large percentage of the world’s population in a few hours and marks the collapse of civilization. The stories of the virus outbreak are a dominant template for the post-apocalyptic survivalist narrative. However, *Station Eleven* does not deal with the virus itself. The transition from the current society to a survivalist world is used as a warning device typical of dystopian narratives. The structure of *Station Eleven* is more complex than usual post-apocalyptic novels as several temporalities are revealed progressively in non-linear events. The novel focuses both on the fast and materialistic before-collapse society and on the post-collapse world where people try to rebuild what civilization stands for by pursuing art and finding strength in the community. This complexity in structure that is peculiar to *Station Eleven* also illustrates how the past, present and future are intimately connected. Every relationship, decision, and act has an effect. Although the fall of humanity is due to an epidemic independent of man’s will, the author thus does not exempt humanity from its responsibility in its future.

On the one hand, *Station Eleven* shows an attempt at continuity after the collapse of society. This continuity builds itself in hope and faith through a walking community. After ten years of violence where humans were shot on sight, the roads are more secure, and characters walk in a now calmer age. The post-collapse characters all find themselves assembled in communities or settlements and the narrative follows the Travelling Symphony. This group of

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survivors made of actors and musicians assembles to walk on the Great Lakes region and perform Shakespeare plays to the different settlements they met on the road. Some of them were born after the collapse and have only known this new world but most of them, like Kirsten, the protagonist of the post-collapse story, lived both worlds. In this new life, walking together is what forges the relationships and the sense of community. Walking enhances the bonds of the members of the Travelling Symphony but also creates connections with the last living people scattered. Walking from settlement to settlement allows them to share stories: stories of hope, of the past, of the future. This walking-storytelling project is what gives the characters the will to continue to live “because” – as their motto or tattooed slogan says – “survival is insufficient”.

On the other hand, *Station Eleven* also illustrates the contemporary before-collapse world depicting a reality of speed, corporation, superficiality and materialism. The reader follows through a descending order the entire life of Arthur, a movie star, from his death on a theatre scene to his entire life. For instance, the reader gets to learn about his friendship with a man named Clark who becomes the creator of the Museum of Civilization in the post-outbreak world, or his multiple love stories – most importantly two characters named Minerva and Elisabeth. Events, relationships, travels around the world, facts go on. Even in terms of duration, the rhythm is faster than in the after-collapse story, portraying societal overconsumption and a fast era. Another character than Clark is present all along the timeline, Jeevan, showing great character development. After a life as an individualistic paparazzi, walking in the postapocalyptic world enables the character to reflect on himself. At the end of the novel, he becomes a figure of solidarity as a father and doctor in a survival community, distancing himself from his superficial, nearly zombie-like previous life.

Eventually, the before- and the after-collapse worlds are connected by motifs of technology. Some objects of the past left behind, on the road or carried in bags have become artefacts of memory for characters of the post-apocalyptic world. The most important is a comic book created by Miranda – an important character of the pre-outbreak – named *Station Eleven* and given to Kirsten. Shakespeare’s plays are also a common thread as they are performed pre- and post-outbreak. These artefacts are symbols of alienation from the past materiality with its technological devices and especially electricity. The end of electricity is used as the time reference throughout the novel but is also intertwined with the definition of human civilization. At the end of the novel, the author chooses to represent the characters’ hope not with the renewal of a sustainable society in an old airport, but by the possibility of the return of electricity in another settlement. As Jeremy Rosen states, Mandel “pay[s] homage to the underappreciated miracles of technology and the resilience of human goodness through the bleakest of

circumstances.” (Rosen 2018) However, the characters’ undeniable attachment to the past through technology’s desire can be analyzed, rather than an homage, as an obsession for technology and materialism which question the will of humanity to go forward for a better future for the Earth and not just for humanity’s comfort. In conclusion, Emily St. John Mandel in *Station Eleven* portrays a new human civilization which keeps hope while walking, but she still recalls its seemingly inseparable link and need for technology and consumption.

The novels through the scope of walking and ecocriticism

Since the end of the 20th century, in a world of crisis and uncertainties about the endangered future, Cli-fi – or Climate Fiction, a term coined by Dan Bloom in 2007 – has a fertile ground to emerge. “As [a] threat grows, so will the vocabulary designed to make sense of it.” (Glass 2013) Climate Fiction, a subgenre of speculative fiction, “setting out to warn readers of possible environmental nightmares to come” (Glass 2013), has gradually increased in the last decade to be omnipresent in bookstores given the urgency and acceleration of the crisis. As Melina Pereira Savi states in her article “The Anthropocene (and) (in) the Humanities: Possibilities for Literary Studies.”, “[t]he genres of speculative and science fiction are also fertile terrains to ponder the waning boundaries between the human and the nonhuman and the ways in which human practices are disrupting the natural world almost to the point of no return.” (Savi 2017: 956)

The three novels under consideration in this thesis are not classified as Cli-fi in the first place, but they can be analyzed as such as they still offer recovering or destroyed natural settings that can be used to send ecological warnings. The thesis analyzes walking characters, post-apocalyptic settings and both impact on the more-than-human-world as these three components are closely intertwined in the corpus of novels. Looking at each conception of Apocalypse reveals a lot about the novels’ ecological perspective and criticism.

Station Eleven positions itself by regularly returning to how the collapse of humanity could be considered by some as the end of the world, while life continues, the animals and the environment being almost untouched here. The novel depicts a world where only humans are negatively impacted, which can consequently be seen as the collapse of humanity and not of the world. The apocalyptic collapse of *Station Eleven* is the end of the comfortable way of life of the past era with a loss of electricity, fast travel, and fast communication, forcing them to walk in difficult conditions. The choice to define this change as an apocalypse reveals the irony of anthropocentrism and the alienating power of capitalist, technological and corporate society narrated in the pre-collapse story.

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In opposition to the intact natural environment of *Station Eleven*, everything in *The Road* has been destroyed and burned. All species were touched, human or not. The cause of the apocalypse is never clearly explained. As claimed by John Banville in the introduction of *The Road* (ed. 2022) “We are not told what kind of cataclysm it was that brought about civilization’s extinguishing, though we assume it was man-made.” (In McCarthy ed. 2022: xiii) The motif of waste as a trace of capitalism is omnipresent and a massive climate change weighs on the characters. Therefore, the post-apocalypse conditions of *The Road* can be seen as the consequences and prolongation of the current contemporary world. Cormac McCarthy answered to the absence of an explanation that “It could be anything – volcanic activity or it could be nuclear war” (qtd. in Adams 2009). By not emphasizing what triggered the collapse, the novel rather focuses on how humanity unethically reacts – with cannibalism – and still lives as consumers in the post-apocalyptic world.

Eventually, *The Marrow Thieves* offers both apocalyptic conceptions. On the one hand, a global apocalypse has affected both humans and non-humans; the environment, animals and humans are all impacted. Although the novel does not focus on the environmental crisis as a priority, it is still an important background subject which regularly returns during the walking journey of the characters. The cause of this apocalypse is clear; humans have drawn from the earth beyond its resources, destroying it and themselves at the same time. On the other hand, the novel can also be considered a socio-political dystopia given the anthropocentric conception of the apocalypse by the depicted society that focuses on hunting humans rather than taking care of the earth.

The different relationships to the nonhuman world portrayed in these novels are the reason several scholars have already considered them as cli-fi. As the scholar Lawrence Buell states, “Apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal” (qtd. in Wright 2015: 507) Even if these novels are not initially categorized as climate fiction, they engage with ecocritical concerns by interrogating humanity’s relationship with the nonhuman world.

Writing walking bodies: between consumers and
consumed

The post-apocalyptic worlds depicted in the three novels under consideration are not yet free from capitalist and consumerist minds. This is visible through the resurgence of practices such as hunting, the consumption of human flesh, and the transformation of the body into both prey and a commodity. Each novel offers a metaphorical and ironical portrayal of capitalism's alienating effects – consumerism, the commodification of nature, acceleration, and growth – in postmodern society. These themes are explored through the ambivalence present in the characters' movements and the uncertain paths they traverse¹. This chapter begins by examining the symbol of the road as an ambivalent space of both reassurance and danger, to reveal the significance of the characters' decisions in the three novels to either continue walking along a path or to abandon it. Some of these walking characters are then analyzed through the symbolic figure of the zombie, serving as a caricature of technological and capitalist alienation. The chapter eventually focuses on the theme of hunting, framed by the tension between chasing and being chased in the novels. The vocabulary used to describe the walking characters reveals objectification, sexualization, animalization as well as dehumanization of human bodies.

1. Walking on capitalist roads or fleeing from their influences

Roads in the three novels' post-apocalyptic worlds have kept their symbol of consumption and capitalism. This section delves into the symbol of the road in *The Road* as an ambivalent place of reassurance that attracts walking characters but puts them in danger of being consumed. In *The Marrow Thieves*, the walking characters know this danger and thus flee in the welcoming natural environment, creating a dichotomy between city roads and paths of the forest. In both novels, the post-apocalyptic road is caricatured as a consuming monster. Therefore, looking at the choice of path from all three novels' characters reveals a persistent state of alienation from the symbolic road as a remnant of the capitalist postmodern society.

An ambivalent place: the road in *The Road*

In *The Road*, the man and the boy come back to the central physical space of the road. The walking characters always stick to roads or anything that can be seen as the ordered line of a path: along a hill, a wall, a dead tree row, a river – knowing that any natural element has now become as dead or concrete as a road: “the creek looked like a path of basalt winding through

¹ To read more: Martin Walter analyzes walking in the post-apocalyptic space as a criticism of postmodern mobility and migration. Through the nomad-like quality of outsiders and the roaming of spaces, one can see the representation of the effects on identity-making under globalized hyper capitalism: a come back to a hunter-gatherer lifestyle which also implies violence when meeting strangers, embodying the exclusionary logic of migration (Walter 2019: 147). In *The Road*, the last survivors are named as “refugees” and “migrants” (TR: 28) or even “fugitives” (TR: 198) which also ironically recalls the contemporary migrative politics.

the woods.” (*TR*: 36) The place of the road in McCarthy’s novel is one of the last – more or less standing – trace of the order of the past world, which creates a sense of reassurance for the walking characters. Martin Walter who analyzes movement and space in post-apocalyptic fiction argues that post-apocalyptic spaces “address both a perturbed familiarity and discourses of global (in)security” (Walter 2019: 134-135). Even if the world setting has changed after the collapse, the characters return to follow their map and what remains of roads because that is what is left of what they always knew.

Bringing an illusion of security, the road however remains a place of capitalism. The environment in *The Road* is constantly described as the ruins of capitalism: cars, supermarkets, trolleys, billboard advertisements and logos of vanished companies,... Jordan J. Dominy, who analyzes *The Road* under the scope of the end of capitalism in his article “Cannibalism, Consumerism, and Profanation”, explains that “these images of marketing, branding, and shopping have survived the catastrophe and serve as markers of past consumption that have outlived its own heyday.” (Dominy 2015: 148) The road as an ambivalent place of reassurance and capitalism transforms the last walking humans into consumerist looters. The boy walking through cities notices along the road the trace of the absence of objects looted by scavengers as the country has been “looted, ransacked, ravaged. Rifled of every crumb” (*TR*: 136-137). The only objects they find to help and protect them are grey, non-organic, industrial objects in aluminum, metal, and plastic materials. The repetition of unnatural materials, like plastic (*TR*: 3 – three occurrences in one sentence), is an “extreme parable warning of an entire globe commodified and converted to waste” (Dominy 2015: 144). However, the industrial leftovers and waste found on the road like plastic suitcases or electrical appliances that once were possessions of travellers are not the only ones as a substantial number of corpses and human remains are also lying along the road:

By then all stores of food had given out and murder was everywhere upon the land. The world soon to be largely populated by men who would eat your children in front of your eyes and the cities themselves held by cores of blackened looters who tunneled among the ruins and crawled from the rubble white of tooth and eye carrying charred and anonymous tins of food in nylon nets like shoppers in the commissaries of hell. (*TR*: 192)

This extract depicts how the world of *The Road*, emptied of any food resources, leads humans to take the path of cannibalism, therefore persisting in participating in the past economy even if it means “loot” and capitalizing on other humans as the last commodity. The mentioned teeth and eyes, inedible parts of the human body, are the new post-apocalyptic waste, remnants of cannibal feasts. On the one hand, people-eating humans are compared to monsters as they

“crawl” like beasts instead of walking. On the other hand, they are compared to “shoppers in the commissaries of hell” as they unethically look for human bodies as resources to consume. The two characters of *The Road* are therefore in danger and merchandised by their presence on capitalist roads.

Consumption of bodies in this novel is a survival option that cannibals have chosen, but the man and boy refuse any act of cannibalism, even if it means to starve looking for food on empty roads and buildings around with their shopping cart. Yet the choice to loot any resource left still sustains a consumerist way of living. As Dominy states, “The association of looting the city with shopping at the company store emphasizes not only the totalizing reach of commercialism but also conflates the consumerist and survivalist impulse.” (Dominy 2015: 148) Therefore, to survive in *The Road* is equal to consuming any resources on the road. Even such an apocalyptic end, Dominy concludes, does not spell the termination of consumerism (Dominy 2015: 144). The post-apocalyptic road embodies again ambivalence, as a trace of past capitalism, but also a prolongation of it.

Therefore, the post-apocalyptic road as a consumerist and capitalist place influences and transforms walking characters into consumers. By examining how humans are named in the novel, one can see that their identities are consistently linked to walking and consumption. First, the language of walking widely invades *The Road*, articulated through a varied and nuanced vocabulary that reflects the importance of movement in the novel. Walking has always been at the “core of our human experience” and thus has shaped the language with rich linguistic associations and expressions, nouns, adjectives and verbs of motions (Amato 2004: 6-7). However, the language of *The Road* goes even further as each mentioned or secondary characters are given an appellation implying a particular mode of movement. Epithets to characterize any human of this post-apocalyptic world are walking related as “the marchers (TR: 95) or “the travelers” (TR: 171). These denominations show that walking has become the characters’ way of life – or survival. Then, walking identities also imply capitalistic behaviors. The character stealing the caddie is named “the thief” (TR: 273) and the others are “the marauders” (TR: 15), while both pillar and body consumers are “the scavengers” (TR: 203). Moreover, the roads are controlled by “roadagents” who have an occupying power on roads and will consume human they encounter on their way.

Every character in this world is indeed considered a robber, of goods or bodies as humans are now resources. When the father and son meet Ely on the road, the old man first expects them to rob him. When the father reacts by saying “We’re not robbers”, Ely replies “What are you?”, since *The Road*’s walkers think there is no other way to live in this post-apocalyptic world. Moreover, the character of Ely is the only one to have a name, but it is false

as he is a decoy put on the road to attract people for the cannibal roadagents. The father uses a commercial metaphor to describe his role: “a shill for a pack of roadagents” (*TR*: 183). A clue through the description of his way of walking also indicates that the character is part of the consumers and not consumed because he fears no chase: “The traveler was not one for looking back” (*TR*: 171). In conclusion, the characters walking on the road in *The Road* think that to capitalize and consume is the only way to survive in this post-apocalyptic world.

Dichotomy of places: roads of the city or paths of the forest

The only characters in *The Road* that do not consume human bodies nor capitalize resources are the “good ones” who live inland and share what they have with each other. The road is presented in many ways as the domain of the “bad guys”, the cannibals, the walkers who consume bodies, while those whom father and son call the “good people”, are the non-cannibalistic community who keep out of the road and live in what is left from nature. In *The Marrow Thieves*, a similar dichotomy of places in terms of consumption is drawn between the road and the woods.

First, at the end of *The Marrow Thieves*, a revolutionary battle happens at the intersection of road and forest where the characters face off against the Recruiters to retrieve Minerva, a valuable member of their community, from them. On one side, the Recruiters, the consumers of Indigenous bodies, drive in their fast, industrial cars on the road. On the other side, the Indigenous characters, who are objectified and consumed as resources, walk cautiously and slowly in the forest. Hiding in their protective trees, they try to stop this ethnic elimination. The road is thus the field of consumers while the forest is the space that protects the fugitives.

Therefore, roads as spaces of violence create real terror for the indigenous people who are consumed if they stay in the city. The characters are not defined as humans by the city population, but as “product[s]” (*TMT*: 92), “just commodities” (*TMT*: 102), “bodies” (*TMT*: 203), “served up like a club sandwich to the dreamless” (*TMT*: 145). This is why the characters take refuge in the woods, “migrating inward” (*TMT*: 87), as far away from the danger and the “unknown of the city” (*TMT*: 141) as possible. Martin Walter, analyzing post-apocalyptic spaces, recalls that “following this ‘unwritten law’ of apocalyptic fiction, moving to the fringes is commonly seen as a form of securing the body, while urban settlements are often rendered as dangerous places.” (Walter 2019: 143) A dichotomy of places is thereby created in the ambivalent post-apocalyptic setting.

An extract exemplifies this distinction between the two places: “I’d spent most of my early life in the crumbling east end of the city, surrounded by urban decay and concrete waste where the skyline looked like a ruined mouth of rotted teeth. That is, except for these last few

years out in the bush where we ran and home was a campfire and a canvas tent (...)." (*TMT*: 59) In this extract, the lexical field of the city and its roads, that is similar with the one in *The Road*, depicts the ruins of capitalism ("crumbling", "decay", "concrete", "waste") that are unwelcoming, contrasting with the paths of the forest that creates a sense of "home". The city in the first sentence is also compared to a hungry monster, described as "a ruined mouth of rotted teeth". Another example of the description of the urban setting as a monster in *The Marrow Thieves* is page 106 where a character calls the government schools "monsters who stayed there, ingesting [their] children like sweet berries, one after the other, for over a hundred years" (*TMT*: 106). McCarthy also compares the road to a monster at the beginning of the novel when the father explains his dream of the road eating them: "Like pilgrims in a fable swallowed up and lost among the inward parts of some granitic beast." (*TR*: 1) The road is here a granitic beast, that is also later depicted as a dangerous devouring hot macadam which melts the walkers' shoes and so consumes their valued survival essential (*TR*: 50). The road is portrayed as a monstrous, ogre-like embodiment of capitalism. As a result, the Indigenous characters in *The Marrow Thieves* and the "good ones" in *The Road*, threatened by the risk of being consumed, seek refuge in the woods.

Characters' choices of path: to stay consumer or flee consumption

Walking on the road or not is a choice the characters make. The characters in *The Road* but also *Station Eleven* choose to go back to the reassuring roads. For instance, in *Station Eleven*, Jeevan leaving the now uninhabitable city, instinctively starts his journey on the road and a few decades later, characters continue to walk on the road as a place of memory. The Travelling Symphony follows the road as if it were the only path, avoiding going inland (*SE*: 56). Even the leader of this moving community has the foreshadowing surname of "the Conductor", her identity linked to past car drivers. By contrast, the characters in *The Marrow Thieves* flee and avoid the road to walk on the paths of forests, even if it means leaving habits of the past to enter the unknown of the nonhuman world. The characters understand that the unknown of non-humans becomes less dangerous than the new unknown the city has become.

This choice of path is significant to the ideologies of the three novels' characters. Walking on the same path as others before is, according to Rebecca Solnit, to pursue the same ideas: To walk the same way is to reiterate something deep; to move through the same space the same way is a means of becoming the same person, thinking the same thoughts (Solnit 2001: 68). The choice to keep walking on the road for the main characters of *Station Eleven* and *The Road* hence shows how the walkers are still alienated from postmodern era and its capitalist ideologies. In contrast, the walking characters of *The Marrow Thieves* who return to their

ancestors' paths in the forest demonstrate that a respectful and non-consumer way of walking with the last living beings and the environment is still possible in a post-apocalyptic world.

Nonetheless, this walking alienation in *The Road* and *Station Eleven* with the road is not set in stone. Some walking characters get to learn another way of walking in the post-apocalyptic world. In *Station Eleven*, Jeevan understands that it is better to avoid roads and towns to escape human violence, thus ending his travel mostly in the woods (SE: 193-104). At the end of *The Road*, the boy encounters the good people who live inland and offer him to stay with them: "You can stay here with your papa and die or you can go with me. If you stay you need to keep out of the road. I don't know how you made it this far." (TR: 303) The boy then follows the community who is used to non-road places which sends a powerful message of hope: moving away from the road and its habits and becoming less afraid of the unknown of the woods is possible. The two novels therefore offer a shift in the way the road is considered. A departure from the road might end the alienation from consumerist and capitalist behavior. Before looking at this hopeful change of path, the three novels offer other figures of alienation.

2. The figure of the zombie: an allegory of postmodern alienation

If the road is a symbolic place of consumption, walking characters on roads are figures of consumption as well, especially when characterized as zombies. The figure of the zombie has its origins in Haitian myths. Robbed of its self because of voodoo magic, the human body becomes a witless shell used for slave labor (Boon 2011: 57). Then, zombies merge with flesh-eating ghouls in Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) (Boon 2011: 57). Nowadays, the figure of the zombie is massively portrayed in contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction as post-human cannibalistic creatures. From TV series like *The Walking Dead* (2010-), novels like *World War Z* (Brooks 2006) or especially video games like *The Last of Us* (2013-), the collapses of society are due to viral pandemics such as viruses or fungi infections that wiped out most of humanity and let the few humans left fighting zombies. The figure of the zombie in post-apocalyptic fiction consists of a mindless consumer driven by relentless hunger. Often illustrated in groups, zombies are an army of unreasonable and emotionless monsters.

Zombies, as Martin Walter states, "have become so familiar that audiences hardly seem to question them." (Walter 2019: 136) However, this walking figure is used in contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction to highlight and satirize many contemporary issues such as dehumanizing technology, exhaustive hyper-productivity or blind consumerism. The scholars Pearson and Scott, analyzing zombies in post-apocalyptic narratives in "Dead Narratives: Defining Humanity Through Stories", claim that many have suggested that zombies represent

the logical conclusion of a commercial, capitalist society (Pearson and Scott 2016: 166) because the only remaining purpose of a zombie is relentless consumption.

Moreover, to find any food – or rather human – to consume, zombies need to walk. Walking is one of the main characteristics of zombies which is why it can be found in their very name, as the “walkers” in *The Walking Dead* (2010) or the “stragglers” in *Zone One* (Whitehead 2011). Therefore, even if the characters in the three novels are not literal “zombie” characters like in another zombie post-apocalyptic fiction, this thesis considers most of them as ones because they are alienated walkers who live only to consume other humans. The second section of this chapter examines the walking figures in the three novels as satirical zombie representations of postmodern overconsumption, as well as technological and corporate dehumanization. In *The Road*, the “bad guys” chasing humans can be seen as zombies as they engage in immoral acts of cannibalism and slavery to consume newborns. However, particular attention is paid to the two non-cannibal protagonists who can also be analyzed as zombified because of their shopping cart that maintains them on the road only to look for food. In *The Marrow Thieves*, the “dreamless” hunters who consume the Indigenous People’s bodies are like unethical and unreasonable zombies. Finally, in *Station Eleven*, corporate workers of the pre-collapse world are defined as ghosts or iPhone zombies who unconsciously walk in the street, eyes on their screens.

The Road: the symbol of the cart zombifying humans

In *The Road*, the zombie figure is polyvalent. First, cannibals in this post-apocalyptic world can be considered people-eating zombies as a metaphor for unrestrained consumerism. However, cannibals are not the only zombie figures in the novel. Even if they have chosen to avoid cannibalism, the man and the boy are also endlessly walking only in search of food. The vocabulary chosen to describe their way of living and walking recalls those of a zombie. For instance, the mother argues with the father about their identity claiming that they are not “survivors” but “the *walking dead* in a horror film.” (*TR*: 57 – italic added for the argument), acknowledging that “walking dead” is a synonym of zombie. Later, the father himself makes several comparisons between their way of walking and a consumerist state of the past such as when they “plodded on, thin and filthy as street addicts” (*TR*: 188), “wandered through the rooms like skeptical housebuyers” (*TR*: 220) or when Ely the decoy dwindled “like some storybook peddler from an antique time” (*TR*: 185).

Moreover, the man and boy’s zombie ways of walking are reinforced by a symbol of consumerism that they drag on their way: the shopping cart in which they keep their food, blankets, and other survival items collected from houses, service stations and even

supermarkets. The symbol of the cart denounces their ironical dependence on it and how absurd it is. The cart is a heavy burden that prevents them from walking where they want and being more discreet when they could have a small backpack. While they carry the cart, the object participates in the way they consume and collect goods. Joseph Amato argues that walkers can be interpreted “not just by how and with whom they walked but also by what they carried and how and why they carried it.” (Amato 2004: 9) Therefore, the man and the boy can be analyzed according to how and why they carry the cart despite everything. On the one hand, the trolley they carry along the road portrays them as consumers who always want to collect more in their basket. For instance, the cart storage for what they could gather has a limit, but the father, like a consumerist mind, fills it more than he should out of fear of a shortage that he knows will happen (*TR*: 245). On the other hand, the way they carry the cart also demonstrates how alienated they are from this symbol of consumerism. The father is used to leaning on the cart, so more than just carrying it, the cart carries him too. The father kept leaning on it like a cane (*TR*: 35, 202, 293...) and when the thief stole it, he “bent over the loaded cart” (*TR*: 273) as well. The ironical survival need of the trolley assistance highlights human alienation from the capitalist system. A last mockery is shown by the father’s personalization of the cart: “he fashioned sweeps from two old brooms he’d found and wired them to the cart to clear the limbs from the road in front of the wheels.” (*TR*: 18) The word “limbs” is ambiguous as it means both tree branches and human body parts. Therefore, the shopping cart has zombified his way of walking as he overlooks the awful act of sweeping human bodies like insignificant dust.

The Marrow Thieves: humans zombified by the greed of capitalism

In *The Marrow Thieves*, societal and social structures are told to have fallen alongside the environmental collapse. However, the population continued to work, finding comfort in the familiarity of their routines: “Those that were left worked longer, worked harder. And now the sun was gone for weeks at a time. The suburban structure of their lives had been upended. And so they got sicker, this time in the head. They stopped dreaming. And a man without dreams is just a meaty machine with a broken gauge.” (*TMT*: 88) In this extract, the suburban population of *The Marrow Thieves* which is defined by consumption and corporation try to stay sane in the fall of society, but when working is not possible anymore, they lose what defines them and so their self. As zombies who lose all humanity, they become the “dreamless”. They lose all hope but also all goals: “like factory machines at the end of a shift: functioning, purposeful, and then just out.” (*TMT*: 88) Reduced to mechanical, mindless beings, they are dehumanized, reduced to utilitarian roles. The ironic comparison of humans with machines in a time when industry has already fallen highlights the pursue of capitalist alienation.

The dreamless zombies then chase the walking characters to consume their bodies by drawing on their dreams – and thus hopes – by “siphon[ing] the dreams right out of [their] bones” (*TMT*: 89). *The Marrow Thieves* caricatures the postmodern consumerist mind through the illustration of a population ready to destroy and consume human bodies for their psychological comfort. The scholar Wendy Sterba argues, in her article “The Corporate and Corporeal: Min(d)ing the Body – Conscience and Consumption in Early 21st Century Hollywood Dystopia”, how “large multinational corporations with their propagation of rampant consumerism are turning people into mindless consumers – into veritable zombies.” (Sterba 2016: 203) The dreamless indeed consume human bodies remorseless.

Moreover, the population also markets the human bodies: “figuring out ways to hone and perfect their ‘solution’ for sale.” (*TMT*: 89) The phrase “solution for sale” designates the indigenous people’s bodies, hence underscoring the dehumanizing effects of capitalism. *The Marrow Thieves* satirizes capitalism by using commercial language to describe human beings, highlighting how postmodern system reduces everything to merchandise.

Moreover, *The Marrow Thieves* also illustrates another ambivalent motif of the zombie figure: how humans first chased by zombies can then turn into ones. Usually, zombies bite humans for them to be transformed into zombies as well. However, in this capitalist and consumerist metaphor, *The Marrow Thieves* transforms the indigenous traitors into mindless consumers because of greed. Wendy Sterba comments on the irony of the zombie shift: “In an ironic ‘turn’, the consumed could also be transformed into the consumers.” (Sterba 2016: 203) Indeed, in addition to the dreamless ones that hunt the natives to consume them, some indigenous people themselves turn against their own. Some “Cannibal Indians” (*TMT*: 167) who only desire meat (*TMT*: 115) are mentioned, but some are traitors who decoy, catch the natives they meet in the forest and sell them to the Recruiters: “‘Linc, we got the ‘cruiters coming any minute now. Every head is worth a fortune. Don’t damage any of ‘em.’ They were traitors. Indians turning in Indians for reward. I couldn’t believe it. I’d been lulled to complacency by the color of skin and an accent that made home feel real.” (*TMT*: 132). In this extract, the characters are again considered valuable commodities not to be damaged. The traitors reveal their capitalist nature which causes the young indigenous narrator to understand that he has been fooled by the traitors’ appearance. Just as a zombie appears human but is driven solely by hunger to consume, the traitors may share the skin color of their community, yet they are zombified from within by a capitalist spirit.

Station Eleven: the corporate and tech zombies

In the same way *The Marrow Thieves*' population mindlessly kept working, some characters in *Station Eleven* embody corporate walking zombies. In both pre- and post-collapse world, *Station Eleven* depicts the characters as a zombified corporate mass walking through repetitive and busy behaviors.

On the one hand, the pre-collapse narrative of *Station Eleven* offers both corporate and technological zombies as a mockery of postmodern hyper-productive and digital society. The alienation from postmodern society haunts two corporate characters, Miranda and Clark. The first is working in a shipping company that seems to make people depressed and lonely. The character compares the corporate workers she observes to a "skeleton crew walking the empty room and corridors, their footsteps echoing." (*SE*: 28), emphasizing the pointless relentless walking of corporate workers. On pages 160 to 164, Clark, who is a corporate coach, is walking through New York to go to an appointment:

Twenty-third Street wasn't busy – a little early for the lunch crowd – but he kept getting trapped behind *iPhone Zombies*, people half his age who *wandered in a dream* with their *eyes fixed on their screens*. He jostled two of them on purpose, walking faster than usual, upset in a fundamental way that made him feel like punching walls, like running full-speed, like throwing himself across a dance floor although he hadn't done that in two decades. (...) A young woman stopped abruptly at the top of the subway stairs and he almost cashed into her, glared as he brushed past – *she didn't notice, enraptured by her screen*. (*SE*: 160-161 – italics added to support the argument)

In this passage, the streets are invaded by the mass of walkers zombified by their screens. These "iPhone Zombies" wandering in a technological "dream" is an ironic portrayal of the alienating postmodern desynchronization where walking is not a way of thinking anymore. Hartmut Rosa in *Resonance, une sociologie de la relation au monde* analyzes how the way one walks means a lot about the way of being in the world. Walking with the head down or eyes on the screen, as in this passage from *Station Eleven* denounces and exemplifies a zombified state: « La société moderne est en passe de se transformer en une 'culture du regard baissée' (et de la nuque courbée), et il y a fort parier que notre rapport physique au monde devrait s'en ressentir. »² (Rosa 2018: 83). Walking workers in this passage are not even looking forward, not present in society, and are therefore shown disconnected from the world because of their screens and jobs.

Moreover, in the extract above, Clark intentionally changes his walking rhythm to bump into the passer-by in an attempt to wake them from their numb state but also criticizes their

² Personal translation: Modern society is in the process of becoming a 'culture of eyes down' (and of bent necks), and it is likely that our physical relationship to the world could be affected.

mechanical walk and their non-awareness of their surroundings. However, the character then meets a corporate worker who leads him to re-examine himself. The worker criticizes how adulthood, like the corporate world as well as the “horror show” that is academic, is “full of ghosts” (SE: 163). Again, humans are compared to figures of monsters disconnected from the world to criticize repetitive corporate behavior: “iPhone zombies” (SE: 160), “ghosts” and “high-functioning sleepwalkers” (SE: 163). These ironical monstrous identities denounce how people are trapped day after day to do what is expected of them (SE: 163), which *passes* (in italics in the novel) for life but “nothing ever jolts them awake.” (SE: 164) Clark realizes then how he is a zombie corporate as well: “He had been *sleepwalking*, Clark realized, *moving half-asleep through the motions of his life* for a while now, years; (...) He wished he could somehow go back and find the iPhone people whom he’d jostled on the sidewalk (...) – I’m sorry, I’ve just realized that I’m as minimally present in this world as you are, I had no right to judge.” (SE: 164) Reconsidering his position in the earlier crowd, Clark realizes he is not the subversive walker he thought he was, but a full member of this crowd of sleepwalkers. The character understands that while walking in the NY mass, he is a hard-working, anonymous and busy walker as hostile as the zombie crowd³ he is crossing. Clark walking quickly to an appointment for a job he does not like transforms himself into a hostile competitor “bumping” into others, not ready to meet others either. This passage from *Station Eleven* denounces the walking paradox of the postmodern era: walking is originally a social activity but in a hyper-productive and corporate society, humans turn into non-communicative zombies and therefore find themselves disembodied and individualistic.

On the other hand, characters of the post-collapse narrative have pursued the past zombie behavior. *Station Eleven* demonstrates how human alienation is pursued even after the end of society. Humans stay obsessed with technological devices with the recurrent motif of the air-conditioner, the civilization defined by the Internet (SE: 262: “They were told about the Internet, how it was everywhere and connected everything, how it was us.”) and the electricity as hope. Moreover, humans stay socially conformed to what remains of the established order. For instance, at the collapse of society, most people at the airport leave for roads even if they know everything is impassable or shut down, “because the voice over the intercom had said that they should.” (SE: 237). Those who stay at the airport pursue the day-to-day – even if now survival – productive demands as the corporate zombies from the past world. People mentioned in these two examples are still asleep, mindless zombies walking or rather following without

³ In *Marcher, une philosophie*, Frédéric Gros conceptualizes the modern alienated masses – or *foules* – as “laborieuses, anonymes, affairées” and “hostile à chacun de ceux qui le composent.” (Gros 2008 : 237)

questioning what a supposed superior authority would give them as a reason to live, which is why the novel satirizes blind consumer culture.

Another example of mindless following walkers in *Station Eleven* is the people who require new gods, the “religious wanderers” (SE: 261). They become cult members, named “followers”, “walking all together in a clump” (SE: 272). Blinded again, they do not question the awful sexual and violent atrocities of the cult leader. The last embodies a zombie figure as he walks to find women, not to eat, but to sexually consume. In a capitalist spirit, he chooses and chases women he desires and gathers communities of people he “manages” (SE: 54). The conductor of the Travelling Symphony analyzes “how corporate of them” (SE: 54) this management of human bodies is.

In conclusion, each novel offers figures of zombies as allegories of postmodern ideologies. From the consumerist and capitalist zombies in *The Road* and *The Marrow Thieves*, the corporate zombies in *The Marrow Thieves* and *Station Eleven* as well as the technological zombies in *Station Eleven*, characters find themselves zombified by the alienation created by extended capitalist, hyperproductive and technological systems. The use of zombie figures that produce shock and fear to readers helps to denounce this alienated relationship with the world.

Moreover, as the figure of the walking zombie is omnipresent in the three novels, it draws attention to how the characters consider a lack of options other than consumption which echoes the concept of Capitalist Realism. This term coined by Mark Fisher (2009) refers to the difficulty of considering another alternative than that of dominant capitalism. However, just as the novels offer the possibility of leaving roads, they show the possibility of avoiding zombie behavior. For instance, in *The Road*, the shopping cart zombified them because it is an object made for a concrete path and not a path in the woods, forcing the man and the boy to stay on the capitalist road: “The cart was too heavy to push into the wet woods” (TR: 165) The object prevents the father from reconnecting with remnants of nature he could join and continues his consumerist acts. However, if post-apocalyptic zombie behaviors as cannibalism or looting are a consequence of “a mentality forged in the consumer-driven culture of late capitalist”, argues Laura Wright analyzing *The Road* in “Vegans, Zombies, and Eco-Apocalypse”, “then the boy, having never known that culture, remains outside of that mentality.” (Wright 2015: 513) The boy indeed is the only one besides the good ones of the end of the novel that “maintains a nonexploitative, empathetic morality that will necessarily shape whatever follows.” (Wright 2015: 522) Therefore, MacCarthy’s novel gives again some hope to the reader with a non-alienated character that ends up leaving the road but also carries the fire instead of the shopping cart.

3. Chasing or being chased

To consume humans, zombies chase them. As Dominy argues: “anthropophagy transforms every survivor into a consumer and to a potentially consumed person.” (Dominy 2015: 147) Another ambivalence is found around walking in these novels: characters are either hunting or are being hunted like animals.

All main characters of the three novels are walking to escape the consumption of their own bodies, whether as meat, resources or sexual objects. In *Station Eleven*, the Travelling Symphony finds itself confronted by a cult, directed by one of the few humans who claim superiority over others. The Prophet asks his followers to hunt others for his personal and sexual use, decreeing a power of possession, but also of life and death over humans. The cult thus tracks survivors not for survival reasons but only because of an egoistic desire for ownership of others, which recalls a materialist desire to always want more, beyond the necessities, even at the expense of the freedom of others. Moreover, this post-collapse hunting is again paralleled with methods of the pre-collapse world like the corporate concept of target coaching. Part four of the novel is dedicated to the two timelines inviting the reader to link the two kinds of hunting. In *The Road* and *The Marrow Thieves*, the principal reason the main characters are walking is because they are hunted for their bodies. The man and boy of *The Road* keep walking to find food, avoid the cold and stationary death, but most of all to escape cannibals, while in *The Marrow Thieves*, the walking community must keep walking to avoid being caught by the hunting Recruiters. As Miigwans the leader of the community explains to French, the young narrator of the novel: “We all do what we can to survive. Right now, they can chase us. And us? We can run.” (*TMT*: 55) Walking in these three novels is not for pleasure, but to escape, run away from people whose choice is either egoist, anthropocentric or unethical.

Hunting is thus a central action in these novels, through verbs, character comparisons, and ways of walking as walking is a part of this chasing act. The imagination of hunting is adapted to walking characters in post-apocalyptic settings. For instance, as the hunted are not animals but humans, the hunting tools, strategies and settings are adapted. In *The Road*, for instance, the tree stand is not a wooden hut among the trees anymore but a city child’s playhouse (*TR*: 121). Decoys used to attract prey are no longer lifelike models but living beings such as Ely in *The Road* or the traitors in *The Marrow Thieves*. Moreover, there is recurrent tracking of traces in all three novels. As Kirsten implies by describing the absence of the Travelling Symphony from the route by the lack of tracks or footprints (*SE*: 146), looking for others – or hunting them – is made by looking for their traces. This is why the man and the boy in *The Road* blur their presence by “leaving a maze of tracks” (*TR*: 110) when people hunt them, and

the walking community in *The Marrow Thieves* trains a specific walk to leave no traces for hunters: “we’d zigged and zagged our way to what seemed like an untraceable spot.” (*TMT*: 147) The lasts even recognize the predator or the prey by their pace or the shoes visible in their footstep’s traces: The predator is “light and cautious like a Recruiter on the prowl” (*TMT*: 30), and prey are “runners – quiet and travelling light” (*TMT*: 218) whose boots are “not the mesh runners of the recruiters” (*TMT*: 219). If characters and their presence are defined by their pace, traces, and direction, one can see how these post-apocalyptic characters in their essence are either chased or chasing.

The novels’ adaptations of the imagination of hunting allow readers to identify and be in empathy with the hunted beings now human. This zoomorphism serves a satirical purpose to denounce the cruelty of hunting and, by extension, of power dynamics and oppression of a capitalist system. Different readings around hunting and animalization in these novels are therefore possible to denounce control over personal freedom. First, nomadism in contrast with sedentarism caricatures the last as a negative habit. Then, a return to slavery in the three novels denounces blind consumerism. Finally, by animalizing, objectifying and reducing the characters to chased bodies, the novels denounce both gender alienation that dehumanizes women and the non-regenerative capitalist relation to the nonhuman world.

From sedentarism to nomadism

Both *The Marrow Thieves* and *The Road* reconnect with a form of instinctive nomadism because they must run from people chasing them. An ambivalence is found in the characters’ behaviors between nomadism – being chased – and sedentarism – chasing. In *The Road*, the motif of the map shows how the way of living according to movement has changed after the collapse: “He’d pored over maps as a child, keeping one finger on the town where he lived. Just as he would look up his family in the phone directory. Themselves among others, everything in its place. Justified in the world. Come on, he said. We should go.” (*TR*: 194) The before-collapse is, in this extract, remembered as a stationary comforting order while the post-collapse is now summed up by movement. To move is the secure way to live in both novels’ post-apocalyptic worlds: To survive, the characters must walk. In both novels, a scene shows how they find warmth, food, and comfort in a shelter, but both leaders, the father in *The Road* and Miigwans in *The Marrow Thieves*, fear that the hunters will end up coming without being heard. For instance, after staying three days in the hotel, “everything in [Miigwan’s] gut sang ‘move, move, move’” (*TMT*: 75). His instinct tells him to keep moving to be safe as the shelter is an illusion of “less in danger and less chased” while they must “keep the will and instinct to keep moving altogether” (*TMT*: 92).

Moreover, while walking is required for the characters to survive, the cannibals of *The Road* and the dreamless hunters of *The Marrow Thieves* have chosen the path of sedentary life, except for hunting when their body reserves run out as if they were going shopping. Therefore, the unethical choice of human consumption is connected to sedentarism. In *The Road*, a passage exemplifies this dichotomy in behavior between unethical sedentarism and ethical nomadism: After the man and boy come across the camp of cannibals where they found “a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit” (TR: 212), the child comments that “If [they] had that little baby it could go with [them].” (TR: 213). While the bad ones sit and eat a baby, the boy would have included him in his nomad community. Walking and stationary metaphors are also used to explain bad behavior in *The Marrow Thieves*: “You either run or you find other ways to fit and get by” (TMT: 126). In this sentence, those who choose to not run are the traitors who thus become hunters. “They lost their way but don’t want to get back on the path.” (TMT: 115) In this other sentence, cannibalism is the unethical choice again used in a metaphor of not walking anymore. Both novels move away from sedentary culture as an illusion of comfort and order – but imprison humans in negative behaviors – to explore more nomadic ways of travelling due to post-apocalyptic circumstances.

To walk on others: capitalist power through the motif of slavery

However, the new nomadism also implies a loss of freedom of walking. The characters walk because they are chased for their bodies to be transformed into products to abuse, use or eat. Even if one can see sexual slavery in *Station Eleven*’s cult system, the focus is especially on *The Road* and *The Marrow Thieves* which make direct connections between slavery and blind consumerism.

First, *The Road* brings several slavery allusions during the travel of the man and the boy who observe traces of cannibalism. They come across both animals and humans hanging, dried, in a barn, like food (TR: 16), and at some point, walk through a cannibal territory: a cauldron before used for rendering hogs, a smokehouse and a human larder (TR: 115). *The Marrow Thieves* also mentions a human larder by a colony of townspeople who kept Indigenous as a “personal reservoir” by hanging them in a barn as well (TMT: 98-99). One can talk about the commodification of the world. As Gros explains in *Marcher, une philosophie* analyzing walking in cities, “tout devient objet de consommation, tout se vend et s’achète, s’offre sur le grand marché de la demande indéfinie.”⁴ (Gros 2008: 237-238). The walking characters of these two novels are seen as commodities for their hunters, which echoes colonialism and blind

⁴ Personal translation: Everything becomes an object of consumption, everything is bought and sold, offered on the great market of endless demand.

consumerism. The cannibal territory of *The Road* is set in an old colonial mansion, the man recalling how “Chattel slaves had once trod those boards bearing food and drink on silver trays” when they are crossing the porch (TR: 112). Then, *The Road* and *The Marrow Thieves* both reproduce the past colonial behavior of controlling the freedom to walk. On the one hand, *The Marrow Thieves* illustrates the return of the historical loss of indigenous freedom to put them in schools (TMT: 11). On the other hand, *The Road* illustrates this loss by one of the roughest images in the novel: an “army” of cannibals leading a marching formation of sexualized and animalized slaves. The fact that this commune is walking is a bad sign because it suggests cannibals are looking for food and so other prey, putting man and child at risk of enslavement and consumption.

An army in tennis shoes, tramping. Carrying three-foot lengths of pipe with leather wrappings. Lanyards at the wrist. Some of the pipes were threaded through with lengths of chain fitted at their ends with every manner of bludgeon. They clanked past, marching with a swaying gait like wind-up toys. (...) They passed two hundred feet away, the ground shuddering lightly. Tramping. Behind them came wagons drawn by slaves in harness and piled with goods of war and after that the women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant, and lastly a supplementary consort of catamites illclothed against the cold and fitted in dogcollars and yoked each to each. All passed on. (TR: 96)

This slavery walk recalls how colonial merchants transported slaves. Chained to the feet, they can only trample (“trampling” has two occurrences) therefore not free to walk normally. Chained to their hands, and treated like livestock, they do forced labour. Chained to their necks and forced to walk in packs, they are animalized like a band of sledge dogs, used and exhausted for fun and personal consumption. Moreover, the mechanical walking of the slaves as toys demonstrates dehumanization and objectification from the capitalist figures of cannibals and their authoritarian control. This extract therefore suggests capitalist control over personal freedom.

However, before people-eating monsters became a symbol of capitalism in literature, they were associated with African slaves or Native Americans. As Dominy argues in his article “Cannibalism, Consumerism, and Profanation, Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* and the End of Capitalism”, imagery of insatiable anthropophagy has been identified since colonial travel narrative, digging the difference between European civilization and barbarism (Dominy 2015: 144). However, British abolitionist writings also sensationalized cannibalism and used it as a motif to define civilization or critique imperialism and excessive consumption (Dominy 2015: 144). The motif of cannibalism has been used to emphasize the greed of consumer capitalism as it is visible in *The Road* through the distinction between the bad and the good ones. The

aversion to cannibalism is in *The Road*, Dominy states, a method for emphasizing the man and boy's humanity (Dominy 2015: 145-146). Moreover, the use of cannibalism from a segregationist construction of racial differences to a deconstruction of these differences is also found in *The Marrow Thieves* with a shift in positions: "Recruiter #3 stayed to satisfy his *sadistic* nature, and Recruiter #1 (...) didn't find this part interesting. The *chase* was the crux; after that, who cared how the *savages* screamed or cried?" (*TMT*: 172 – italics added to support the argument) Here, even if the indigenous are the hunted animals, the Recruiters are the ones who are sadistic cannibals, predators that consume other human bodies. Body consumption and slavery used in these two novels denounce both blind consumerism and the alienating power and greed of capitalism that dehumanize people.

Walking while female: gender alienation through female bodies as preys

These walking narratives also use dehumanization through walking to denounce the alienation of women. While walking, women lose their freedom, becoming objects of sexualization by male predators. The few women of the corpus are indeed sexualized, especially when walking. The novels demonstrate how male-dominated is the imagination of walking, and in this case, hunting.

There is indeed a sexualization of women characters in all three novels. *The Marrow Thieves* recalls several times how all women are constantly seen as sexual objects (*TMT*: 82), possibilities or phantasms by the men they walk with (*TMT*: 78). In *The Road*, the mother offers the man to see her as a "faithless slut" taking a new lover (death) (*TR*: 58) having a "whorish hearth" (*TR*: 59) for him to understand better her decision to stop walking with them. The sexualization of her vocabulary to excuse her suicide shows how women acknowledge the cultural conception of their bodies as sexual items.

This sexualization is the reason why women are under the threat of consumption while walking and therefore chased in these post-apocalyptic fictions. The hunters in *The Road* and *The Marrow Thieves* are animalized, which emphasizes the primal instinct of dominance and predation among men. In *The Marrow Thieves*, one of the Indian hunters is compared to a dangerous animal before kidnapping and killing a young girl: "The girls turned their backs to him (...) but you don't turn your back on a dangerous animal. (...) We didn't know that he was an animal we had yet to imagine could exist." (*TMT*: 129) In *The Road*, the hunting cannibals walking on the road with weapons and trucks are named after animals: road agents are named after "roadrats" (*TR*: 68) and Ely is compared to a "vulture broken in the road" having "scrawny claws" (*TR*: 174), himself saying how he lives like an animal because he eats other humans (*TR*: 183).

This bestiality in hunting is connected to masculine sexuality. In *The Marrow Thieves*, men are like beasts moving around “in packs” (TMT: 82), chasing women as game and fighting each other to see which one is the alpha who will win the woman as a prize (TMT: 185). A sexual scene between the teenage couple of *The Marrow Thieves* compares the excitation of French to a beast instinct hunting: “I swallowed hard and breathed slow and steady, like you do when you have game in sight, and you don’t want to scare it off.” (TMT: 72) This sexualization of women through the bestiality of men is also allegorized in the Indigenous myth that Minerva tells the young women. The old woman tries to warn them from men who are a constant threat on their paths via the story of the Rogarou: “the dog that haunts the half-breeds but keeps the girls from going on the roads at night where the men travel.” (TMT: 66) At the end of the myth, the beast is depicted as a “tall, naked man” who has “that hunger”. This hunger symbolizes the sexual desire. Walking women must therefore protect themselves from the sexual consumption of men by staying at home to “chase off hungry men.” (TMT: 67)

Through a metaphor of consumption and oppression in the three novels, the chase of women’s bodies sexualized them again as objects to be consumed by men. In *Station Eleven*, the cult chases the Travelling Symphony to get back a 12-year-old girl who ran away with the group as she was promised to the prophet to be an umpteenth sexual possession. The young girl is objectified through the consumption of her body: “You took something that belongs to us” (SE: 285), “She’s the property of the prophet” (SE: 286). As Carol J. Adams, feminist writer and animal rights activist, explains in her feminist-vegetarian critical work *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, “la consommation constitue l’accomplissement de l’oppression, l’annihilation de la volonté, d’une identité distincte⁵.” (Adams 2016: 101) Understanding sexual aggression as a consumption of their bodies, hunted women in *Station Eleven* lose their identity and their freedom through objectification and sexualization of their bodies.

However, the post-apocalyptic circumstances prevent women from protecting themselves in buildings for instance. Women who keep moving on roads and paths hence find themselves in the constant threat of men. Wab in *The Marrow Thieves* is attracted by a human “decoy” (TMT: 84) who makes her walk to men who rape her because she dared to use her running skills to make some money to survive. After being raped, men prohibit her from running (TMT: 85). Sexually abused for walking, then oppressed and dispossessed of her freedom to walk, the female character however resumes the running in an attempt to save her walking family from the decoy traitor. Another female character in *Station Eleven*, Kirsten, keeps walking and resisting the threat of men. Defined as a “woman, polite but lethal, who

⁵ Personal translation: Consumption is the fulfilment of oppression, the annihilation of will, of a distinct identity.

walked armed with knives through all the days of her life.” (SE: 267), she is independent, one of the most important narrative voices of the post-collapse story. However, she is always accompanied by another man, her friend, who ends up protecting her.

No female characters in the novels are therefore walking alone, always escorted or parented by men. The presence of women on roads, explains the scholar Solnit, is less likely to be read as a sexual invitation if they have male companions, “women’s best guarantee of public safety.” (Solnit 2001: 244) For instance, the Indigenous community recalls the need to “stick together and make sure the girls are in sight at all times” (TMT: 118) when they encounter strangers on the path. The young Rose also explains how her uncle “was charged with protecting [her] and he couldn’t trust no one with a little girl around. Jonas said [their] family had survived residential schools back in the old times and those stories were kept on down the line.” (TMT: 71) The first sentence implies that a girl walking is inherently threatened by men, while the second sentence implies that this threat has been there before the post-apocalyptic world. The post-apocalyptic novels by the motif of the chase highlight how women have never been and are still not free of walking alone, anytime, anywhere because of the sexualization of their bodies, the threat of their consumption and thus the oppression it creates.

Dehumanization by being chased: satire of non-regenerative industrialism

The hunters are not the only ones animalized as all tracked humans are animalized as well in the three novels. First, an animalization of the chased characters again dehumanizes them and highlights capitalist oppression. However, *The Marrow Thieves*’ characters also return to the classical hunting of animals but with respect and regenerative rituals, highlighting the contrast with the other way of hunting that destroys everything and everyone in massive extractions.

On the one hand, the hunters of these novels animalize the other characters in terms of movement in space. In *Station Eleven*, the Prophet brands like beasts of people who won’t submit to or follow him (SE: 204). In *The Marrow Thieves*, last standing industries high-fenced people off with razor wire edging, controlling where they can go or not like livestock (SE: 56-7). Therefore, the hunted characters end up adopting animal behavior to react to danger. For instance, the father of *The Road* trains the boy to “lie in the woods like a fawn” (TR: 124). At the end of his life, the father also walks inland, far from roads, because “they should find some place to hide where they would not be found” (TR: 295-6). Hiding in nature when death approaches is reminiscent of the behavior of a cat. Moreover, animalized ways of walking to escape the hunters are visible through several walking verbs or comparisons usually used for animals in *The Road* like to crawl (TR: 118, 134, 192), to clamber (TR: 294), to tramp like

parade horses (*TR*: 250), at a lope (*TR*: 110), to tread “the dead world under like rats on a wheel” (*TR*: 292), or in *The Marrow Thieves*, the characters walking with “speed and agility at the threat on our heels, jumping a narrow gorge and crossing a clover-filled clearing like gazelles with packsacks.” (*TMT*: 146-147)⁶ Animalization in hunting is such that the characters defend themselves like animals as well.

On the other hand, the characters of *The Marrow Thieves* are also considered as resources to “harvest” (*TMT*: 47) like plants for medicine while the schools where people harvest them are compared to “bushfires” (*TMT*: 147) as if the establishments were destroying grass rather than human bodies. In her analysis of *The Marrow Thieves* in “Spirallic Temporality and Cultural Continuity for Indigenous Sovereignty”, Laura Maria De Vos states how “much like their extractive relationship to the land, settlers did not attempt to enter in reciprocal relationships with Indigenous peoples; rather, they treat them like another resource to exploit.” (De Vos 2020: 18) The dehumanized characters as resources for the hunters is an ironical mirror to the excessive extraction of the lands that is said to be the cause of the apocalyptic collapse of *The Marrow Thieves*. The scholar Marco Caracciolo argues in *Slow Narrative and Nonhuman Materialities* that “If humanity faces the vast challenges of today’s climate crisis, it is because this Western view of nature as a set of “resources” to be harvested has become entrenched in a global financial system based on linear narratives of economic growth and technological progress.” (Caracciolo 2022b: 3) The illustration of harvested Indigenous people in *The Marrow Thieves* indeed points out how the extraction of natural resources has become systematic for a world of Progress without regard to any possibility of regeneration, which leads to its environmental apocalypse.

However, *The Marrow Thieves* does not claim that hunting can only be negative and non-regenerative. The hunting theme is also ambivalent regarding *The Marrow Thieves* which offers two sides of the same coin. The walking characters’ relationship to hunting is paradoxical since they are hunted, but they also hunt. Throughout their journey, the young characters learn how to hunt to get food and survive in the forest. Nonetheless, *The Marrow Thieves* brings a

⁶ Since humans are considered as hunted and consumed animals, one can see in this animalization a criticism of meat consumption and industry. Humans are animalized by the vocabulary which dehumanizes them just as animals have their living nature suppressed by the term *meat*. In all languages, the animal is objectified by the meat denomination as well as the generic pronoun *it* (Adams 2016: 128). A similar case is found in *The Road* with a roadagent eaten by cannibals for his flesh, leaving only his bones that the father defines with a definite article, “the bones” (73), and not “his bones” (analysis mentioned in Dominy 2015: 147). The animalization and dehumanization may highlights blind consumerism of meat industry as well as the unethical and cruel industrial attitude towards animals. Moreover, one can interpret a critique of its environmental repercussions, notably through the animal extinctions in *The Road* and *The Marrow Thieves* visible in the absence of animals during the characters’ journey.

distinction between the industrial hunt and a more positive and respectful one, hence demonstrating a more ethical and regenerative way of consumption.

During a hunting learning session, the young narrator, French, is looking for marks on the ground (*TMT*: 35), traces on the trees or fresh prints of animals (*TMT*: 45), but also learns to keep track of his direction when he walks, crossing twigs on his paths when he changes direction to find his way back without tipping off potential predators (*TMT*: 45). Therefore, the character learns to hunt while connecting with non-humans and inhabiting the environment rather than just colonize and exploit it. Indigenous hunting is actually a spiritual act: “Chez les Indiens d’Amérique du Nord, (...) la chasse est une occupation de première importance : suivre la piste de l’animal, c’est suivre la voie qui mène au Grand Esprit⁷. » (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1982: 246) The Great Spirit is illustrated in *The Marrow Thieves* by the Moose French meets when hunting. Without words, the animal and the character communicate, and French understands that it is not the time for the moose to die. This event changes the character’s perception and relationship with nature but also enables the reader to see a contrast with the exploitation of the other hunters. For instance, in *The Road*, hunting equals complete exploitation. After chasing the trolley thief and tracking his traces on the road, the father chooses to take the trolley but also the clothes of the thief. Leaving him like a “nude and slatlike creature standing there in the road” (*TR*: 276), the father chooses to kill him because the thief is now confronted by the cold and cannibals, defenceless. The father’s hunting leads to the death of the hunted man who is robbed of everything. Tim Ingold in *The Perception of The Environment* discusses the theme of hunting looking at Indigenous communities who maintain a proper balance with their manifold powers in their relationships with every being (Ingold 2000: 68). The scholar emphasizes how rather than seeing hunting as exploitation of environment – like the father in *The Road* – “it might be better to say that they aim to keep up a dialogue with it.” (Ingold 2000: 68) – as the dialogue between the moose and French.

Indigenous people are constantly illustrated in *The Marrow Thieves* in dialogue, peer-to-peer, with their environment, but also respect the hunted animals as they respect their passing elders through ceremonies since they “resurrected an old ceremony for that deer” (*TMT*: 101) or “allowed the deer to take his dreams with him so he had all the magic he would need to find the next world.” (*TMT*: 194). Ingold explains the idea that, following the successful hunt, animals enter the Indigenous community by being eaten, and so do not cease to be but still exist, albeit in another form (Ingold 2000: 143). The hunting rituals of indigenous communities allow the possibility of the animal’s return. Therefore, indigenous hunting enables nature and animals

⁷ Personal translation: Among the Indians of North America, (...) hunting is a primary occupation: following the trail of the animal is to follow the path that leads to the Great Spirit.

to have the possibility to regenerate by not killing them when it is not their time or giving passing rituals of regeneration when it is the case. In conclusion, the ambivalent hunting theme of *The Marrow Thieves* offers a good alternative to the industrial consumption that extracts the resources of the earth to the bone – or the “marrow”.

In conclusion, analysis of post-apocalyptic settings and characters' ways of walking on it reveals different paradoxes and ambivalence since the road is an illusion of security but is dangerous and turns walkers into zombies that consume but are also consumed, as well as chase and being chased. The symbolic place of the road, the consumerist and mindless way of walking of zombies as well as the hunting behavior have ironically shown in these novels that some human alienation and environmental negligence from the postmodern system have been continued in post-apocalyptic worlds. As Walter points out, post-apocalyptic settings exacerbate any problems that already existed initially: “Through the characters' nomad-like attitude towards space, that is, their specific form of movement through empty and hostile spaces, the underlying ideological tensions of a post-apocalyptic world are increasingly displayed.” (Walter 2019: 135) The motif of walking in these novels enhances the dystopian criticism capacity. However, each section of this chapter has also shown ways of walking to leave the path of alienation from capitalism and consumption. Characters are seen capable of moving away from the road to return to the unknown of the forest, ready to return to the harmonious natural path of their ancestors or instead to break with the alienated way of walking of a father. Regaining control of their bodies, and reconnecting with another form of consuming, characters may enter into discussion with the more-than-human world. The following chapters of this thesis attempt to show these new ways of walking.

Walking as a new epistemology

Walking in post-apocalyptic fiction is not only associated with consumption and fear but also a way to change behavior and move away from habits of the past. The novels bring a change of path from one of alienation to one of reconnection. The new path is taken after a long walking progression as a metaphor for a journey of life, enabling characters to learn new ways of thinking from the stories and experiences they live while walking. Therefore, walking is a way to learn and acquire new knowledge about human identity and the world.

In their article “Dead Narratives: Defining Humanity Through Stories”, Fiona Pearson and Ellis Scott analyze zombies and how survivors in post-apocalyptic worlds rely on their storytelling abilities to make sense of their situation to survive in an emotional order imposed when physical chaos prevails (Pearson and Scott 2016: 166). Pearson and Scott argue that “for most cultures, authors, and directors, zombies possess neither language nor cognition – thus, they cannot construct narratives in order to make sense of their world.” (Pearson and Scott 2016: 167) Zombies being incapable of storytelling, continue to live but only to satisfy their desire to eat, without understanding this very desire or their environment (Pearson and Scott 2016: 167). To counter these zombies’ mindless day-to-day hunting, a response is storytelling. *Station Eleven’s* Travelling Symphony is “trying to cast a spell, and costuming helped; the lives they brushed up against were work-worn and difficult, people who spent all their time engaged in the tasks of survival.” (SE: 151) Because “Survival is insufficient” (SE: 119), the Travelling Symphony dedicates its life to walking to share stories, joy and spirit with people, so they do not turn into desperate zombies. The father of *The Road* also tells stories to his boy throughout their journey to teach him hope and goodness while each member of the Indigenous community, during their night stops, shares the history of their people or their personal stories, creating solidarity, empathy and understanding⁸.

The previous chapter discussed how the characters transform into zombies as they pursue consumerist ways of walking. While these novels offer irony through the pursuit of postmodern habits, they also offer the possibility to move away from them as the characters walk. This chapter examines how characters grow and evolve through walking and storytelling along a symbolic path of life. First, the three novels are analyzed to show how the path serves as a metaphor for life, the walker as a metaphor for humanity, and how walking through life is not linear but cyclical, implying both a return to the past and growth toward the future. Then, one section focuses on the motif of storytelling and walking in *The Marrow Thieves*, while another is dedicated to the characters’ evolution through walking metaphors in *The Road*. Finally, the reader’s implication in the novels leads to catharsis and warnings.

⁸ To learn more about revelation of personal stories in a postapocalyptic zombie setting, see the example of *Walking Dead* by Pearson and Scott 2016: 172-173.

1. Stories of travels, life as a journey

To understand how walking serves as a means of growth for the characters, one must first understand the symbolism of walking and the path on which the characters walk. The path can be a metaphor for life in post-apocalyptic worlds, where continuing to walk despite everything becomes the choice to survive. Moreover, if the story of a journey symbolizes human life, the figure of the walker symbolizes humanity. Progression through walking thus shapes human identity and different ways of walking. However, walking through life is not a linear path, but a cyclical one, allowing walkers to return to the past to create a better future.

The path is an allegory of life, the walker is an allegory of humanity

Life has been considered as the narrative of a journey by several scholars like Rebecca Solnit who states that walking is a metaphor for traversing life (Solnit 2001: 72-73). To understand time and experience through life, humans tend to imagine a path on which they walk with other entities (Solnit 2001: 72-73). This is why the movement has invaded the language through expressions and metaphors, thus also invading narratives. Initially discreet, not perceived as central at first, walking is nonetheless a major theme to represent the evolution of a character through his past, present and future, especially in post-apocalyptic fiction.

The characters of these novels all walk through a metaphoric path of life – or the “road” of life as the father in *The Road* uses the prepositional paraphrase “On this road” (TR: 32) to mean the world he lives in. For instance, these narratives use literary allegories of life and death with walking or standing characters. In *The Road*, movement means being alive and surviving. When the boy loses the desire to live, he stops walking, and the father responds: “Come on”, “You have to come on” (TR: 104) because stopping along the road symbolizes the end-of-life journey. The point is also visible through the motif of destination: “When they got to the curve in the road the man was still standing there. There was no place for him to go.” (TR: 276); or through the loss in walking capacity: “(...) when he lay down, he knew that he could go no further and that this was the place where he would die.” (TR: 296) In *Station Eleven*, Kirsten, the main character of the post-collapse story, dreams that she is walking down a road with her walking companion August, but when “she turned and he was gone, she knew he was dead.” (SE: 283) The road here exemplifies the path of her life and her friend’s absence of the path means his absence in life. This is why in both *The Road* and *Station Eleven*, graves are along the roads, where the path of life ended for a person.

As in *The Road*, lifetimes are defined by metaphors of movement in *Station Eleven*: After the collapse, “some people would have turned back and retraced their steps for miles”,

staying on the past, and others “would have stepped off the road”, or in other terms, surrendered (*SE*: 298). Those who survived were those who decided to stop waiting for nothing and walk towards a future (*SE*: 188). Walking on the road demonstrates hope, the idea to keep going for a brighter future without death and struggle. Kirsten has “her eyes on the road” (*SE*: 131), symbolizing her desire to live, looking toward the future. *The Marrow Thieves* is of course not excluded from life metaphors with for example allusions such as “so that people have the hope to put one foot in front of the other.” (*TMT*: 108) In these three novels, walking means choosing life over death.

If a journey is an allegory of life, the figure of the walker is an allegory of humans. Moreover, by considering the figure of the walker as a symbol of human existence, post-apocalyptic narratives that return to walking characters may help increasingly sedentary postmodern readers to reconnect with a more grounded sense of what it means to be human: anchored and progressing in the world rather than motionless and alienated from it. The three novels define their characters through the identity of walkers who are the sum of their journeys after body and mental experiences along the way. Characters are presented by how their bodies kept traces of life events which is why in *Station Eleven*, a man is described by his “stiff way of moving that suggested an old injury” (*SE*: 145) or a war soldier by his incapacity to walk. The first impression of the father of French, the narrator of *The Marrow Thieves*, is also focused on his incapacity to hunt because of a leg injury.

Tim Ingold in *The Perception of the Environment* analyzes life as a trail on which humans move and evolve: “Every trail, however erratic and circuitous, is a kind of lifeline, a trajectory of growth.” (Ingold 2000:144). The scholar explains that humans tend to think of walking “as the spatiotemporal displacement of already completed beings from one point to another” while walking is more “the movement of their substantive formation within an environment.” (Ingold 2000: 144) This is thanks to the dynamic process of walking along “lines of growth” that humans learn about themselves and the world, therefore becoming progressively “the sum of their trails” (Ingold 2000: 144). In these novels indeed, ways of walking are part of the walkers’ identities and what they experienced along the path. For instance, Wab, a woman character in *The Marrow Thieves* is first a runner, then she turns to a more discreet way of walking because of a traumatism after being oppressed and abused for being a runner. However, she resumes running when she wants to save her community. A change in ways of walking reveals a human fluctuating identity which is why the walking characters of *The Marrow Thieves* talk about origins by asking “Where did you walk from” (*TMT*: 42) instead of “come from”. Representing life experience with what characters’ bodies and identities go through by walking, these novels argue that moving is what makes human

humans. Therefore, the sedentary, zombie behavior turned into irony in the precedent chapter is not immutable, characters while walking may progress and change of path.

The motif of cyclicity: walking is reconnecting with the past

Therefore, the path is not a constant progression nor a straight line. Walking the path of life is not a linear evolution, but a circular one: “Since to follow a trail is to remember how it goes, making one’s way in the present is itself a recollection of the past” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 17). Moving forward involves learning and relearning, especially by returning to the past. In the same idea, dystopian fiction offers a futuristic perception of the world while also illustrating a return to errors of the past, which is why capitalist traces and behaviors kept returning in these novels as already argued in the first chapter, but it is also why the characters keep returning to memories and artefacts of the past.

Temporal and geographical cyclicity is evident in the three novels through the act of remembering which is intertwined with walking. *Station Eleven*’s Travelling Symphony keeps walking in a circle, returning to the same cities. Following a single trail to stop at settlements, they are doing cycles so that they return to the same points several years later. This can be seen as a metaphor for their impossibility to let the past go. The characters of *Station Eleven* are still significantly anchored in nostalgia, archives and memories. They cannot forget about the past while walking as it holds their origins, identity and beliefs. For instance, Kirsten cultivates the idea that “the murdered follow their killers to the grave”, the souls dragged by the walker “across the landscape like cans on a string” (SE: 297), as if survivors carried their heavy past with them on their way. Humans of *Station Eleven* cannot and do not want to let the past go and they conserve it through stories, objects and traces they find along the road and carry with them while walking. The reading experience of this novel is itself a travel through the past to understand the characters’ present and future because of the structure and progressive unveiling of events. *The Marrow Thieves*’ characters also come back to the past by returning to the old lands. Walking on their ancestor path, they reconnect to old traditions such as rituals, and hunting knowledge, and so return to a peaceful relationship with earth. On the contrary, *The Road*’s father keeps struggling with his past and memories, returning to his old house for instance. The walking character does not collect but leaves his memory artefacts on the road. He tries to forget the past as he does not see a possible future and does not see a future in humanity.

Besides a cyclicity in paths, it is also found in humanity itself: someone is born and starts walking while another dies after having made his way. The narrative structure of *Station Eleven* for instance opens on Arthur, whose entire path of life will be told quickly throughout

the novel, dying in the theatre Jeevan describes as a “transitory” space like a terminal, an airport where everyone is passing quickly through (*SE*: 5). As for the end of the novel, it ends on a birth in the departure part of an airport. The cyclical structure of the novel uses the airport as a symbol of “coming and going” life. Ingold in *Perception of The Environment* argues that when a person dies, his or her life is not finished, as life does not start or stop (Ingold 2000: 143). Citing Deleuze and Guattari, Ingold explains that it is a matter of “coming and going rather than starting and finishing”, a particular person may come and go but the human life process continues (Ingold 2000: 143). The scholar also argues in *Ways of Walking* that even as humans mourn those whom they have lost, they still live on in the memories of those who follow their footsteps: “As one journey ends, others begin, and life goes on.” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 18) *The Marrow Thieves* takes part in this conception of cyclical life through the path of remembered ancestors, since the epigraph of the novel which reads “For the Grandmothers who gave me strength. To the children who gave me hope”. De Vos analyzing the Spiralic temporality and cultural continuity for indigenous communities explains that this epigraph already places *The Marrow Thieves* “into relation with both those who came before and those who are yet to grow or even to be born.” (De Vos 2020: 22) Additionally, the novel ends on a “smell of decay and rebirth clouding around [them].” (*TMT*: 219). The cyclical system of seasons recalls the cyclicity of life as they have lost Miranda but also found Isaac.

Post-apocalyptic walking narratives are thus playing with cyclicity on two levels. The theme of walking merges with the postapocalyptic genre to allow readers to understand the cyclicity of humanity, how errors that have not been corrected keep returning. Like pilgrims, readers learn while reading the journey of characters who themselves retrace the path of their ancestors.

2. Learning on the path of those who walked before in *The Marrow Thieves*

Walking on a path is an act of embracing past interpretations and experiences lived on this path. As already said in the past chapter, walking the same way connects you to those who walked on the path before you by reinforcing a shared way of being and thinking (Solnit 2001: 68). In the context of these post-apocalyptic novels, a debate is visible as to the relevance of learning the past way of walking the Earth given the chaos that it has generated. The consumptive way of walking is not an ethical path to follow, but it is not the only one that the walking characters can take. Concerning *The Marrow Thieves*, the characters leave the cities and roads to return to the path of their ancestors.

The Marrow Thieves denounces the history of cultural and language appropriation and violence against Indigenous communities of North America by colonizers who walked before on their Earth and still do. Suppression of their culture and history is once again attempted, this time by the puncture of their dreams and the destruction of the environment which impacts their way of life too. *The Marrow Thieves*' Indigenous Council understands, as De Vos explains, that to ensure a future on the dying Earth, they must unlearn Euro-western settler logic and start from the land: "It is crucial to reconceive of the world in a way that will not inevitably lead to another repeat of violence like the coming of early explorers and settlers, like the residential schools, like the destruction of the environment." (De Vos 2020:25) Therefore, although the reason they walk is because they are being chased, the characters take the opportunity to change their path, to walk in the footsteps of their ancestors instead of those of the Westerns. Walking in the forest, they reconnect with their memory and precious words and carry their traditions.

The motif of storytelling: reconnecting with the past to move forward

Walking is a way for the characters to maintain a relationship with ancestors' History and therefore to uncover the knowledge of the lands and many hidden narratives coexisting in the path. On the one hand, ways of knowing are transmitted through genetic inheritance. The novel uses, De Vos points out, "the familiar images of 'blood memory' and bone marrow to embody Indigenous ways of knowing and being in ways they can be passed on" (De Vos 2020:16) The dreams in their blood and bones memory is what allows the characters to keep walking with hope but also acquire survival knowledge and instinct while walking on the lands. On the other hand, what is not genetically inherited but transmitted from older to younger while walking is the Story – with a capital letter, personified as sacred. Several chapters of the novel are dedicated to the ritual of the storytelling of "Story" which consists of the History of the Indigenous People who walked on the earth before the first school system settled, as well as what happened at the collapse when the second school system returned. Indigenous origins are bounded by the lands the ancestors crossed which is why Miig indicate the ground when he begins "Story" (*TMT*: 22):

Miig stood, pacing his Story pace, waving his arms like a slow-motion conductor to place emphasis and tone over us all. We needed to remember Story. It was his job to set the memory in perpetuity. He spoke to us every week. Sometimes Story was focused on one area, like the first residential schools: where they were, what happened there, when they closed. Other times he told a hundred years in one long narrative, blunt and without detail. Sometimes we gathered for an hour so he could explain treaties, and others it was ten minutes to list the earthquakes in the sequence that they occurred, peeling the edging off the continents back like diseased gums. But every week we spoke, because it was

imperative that we know. He said it was the only way to make the kinds of changes that were necessary to really survive. (TMT: 25)

This extract demonstrates how storytelling and walking work along together. First, the storytelling journey takes as much time as their walking journey. The story is told over several weeks (“but every week we spoke”), each session punctuated by the stages of their history or lists of events and therefore metaphorically walks through ages and times. Then, the first sentence uses movement characteristics with the pace of the Story or Miigwan, the storyteller, compared to a “slow-motion conductor”. The character of Miigwan is thus as much the conductor of the story as the leader of the walking community. Therefore, while walking on the path of their ancestors, the community gets to learn about their history.

Moreover, the experience of Story is a journey of remembering each character must do. In the extract below, the young character says that there is an “imperative that [they] know” the story to learn what needs to change and how to survive. De Vos, commenting on the novel, adds that “for humans, our lives only make sense when we can understand ourselves as a part of a larger story when we can see our pasts and our presents in a way that helps us anticipate our futures.” (De Vos 2020: 23 – citing Chandler and Proulx) By confronting the truth and harsh reality through “Story”, the characters can acknowledge the past for the future not to return. If stories are not shared and listened to, Miigwan explains that one is not warned of the past experiences and so unaware of the danger: “Isaac didn’t have grandparents who’d told residential school stories like campfire tales to scare you into acting right (...). And I didn’t have time to share them, not now.” (TMT: 106-107) Isaac has paid the consequences of the fact that no older could pass on to him the stories of the past and so necessary learnings to avoid repeat experiences. *The Marrow Thieves* as a speculative fiction gives a lesson: history repeats itself when it is not taught.

Additionally, each member portrays himself through his own *coming-to* story, storytelling what each lived on the way to join the community. The way of knowing the History of their people and the identity of each individual is both made by sharing the story of the walking path. De Vos explains that cultural continuity enables *self-continuity* because *sharing* procedures and practices allow them to imagine and sustain a *shared* history and a *common* future (De Vos 2020: 23 – citing Chandler and Proulx, emphasis in the original). Storytelling while walking enables them to gather strength from the past and unite them in a common pathway forward. By walking and storytelling, the walking characters allow their heritage as well as their identity to keep going and persist in this post-apocalyptic world.

Walking as a way to true learning

Furthermore, walking is essential to acquire the true learning of stories. Elders share with young people stories and words as a needed key to keep strength and hope for a better future but the young Indigenous in turn could “[pass] on the teaching” (*TMT*: 214), knowledge must be acquired through walking experience. For instance, Minerva teaches the young people several words for them to reappropriate past language. According to Ingold in *The Perception of the Environment*, the source of knowledge does not lie in the heads of predecessors but in the world, they point out, hence the words gather their meanings from the contexts in which they are uttered (Ingold 2000: 146). Minerva indeed proceeds this way: “‘*Abwaad*.’ Minerva pointed to the birds on the grill.” (*TMT*: 109 – italics added to support the argument) However, it is only after walking together on the lands that the young Indigenous experience what is the true meaning of the words. For instance, they learn the word *Kiiwen*, “go home” (*TMT*: 211) which is completely understood by French at the end of his travel when he walks towards Rose, his “idea of home” (*TMT*: 217). “True knowledge” thus depends on the confirmation of stories in personal experience made by travelling the trails or visiting the lands of the knowledgeable elders telling (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 6). Ingold and Vergunst introduce the native people of Northwest Canada, the Tlicho, or Dogribs, for whom storytelling is not invested with didactic purpose or understood as a child-centered way of conveying valued knowledge and information, like it might be by Western educationalists: “simply having heard the stories is not enough to make an individual knowledgeable in the sense of having the capacity to take action.” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 5 – Citing Legat) Consequently, walking the land previously experienced by older generations is the very means by which Indigenous stories are converted into cultural knowledge and the continuity of knowledge is secured (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 6).

Moreover, walking the lands to learn is a metaphor for the passage from childhood to adulthood. In the first part of the novel, RiRi is not considered ready enough to hear the Story because she is too young. However, at some point, she eavesdrops on a part of it: “Miig sighed and motioned RiRi forward. ‘Come, daughter. Time to hear Story.’” (*TMT*: 86). Miigwan in his leader role, as a father, is going to teach to his adoptive daughter how the world is cruel, and she will have to learn by herself the veracity of these teachings. Ingold and Vergunst explain that “between hearing the stories and walking the land, there is therefore a transitional stage in children’s learning.” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 6) A passage exemplifies this transition when Miigwan asks the teenage French to climb a pine to check what is going on around them. The boy observes a massive deforestation by the Recruiters willing to build more schools. First, the

character wants to share what he saw to impress his first crush, not acknowledging his responsibilities and risking scaring others (*TMT*: 96). Therefore, Miigwan asks him to walk while listening to the coming-to stories of the different members of their community. He tells the stories of Minerva who was raped, Wab who was walking alone, unable to trust, Riri and Slopper who lost their parents to the schools, and Tree and Zheegwon who were held and used by townspeople (*TMT*: 98). These stories are hard for the teenage to hear; he begged for the storyteller to stop but the last continues with his own coming-to story (*TMT*: 99). The stories are then integrated by French as they “walked side by side for another twenty minutes.” (*TMT*: 108) As hard as the stories are, hearing them and reflecting on them while walking with his community allows the teenager to understand his responsibilities accordingly, even if it makes him “[miss] the innocence of an hour ago when [his] only concern was touching the hand of a girl, [he] thought[s] [he] might love.” (*TMT*: 109) Young people’s innocence is taken away when they step up into the path of growth by hearing stories.

To go further, Story traces the exploitation and violence of humans against the land and their people, but it is after French walks through the forest for months and ends up killing a dangerous traitor to protect his community that he realizes the importance of its teachings and the responsibility that each one gets when he grows up. This walking life in which he hunts, scouts, and deals with daily duties and the responsibility of others makes the character grow into the next phase of his life (*TMT*: 180). French is not the child who only needs to be protected by his parents anymore but becomes the adult who must protect the family he chooses (*TMT*: 180). *The Marrow Thieves*, as a young-adult novel, makes its main character evolve throughout the narrative as the journey of his life. The character leaves his childhood and begins a path of growth where walking through experiences leads him into adulthood.

Learning by walking in an environment

The Marrow Thieves’ characters indeed learn from Story told by Miig and words shared by Minerva or the coming-to stories of others, before experiencing life while walking with the members of the community. However, learning and walking is also made with and along the trees, the wind, the animals. To unfold their history, the characters walk and hunt in the forest and learn in cohesion with this environment.

For instance, the main character reconnects with the teachings of the ancestors through hunting. During one of these hunts, French encounters a moose – an extant species of deer – which plays a significant role in his journey of learning. As a symbol of a return to “primordial purity”, the deer is notable for placing its hind hooves precisely in the tracks left by its forehooves, which would symbolize the way one should follow the path of the Ancestors

(Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1982: 227). As a nonhuman character, the moose thus serves as a meaningful and instructive presence in the character's learning path.

Then, Indigenous people as hunters and nomads move with the cycles of nature as they walk, and hunt along the seasons, weather, animals and rhythms of nature. In her article, De Vos analyzes the Indigenous characters' complex relationship to the lands according to the "Spirallic Temporality". This concept refers to the characters' experience of time-related to the seasonal cycles of the lands as well as their acknowledgement of the present generations' responsibilities to the ancestors and those not yet born (De Vos 2020: 2). The scholar argues that the Indigenous concept of "land" refers more broadly to all relations in the place as every natural entity has agency (De Vos 2020: 2). Therefore, what matters is not *when* events happen but *where* and about what as "the past and the future are all relevant in the now, what matters is how the events or actors are related to a particular *place*." (De Vos 2020: 2 – italics in the original) The environment is therefore implied in their way of knowing since the heritage of knowledge is known by cyclical walking on specific natural places.

Moreover, in this post-apocalyptic new setting, the young Indigenous process their new mode of living and understand the new world around them by observing and growing with it through experience. For instance, Miig recognizes they are in April by seeing buds on trees, understanding they would find more cover from nature but also more sickness "because of the wet ground" (*TMT*: 93). Minerva having lost a baby from spring cough on the run, she teaches young indigenous to take medicine and be careful when they find these clues of nature in their way. In this passage, there is a collaboration between the Indigenous and the environment in the path of knowledge. Again, the Western, traditional and scientific understandings of knowledge as something humans acquire *about* the world living *on* it are challenged by the indigenous people's conception of *inhabiting* the world. In *The Perception of the Environment*, Ingold argues that Indigenous people learn by an "ongoing engagement with the land and with the beings that dwell therein" (Ingold 2000: 12) and so in a more true, immersive, relational and embodied experience.

In conclusion, *The Marrow Thieves* illustrates the Indigenous conception of way of knowing by walking as described by Tim Ingold: "The growth and development of the person, in short, is to be understood relationally as a *movement along a way of life*, conceived not as the enactment of a corpus of rules and principles (or a 'culture') received from predecessors, but as the negotiation of a path through the world" (Ingold 2000: 146 – italics in the original) Indigenous life as a walking journey allows the young characters to understand and extend Story's teachings through experiences, encounters and observations made while walking on the natural path of ancestors.

However, the way of knowing by the indigenous people of *The Marrow Thieves* is still disturbed by the post-apocalyptic setting since the environment has been damaged. French, the main character, introduces himself by saying that he comes from “a long line of hunters, trappers, and voyageurs. But now, with most of the rivers cut into pieces and lakes left as grey sludge puckers on the landscape, [his] own history seemed like a myth along the lines of dragons.” (*TMT*: 21) If the characters inherit their knowledge by hearing the stories of their past by walking on the natural path of their ancestor, a disappearing nature threatens their own identity and heritage. *The Marrow Thieves* thereby conveys the message that preserving the more-than-human world is essential for the continuation of human life.

3. Parenthood and emancipation in *The Road*: follow the steps or grow

The characters of *The Marrow Thieves* are following the footsteps of their ancestors, as it is a positive and powerful way of knowing and returning to the past for a better future, both for humans and the environment. However, the man and the boy in *The Road* live in a post-apocalyptic world that prevents them from reconnecting with the past and therefore from imagining a possible future. The father, as seen in the previous chapter, continues the capitalist way of life he knows, while the boy follows the only path available to him – the one laid out by his father. The father also tells stories to his son but not those that could be experienced in such a cruel and devastated world. This section will thus analyze how the boy grows differently from the characters of *The Marrow Thieves*, following plastic tracks and false hopes, and finally understands that he should take a different path from his father to survive.

Walking on the consumptive and deceptive Western path

There are no tracks to follow in the post-apocalyptic world of *The Road*: “no tracks in the road, nothing living anywhere.” (*TR*: 29) Roads are places of ghosts, where everything is in ashes and the wind blows the few tracks. Moreover, the few tracks the characters leave will not be transmitted to the next generation: “They began to come upon from time to time small cairns of rock by the roadside. They were signs in gypsy language, lost patterans. (...) hopeless messages to loved ones lost and dead.” (*TR*: 192) The idea of his sentence is that messages and footprints along the path are meaningless since no one is left alive to receive them. If the characters cannot walk on the path of past walkers and no future walker will walk their path, even the present is hopeless: “Out on the roads the pilgrims sank and fell over and died and the bleak and shrouded earth went trundling past the sun and returned again as trackless and as unremarked as the path of any nameless sisterworld in the ancient dark beyond.” (*TR*: 193) In

this extract, pilgrims cannot be pilgrims anymore as there are no paths or tracks to follow, and so no hope is left for this falling humanity which leads to an earth without any tracks or marks of human passage, resembling any other planet of the cosmos.

Therefore, the only path left for the boy to follow is the one taken by his father, who becomes his reference. Two ways of walking are juxtaposed: “Where once he’d watched trout swaying in the current, tracking their perfect shadows on the stones beneath. They went on, the boy trudging in his track.” (TR: 30) While the man lived a life before the apocalypse where the tracks of animals were still possible to follow, the boy finds himself obligated and struggling to walk (“trudging”) in his father’s path. Generational transmission, as in *The Marrow Thieves*, is still conceivable with these two characters: “The boy stood beside him. Where he’d stood once with his own father in a winter long ago.” (TR: 33-34)

However, *The Road* also enters the debate of whether children should learn the way those before them used to walk on earth. Although the characters in *The Marrow Thieves* have found a way not to repeat the Western behaviors that led to chaos by returning to the path of their ancestor, the father is only able to teach his child his way of walking, a way as consuming as the one that destroyed their world. The boy learns to walk while observing the consumptive way of walking of his father. The man and the boy leave metaphoric traces of their consumer identities: “They went on. They’d wrapped their feet in sailcloth and bound them up in blue plastic pampooties cut from a tarp and they left strange tracks in their coming and going.” (TR: 259) The tracks of their footsteps are not even humans but made of plastic.

Moreover, while young characters of *The Marrow Thieves* can learn thanks to the environment they inhabit and Miigwan that guides them, the boy of *The Road* learns in very restricted conditions. On the one hand, the devastated and barren environment offers no lessons or experiences beyond walking and resting when darkness falls. On the other hand, the father fails to support the boy in his educational journey, as he is overly protective of him. The father as the elder from *The Marrow Thieves* tries to transmit his knowledge to his son throughout their journey and especially telling the boy “Old stories of courage and justice as he remembered them” (TR: 42). These stories of hope are full of poetry, ethics and goodness. However, the father does not believe in the hope he teaches to his son and the stories he tells are not realistic. This overprotective behavior thus prevents the boy from learning properly through stories. After hearing his father’s stories but only experiencing cruelty and darkness on the road, the boy understands that these stories have no referent in this post-apocalyptic world: “Do you want me to tell you a story? No. Why not? (...) Those stories are not true. (...) in the stories we’re always helping people and we dont help people. Why dont you tell me a story? (...) I dont have any stories to tell. (...) You dont have any happy ones? They’re more like real

life. But my stories are not. Your stories are not.” (TR: 286-287) During this conversation, the boy rejects his father’s stories, which once made him believe in solidarity but now seem unrealistic, as his father forbids him from helping others.

Stories in *The Marrow Thieves* are true and therefore very hard to hear, as seen earlier with French begging Miigwan to stop storytelling. However, stories enable children to be prepared and aware of the cruelty of the world they experience while walking. In contrast, the boy of *The Road* is ironically deceived by the radical differences between stories and reality as he cannot learn nor experience the teachings of the stories throughout his travels. Tim Ingold in *The Perception of The Environment* argues about how the traditional Western idea of knowledge – which is depicted in *The Road* – leaves aside the sensorial progressive learning one acquires while walking (Ingold 2000: 18). The father’s stories are indeed only data without application for his son. However, storytelling and walking still allow the boy to learn a lesson. Stephen Joyce in his article “The Double Death of Humanity in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*” argues that: “It is through stories that the boy develops a moral sense that allows him to criticize his father’s actions” (Joyce 2016) as seen in the extract below. Therefore, the boy still learns something after hearing stories and experiencing life while walking on the road, but what he learns is how hopeless the world is and how he should stop blindly following his father’s footsteps and become independent.

Walking as an allegory of parenthood and growth: breaking with inherited habits

The walking metaphors used to depict the man and boy’s journey can be interpreted as an allegory for parenthood for the father and the journey of the child’s growth through life. At first, the boy walks with the man as a young child who is afraid of the world and finds comfort in his father: “The boy clung to him as they climbed the steps.” (TR: 112) The son always follows his father, clinging to his arms, even if he does not want or is afraid to go where his father wants to go (f.i. TR: 25, 116). His father’s protection while walking also allows the boy to keep going and moving forward in life: “[He] took the boy by the hand. Come on, he said. It’s all right.” (TR: 147) Reassurance comes from walking close to his father. As a result, the boy is protected enough to have the space to experience his childhood even in a post-apocalyptic world. For instance, he runs full of excitement toward the water or plays with the cart.

On the one hand, walking is an allegory of parenting. Upon reexamining what is being carried, the allegory of parenthood becomes evident. While walking, the father sometimes carries his son, symbolizing the support a parent provides throughout his child’s life: “The boy was stumbling he was so tired, and the man picked him up and swung him onto his shoulders and they went on.” (TR: 74) Still, an adult may have his own difficulties in life, impacting

parental support: “They stopped often to rest. He’d no strength to carry the child.” (TR: 107) The man struggles but continues to support the boy. Later, it happens again: “He asked to be carried, stumbling and slurring his words, and the man did carry him and he fell asleep on his shoulder instantly. He knew he couldn’t carry him far.” (TR: 122) The final sentence announces the inevitable moment when a parent must let go, no longer carrying or supporting the child, so the last can step into adulthood. At one point, the boy tries to grow by taking his turn to carry a load: “The boy tried to carry too much and when they stopped to rest he’d take part of his load and put it with his own.” (TR: 254) However, it was too soon for him to metaphorically carry a responsibility as he still needed his father’s help.

Consequently, their relationship is characterized by love and loyalty, but also by the father’s overprotectiveness when walking. While walking, the character covers his boy’s ears from “hideous shrieks” (TR:121) or hides dead bodies lying on the road (TR: 203). Moreover, the father has a ritual of walking alone when the boy is sleeping. The character wakes up, walks and observes his surroundings while taking advantage of this time alone to cough, pouring out his fragility, his fears, and his suicidal thoughts (f.i. TR: 56). By hiding horrors or his weaknesses, the father hopes to preserve the hope and strength of his son. However, the son is not naïve, he still hears him coughing (TR: 288) and handles hard events on the path easier than the father would think: “So strangely untroubled. Why don’t we just go on, the boy said.” (TR: 203). The father’s overprotectiveness – such as telling only beautiful stories – is an attempt to shield his son from the harsh realities of post-apocalyptic life, yet the child inevitably faces difficult experiences that are essential for his growth and understanding of this world.

On the other hand, walking is also an allegory of the growth of the boy. In the same way as in *The Marrow Thieves*, the boy of *The Road* while walking progressively loses his childhood innocence and learns how to take responsibility for others. Throughout the father and son’s journey, an inversion of role occurs, the boy progressively copying his father’s protective behavior while walking: covering him with his arms to shelter him (TR: 257), scouting in the morning (TR: 189) or keeping watch while he sleeps (TR: 131). The shift of roles is achieved by a reversal of appellation: “What are we going to do Papa? He said. Well what are we, said the boy.” (TR: 295) The hard conditions and events of their walking journey confuse the father who loses all sense of parenting while her son takes the responsibility of their survival.

Eventually, the boy’s transition into adulthood is conveyed through his growing independence in walking and his new role of leader of the group. When the father is going to die soon, the boy is already walking further ahead: “He’d stop and lean on the cart and the boy would go on and then stop and look back and he would raise his weeping eyes and see him standing there in the road looking back at him from some unimaginable future (...).” (TR: 293-

294) The road is once again interpreted as a metaphor for the path of life, while the boy's backward glance toward his father evokes a reflection on ancestry, origin, and the imminent passing of a chapter in the man's life. Before, the boy always let his father guide them, choose the path, and make the decisions. However, as he understands that he will walk alone soon, the son takes the lead and takes control of their journey. For instance, when the father asks the son to leave him to die and escape, the boy makes his first real decision by refusing to do so (*TR*: 297). Moreover, the child proves to have integrated his father's survival learning: "the boy thought he smelled wet ash on the wind." (*TR*: 297). At the end of their journey together, the boy is ready to take care of himself as well as of others, having the necessary survival capacities of sensorial study that his father taught him and a sense of leadership, like French the young character in *The Marrow Thieves*.

Another example of the boy's growth is seen through his relationship with his father's shopping cart. At the beginning of the novel, it is said that the son used to play with it, resting in it or sitting in it while his father pushed him. However, after walking on the road for a while, he no longer wants to play with it. The boy starts walking alongside it, with one hand on the wheelbarrow (*TR*: 228), imitating his father's walking habits and his relationship to the cart – which was analyzed earlier as a symbol of consumerist behavior. However, in the end, having learned to be critical, as mentioned earlier, the boy decides to leave the path taken by his father and forge his own. He chooses not to follow the individualistic and consumerist path traced by his father anymore, stepping away from any carts or roads, and moving inland with a community of 'good ones'. The only legacy his father passed on to him is survival knowledge and the idea of carrying the fire, as he placed his faith in his son much like one places hope in humanity.

4. If walking is a narrative, reading is a cathartic way of knowing

Walking, as considered in this chapter, is an important step in the transmission of knowledge. *The Marrow Thieves* and *The Road* represent a walking journey of personal growth, hearing stories and experiencing learnings. If life is regarded as a journey and walking as a narrative, from a meta-perspective, novels can also let the readers grow as well by reading stories and experiencing through the characters thanks to catharsis.

Catharsis from the Greek κάθαρσις, or katharsis, refers to the purification of emotions through art. Aristotle in *Poetics* talks about catharsis to talk about the effects of dramatic tragedy on spectators. By witnessing unfortunate events by proxy, spectators or readers are meant to learn from them and feel negative emotions like fear or pity without experiencing the atrocities themselves. In the same way, by telling the stories of characters facing tragic destinies

and revealing a Manichean view of what constitutes a good or bad path, the two novels under consideration invite readers to engage with the narratives and learn from them.

The Marrow Thieves uses several strategies to engage the reader in the resistant walking of characters in this post-apocalyptic world. On the one hand, French shows metafictional self-reference, blurring the boundary between the narrator, a character, and authorial intent with for instance: “I’d regret this next line forever” (*TMT*: 196). He makes a metaphor of his path of life as a narrative: “It’s weird when you come to a spot in the story where the plot could go either way, you know?” (*TMT*: 116) Therefore, he breaks through the fourth wall and readers get more involved in the story. Another strategy of the novel is the narration which enables readers to identify as a member of this fusional walking community. During Miigwan’s coming-to story chapter, the narration changes as Miig is the narrator who speaks to a “you”, “you see” (*TMT*: 100). Given this apostrophe but also the structure of the novel, readers at the same time as the narrator, French, get to learn lessons through the progressive revelations of the Story and the characters’ pasts. *The Marrow Thieves* argues for both the characters and the readers of the novel how learning how hard life is through stories is the only way to not repeat the same errors in the future, but also how walking – or reading – is a way of knowing to learn how to heal – or act before it is too late.

On the contrary, the stories shared by the men of *The Road* are of beauty, hope and humanity, distancing from the stories of cruelty from *The Marrow Thieves*, and preventing warning the character of the boy of the horrors he will endure on the path of life. *The Road* thus argues that denial is not a good idea to make new generations grow and learn about the current state of society, so there is a need to read Cli-Fi and post-apocalyptic narratives to warn, as negative as these narratives are. However, as hard as the story of *The Road* is, there is still a message of hope for readers. The father questions the futility of storytelling and writing in a world where death is inevitable and where communication ends (*TR*: 279-280): Why write if there is no one left to read? Since the character can only imagine death, he cannot imagine a narrative to tell. However, walking in itself is telling a story. The man and the boy are still walking and while walking, they still pursue the narrative of life. Stephen Joyce states that the narrative of *The Road* “asks us to believe that the act of storytelling itself is the source of our humanity and that simply by picking up a copy of the book we have already taken the necessary step to imagine that the boy’s goodness can survive.” (Joyce 2016) Through this metafictional debate about storytelling, readers may understand that by reading the post-apocalyptic novel, they pursue the narrative of these walking characters and so hope in humanity.

In conclusion, the novels guide readers through a cathartic path of learning by travelling through the walking narratives. First, reading the story of Indigenous characters suffering from

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the Western capitalist way of walking on earth and learning on the path of their ancestors teaches readers a message of care for the earth before it is too late. Then, *The Road*'s narrative offers readers the possibility of change, observing how the boy can break free from traditional, inherited consumptive behaviors. With the allegory of the path of life – where one learns what to follow from those who walk before and what not to – post-apocalyptic walking narratives create fear and pity, but also warn, advise, maintain hope, and drive readers to act, ensuring the moral of the story is learned and not repeated.

On the path together

Walking on the path of life is a continuous process of becoming that never ceases. In *Ways of Walking*, Ingold and Vergunst observe that, throughout their lives, humans constantly readjust the patterns and styles of their walking to accommodate the changes undergone by their developing bodies, but also by the bodies of those, including young children or the elderly, whom they walk with (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 17). In the novels, the characters' surroundings indeed influence how, why, and at what pace they walk. The path of their life, as explained in the previous chapter, is shaped by events, stories and choices. However, their ways of walking are also shaped by the beings they encounter or walk with along the way. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, walking is inherently a social activity. The two scholars Ingold and Vergunst also argue that learning while walking does not occur in isolation but during walking activities with and in the presence of others, both human and non-human, as significant participants (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 36). In these novels, characters are portrayed as learning within a community, just as readers learn with the author as a guide. Walking as a new epistemology is not only a way of learning together but also a way of learning that the other is what matters most.

To take the path of relationality and solidarity is moving away from the path of individualism and capitalism. For instance, in *Station Eleven*, the two characters the most alienated by the capitalist society are Arthur and Jeevan in the pre-collapse narrative. After a life of materialism and superficiality, both realize that they have lost a lot of valued time because of “the way he’d spent his entire life *chasing after* something, money or fame or immortality or all of the above.” (*SE*: 327 – italics added to support the argument) Arthur here “chasing after” money, or Jeevan chasing after people as a paparazzi, are like the hunting capitalist figure mentioned in the first chapter. However, both realize then how relationships and family are what matter the most. This is too late for Arthur who ends his journey on this realization (*SE*: 327), but Jeevan understands he should be “the one to step forward”, a walking metaphor to say the one who will help the other, to become a paramedic (*SE*: 11). Marco Caracciolo analyzes *Station Eleven* in *Contemporary fiction and climate uncertainty, narrating unstable futures* (2022) focusing on chapter 6 being a negative enumeration of all disappeared materialities and technologies in the form of a list. The Belgian scholar argues how “the unavailability of the material things and comforts of consumerist society foregrounded in this list heightens the characters’ longing for community as a response to future uncertainty.” (Caracciolo 2022a: 74) The travelling theater company, according to Caracciolo, sown the seeds of a utopian vision of society through the relationships established while walking throughout the novel. This utopian vision of solidarity could not have been possible without the erasure of familiar objects and experiences which confront characters and thus readers with the

necessity of developing alternatives to current models of society based solely on mass consumption (Caracciolo 2022a: 74). Ultimately, choosing connectiveness means rejecting the isolating values of the exploitative logic of capitalism.

This chapter explores how, in the three novels, walking is a foundation for building relationships. Through walking metaphors and vocabulary, those who accompany the characters come to symbolize home, destination, and purpose within the post-apocalyptic landscapes. As discussed in the previous chapter, the characters also learn within a specific environment. Walking as a social practice includes nonhuman beings as well. The relationship between human characters and the more-than-human world symbolized by the figure of the deer revealed through different ways of walking reflects either alienation from or resonance with nature. The analysis shows that the availability of two-way relationships with non-humans impacts the possibility of healing the earth and thus humanity on it.

1. Side by side: relationships through the language of walking

Apocalyptic chaos affects social formations. Some characters find themselves walking alone on devastated worlds, but most of the time, they end up gathering, looking for their family or building new communities of survivors. Alongside the constant threat that human beings are becoming, the characters still find hope in each other, building strong social ties and even consolidating relationships through shared trauma. The three novels again play with ambivalence in what humans are in terms of sociability in post-apocalyptic worlds, as characters are either caring and united groups or individualist and dangerous for strangers. This section analyzes the different relationships and social behaviors of the characters through the language of walking. While *Station Eleven* and *The Marrow Thieves* leave blood ties to give hope in caring human relationships, *The Road* takes an opposite direction to illustrate an individualistic world where goodness hardly imposes itself.

In *Station Eleven* and *The Marrow Thieves*, strong relationships have been formed through walking. Characters' groups consist of people from different backgrounds, from old people to babies found on the road. Walking is what they have done since the collapse and so life is all about walking. Consequently, walking with people equals sharing life with them. For instance, in *Station Eleven*, when the Travelling Symphony loses members, characters reflect on loss by mentioning parts of the road travelled together: "I have been on the road for fifteen years", she said, 'and Sayid's been with me for twelve. Dieter for even longer.' 'He was with me in the beginning,' Gild said. 'We walked out of Chicago together.'" (SE: 138) The importance of a relationship in this moving community is assessed based on the time spent walking together. Moreover, when a loved one's life is in danger or disappearing, people often

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find themselves reflecting on the moments they shared. In *Station Eleven*, this nostalgia from a shared life experience is formulated by walking: “We have travelled so far together” (SE: 137) or “We travelled so far and your friendship meant everything.” (SE: 302) Therefore, the time walking together symbolizes what forges relationships and communities.

More than just communities, characters from these two novels form bonds to the point of thinking of each other as family. The Travelling Symphony’s members of *Station Eleven* see their walking companions as brothers or cousins (SE: 141) and the characters of *The Marrow Thieves* assemble into a “patchwork family” (TMT: 150) where each member becomes a “boy”, a “daughter”, a “brother” (TMT: 121, 194). Connections between each member of these communities are rooted in a love that spans both familial ties, be they of blood or heart, and romantic aspects. Again, these ties are visible through walking. For instance, the relationship’s progression of Rose and French, the two teenage lovers of *The Marrow Thieves*, is perceived through their walking behavior. First, the characters go through two conflicts that are represented in two walking scenes. There is an argument during their walking journey:

I walked at a brisk pace to avoid the others. I needed to think. “Hey, wait for me.” Rose jogged over. Her hair was pulled back in a loose bun that bounced like a pompom on a toque as she ran. I kept walking, a little slower than before. “Where ya going?” She caught up and walked beside me. “Thanks for waiting, geez.” “Nowhere.” She walked at my pace (...).

I didn’t realize until I had walked a few feet that Rose was no longer with me. I turned and saw her there at the bottom, arms crossed, hip thrown out. “You coming?” “Well, do you want me to?” I shrugged. “Up to you.” She unfolded her arms and placed them on her hips. Then she turned on a heel and stomped away. I shrugged again and walked in the opposite direction.” (TMT: 187 – italics added to support the argument)

In the first part of the extract, the pace, with acceleration and deceleration, indicates whether the character wants to get involved or not with another member of the community. Sharing the path and pace, walking together, the two characters show a romantic relationship while breaking the rhythm, stopping or walking in an opposite direction as seen in the second part of the extract illustrating a break in the relationship. Then, in another scene, a break-up happens again through walking metaphors: “‘Don’t expect me to *chase* after you.’ Her eyes filled with tears, and I was ashamed. So ashamed I dropped my head and looked at the ground so that all I saw of her retreat was the *movement of her shoes as she took off*, sobbing.” (TMT: 196 – italics added to support the argument) Since footsteps are what especially indicate the presence of someone in those walking post-apocalyptic novels, walking toward or away also symbolizes the desire, or not, to be in a relationship with one another. As Ingold and Vergunst argue in *Ways of Walking*, the feet respond as much as the voice to the presence and activity of others in their timings, rhythms

and inflections (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 1). The portrayal of her shoes walking away in this scene thereby symbolizes the departure of Rose from the romantic relationship while chasing her would have demonstrated that French desires to pursue their connection.

As already seen in the first chapter, hunting or chasing the other in these post-apocalyptic novels symbolizes a desire to consume the other. However, chasing does not always have a pejorative connotation in these novels when there is love and solidarity for the person followed. For instance, when the younger member of *The Marrow Thieves*' community of characters, RiRi, is kidnapped, the characters do not think twice before following her:

The clearing was dark and RiRi was at risk. Instead, Miig gave *chase*, Wab *at his heels*, quickly catching up and passing him, her old *runner instincts* returned. Rose *followed*. Behind her, Minerva *jogged*, her arms pumping at her sides, not going much faster than a walk (...). Then I *ran off* into the dark *after my family*. (TMT: 133— italics added to support the argument)

Through synonyms of walking after, each member of the community tries, with his own physical ability, to pursue as quickly as possible the missing member of their patchwork family through a dark unknown. In conclusion, through walking lexical field and metaphors, *The Marrow Thieves* illustrates characters sharing a profound commitment to each other's well-being. The community constitutes their joy, just as it does their sorrow when it is weakened by the loss of a member. Rebecca Solnit at one point theorizes in *Wanderlust* how walking in a group affirms and generates solidarity, but also how in the same way the "delicate act of marching the rhythms of their strides aligns two people emotionally and bodily." (Solnit 2001: 232). These last extracts of *The Marrow Thieves* exemplify how walking together has indeed built strong relationships but also rhythmized the characters in their ups and downs.

Therefore, members of the walking groups of *Station Eleven* and *The Marrow Thieves* all find themselves walking together "in tandem" (TMT: 222). Building step-by-step strong human relationships, their walking behaviors particularly stand out from the ironical representation of the postmodern sedentary and individualist behaviors depicted in the first chapter. These walking communities indeed share a profound spirit of sacrifice with the survival imperative taking a backseat to the primacy of community, thus standing in stark contrast to the prevailing hyperindividualism characterizing the rest of the secondary characters of these novels, but also the characters of *The Road*. The post-apocalyptic world of *The Road* illustrates true social chaos with no politics, no order, and no ethics at all. Some survival groups were established to ensure mutual protection and hunt together but driven only by necessity rather than trust. The only community in the novel that is made of trust and love is the father

and his child who form one small unit bound by blood rather than being part of a disparate survival group. Their care for one another is evident, as seen when the father warms his son's feet or wraps them in plastic (TR: 36, 105). In a post-apocalyptic setting where walking is crucial, attention to feet and shoes serves as a meaningful expression of compassion.

In *Station Eleven* and *The Marrow Thieves*, while being cautious and suspicious of other humans, the walking communities always keep the door open to welcome other walking survivors, which is not the case at all in *The Road*. Their group never enlarges because the father does not want to help nor accept anyone new, their number enabling them to be discreet, maintain preservation and avoid risks. In contrast, the boy would share his food, welcome anyone and help them on their way, even if it means taking risks. Again, interpersonal relationships in the novel are conveyed through metaphors of walking: "The dark did catch them. By the time they reached the headland path it was too dark to see anything. (...), the boy holding on to his hand. We just have to keep going, the man said. Come on. I can't see. I know. We'll just take it one step at a time. Okay. Don't let go. Okay. No matter what. No matter what." (TR: 249) This passage of the father supporting his son while walking by holding his hand and guiding him through an uncertain and dark future symbolizes parenthood. This moment of kindness and solidarity is compared to another passage when the child wants to hold the hand of Ely, an old man encountered on their way who is nearly blind (TR: 177). By lending a hand, the boy wants to help and guide him in the darkness as his father did for him. However, the father refuses, pursuing exclusivism to be safe. The boy is open to cooperation in the individualist and capitalist post-apocalyptic world, which is the reason why the character is the one carrying the fire.

Eventually, when the father and son discuss why they could not save the people from the human ladder, the man explains himself by the possibility of being eaten too (TR: 134-135). The behavior and choices of the father once more demonstrate postmodern individualism. Being isolationist and selfish to survive seems to be the only option for *The Road*'s survivors, whereas unity and solidarity are the fuel of the fire the boy is carrying while walking. Since the boy chooses to keep walking with his flame of solidarity and generosity and enters the community of the good ones rather than stop walking and die with his father, *The Road* ends with a message of hope in the persistence of humanity.

2. Walking with or towards others

In these three novels, relationships are shaped by walking, just as the path is shaped by the people with whom – and toward whom – one walks. In post-apocalyptic worlds, all familiar markers of safety are disrupted. An analysis of walking vocabulary and metaphors in these three

novels reveals that, as a form of compensation, members of the communities become both a home and a destination – the very reason characters keep walking and continue to hope.

Characters as the symbolic home

The apocalyptic collapse usually makes human lose their home. Therefore, one of the multiple reasons characters are walking is to look for a house, a shelter, a space where they could feel safe and at home again. However, these shelters are usually dangerous, unforeseeable or nowhere to be found. In these three novels, the walking communities and their members progressively embody these sought-after shelters, becoming the home and the security one needs in a world where staying still is unsafe.

In both *The Marrow Thieves* and *The Road*, the groups stop for a few days in a shelter, specifically in a hotel for the first and in a bunker for the last. These places that could allow for rest, security and privacy do not provide them with any of these. The members of the groups all end up gathered. The boy would not stay in a room by himself (TR:155) and the indigenous people find themselves sleeping all together, “crammed into one room”, breaths united (TMT: 74). The true shelter providing reassurance is the community and not the buildings. Furthermore, while walking children are also protected from enemies by the body of the other characters. “A child needs walls. Not brick and wood walls all the time, but some sort of walls to keep them in and others out. So they can play and they can sleep and they can move without the burden of eyes and hands. I’m that wall for you.” (TMT: 71) In this extract of *The Marrow Thieves*, human bodies become the metaphoric walls of a shelter protecting children of others and of horrors on the move, leaving them the space to live their childhood. The father in *The Road* finds himself being this wall as well, physical protection for his boy: covering him from the violent rain and wind while walking (TR: 251), while sleeping (TR: 252), holding the boy to warm him and let him sleep when they couldn’t find a shelter (TR: 132-133), or grabbing him, felling on top of him, trying to cover him from the bullets with his body as an armor (TR: 281).

Therefore, moving communities become an entity of security, of secured walls, but also of home and family in a world of Solastalgia – the term for anxiety and sorrow one feels when his environment is impacted, coined by Glenn Albrecht who analyzes the feelings about Earth (Figueiras 2020). For instance, Kirsten in *Station Eleven* explains the difficult conditions of the post-apocalyptic world by telling how “the truth was that the Symphony was their only home.” (SE: 48) and since the home is the destination of everyone living in a post-apocalyptic world, walking in these novels is a spiritual way to get closer to others, to create this home in another.

Characters as the symbolic destination

From a symbol of home to a symbol of destination, the characters of these novels walking on their paths progressively recognize what is important and what one wants to walk towards: those they love. For instance, at the end of his walking journey, French decides to leave his father and pursue his lover, Rose, who he also defines as the “idea of home”:

‘Running only works if you’re *moving towards* something, not away. Otherwise you’ll never get anywhere.’ (...) And he kissed me on the top of my head, just like he used to when I was little. And I felt safe. Safe enough to leave him. (...) I took off running, away from camp, the Council, my family: running towards Rose, who was somewhere beyond the birchbeaded edge of the woods, running towards *an idea of home* that I wasn’t willing to lose, not even if it meant running away from the family I had already found. (TMT: 217 – italics added to support the argument)

The first part of the extract argues that walking has been for the character a metaphorical ritualistic passage from childhood to adulthood as said in the previous chapter. French is ready to walk away from his father. Running all his life eventually makes sense when it ends with the departure from the family cocoon to the creation of a new family, this idea of home made of the people with whom he wishes to walk side by side throughout life. Additionally, the father of French explains here how one needs to move toward a goal to keep hope in living, and this goal is usually someone. Another occurrence is found when Miigwan talks about how he survived because he had “somewhere [he] needed to be” before rectifying with “Someone I needed to be with...” (TMT: 229) The other becomes the embodied destination of one’s travel, the reason why one *pulls the steps* (TMT: 231): to be “home to his love.” (TMT: 231). Moving toward a loved one is what makes the characters of *The Marrow Thieves* keep walking.

The idea of continuing to walk for the other is also exemplified when characters stop walking at the death of their kin. In *The Marrow Thieves*, a grandfather could not protect the last thing that mattered, his grandson, from the Recruiters which is why it is said that there is “no coming back from that, even if he did manage to walk away later on, which he wouldn’t.” (TMT: 81) Motionlessness at the loss of the one who incarnated the destination happens in *The Road* as well. The father asks the woman of the man he just shot if the other members of their group left her behind and she answers that she left herself there (TR: 283), having lost the human she walked for. The places they want to reach hold little significance compared to the people with whom they share the journey.

Moreover, the theme of the destination is found in all three novels through a change of path from a geographical destination to a more metaphorical, emotional destination. In *The Marrow Thieves* and *Station Eleven*, the shift in direction is due to the loss of community

members as well. The Travelling Symphony for instance changes the usual path to look after missing ones. In *The Marrow Thieves*, all indigenous people are aiming North to the old lands, but at one point the community changes direction in search of Minerva. First, if a member of the community was missing, the idea was to continue walking without him to survive because what is missing must not “slow you down” (TMT: 11). Still, walking slower is inevitable as the characters get tired, not from running, but because they are “tired of missing” their loved ones (TMT: 182). French in *The Marrow Thieves* realizes that “there was something worse than running, worst even than the schools. There was loss.” (TMT: 110). Similarly, Kirsten in *Station Eleven*, acknowledging the “emptiness of the landscape, the lack of people and animals and caravans around her”, states how “the hell is the absence of those we long for” (SE: 144). Both main characters of these two post-apocalyptic fictions understand that their missing loved ones are eventually more important than their initial destination. Purposes shift from places to members of the community. *The Road* uses the same philosophy. The characters’ travel begins while “everything depended on reaching the coast” (TR: 29) in the vain hope of finding warmth and food. However, when they reach the sea as dead as everything else, they continue walking without mentioning any new destination. The coast was only an excuse to keep walking and looking for meaning in a senseless world, which they find in each other: man for his son, boy for his father.

Characters as the symbolic driving force

The community is the true destination in all these communities, hence a reason to keep going and survive in *The Road* and *Station Eleven*.

(...) this collection of petty jealousies, neuroses, undiagnosed PTSD cases, and simmering resentments lived together, travelled together, rehearsed together, performed together 365 days of the year, permanent company, permanent tour. But what made it bearable were the friendships, of course, the camaraderie and the music and the Shakespeare, the moments of transcendent beauty and joy. (SE: 47)

When Kirsten defines the Travelling Symphony in this sentence, she emphasizes the constant presence of each other which can be difficult but is also what makes post-apocalyptic life “bearable”. This moving community is like the post-apocalyptic version of the family of *The Grapes of Wrath* (Steinbeck 1939) where through all difficulties, their moving family is the symbol of hope and most of all celebration of survival. Moreover, walking from settlement to settlement, “still in motion back and forth along the shore” (SE: 37) enables them to connect with humans on a larger scale. The moving Symphony and the peddlers share information, stories, objects and most of all the first post-apocalyptic newspaper to the different

communities: “(...) if there are symphonies and newspapers, then what else might this awakening world contain?” (*SE*: 332) The novel claims that human connections made by walking are what create the beginning of a new civilization and so hope.

In *The Road*, the mother explains to her partner the vital importance of community in a meaningless world:

The one thing I can tell you is that you wont survive for yourself. I know because I would never have come this far. A person who had no one would be well advised to cobble together some passable ghost. Breathe it into being and coax it along with words of love. Offer it each phantom crumb and shield it from harm with your body. (*TR*: 59)

The mother explains here that without his son, the father would have no reason to walk – no reason to live – and would inevitably become like the soulless, ghostlike figures they encounter on the road. To help him survive, she urges him to become a moving home for his son, while the boy, in turn, becomes his purpose and destination. In a hopeless world where God can only have disappeared, one puts his faith in the other. The son becomes in the eyes of his father the last walking messiah, keeper of the humanity flame as “there was light all about him” since “when he moved the light moved with him” (*TR*: 296). The character of the boy, with his empathy and humanity, compared to a travelling sanctuary by his father – “glowing in that waste like a tabernacle” (*TR*: 293) – is the message of hope in the novel, as if he may lead the world to a better human place.

3. Alienation or resonance: walking with non-humans

Similarly, walking in a post-apocalyptic world can recreate human and non-human connections which may eventually bring hope in the recovery of Earth. The last section of this chapter analyses the presence of non-humans in the walking narratives since pace and choice in walking partners are an allegory of human relationships, walking with or distanced from non-humans also shows the characters’ relationship to their environment. The setting being post-apocalyptic, the more-than-human world has also evolved, from reclaiming its space in *Station Eleven*, to deteriorating in *The Marrow Thieves*, or even to the limit of total annihilation in *The Road*. This section analyzes first the post-apocalyptic figure of the deer as an allegory of the spirit of nature that enters or is not in resonance with the characters of these three novels. Then, comparing the ecological walking of *The Marrow Thieves* with the neocolonial one of *The Road*, the analysis of the characters’ behaviors towards what is left of the more-than-human world reveals collaboration or antagonism. The interconnectedness expressed through walking in *The Marrow Thieves* concludes the chapter with a message of hope: that healing humanity

begins with healing the Earth, highlighting the destructive consequences of the unsustainable individualism depicted in *The Road*.

To assess the characters' relationship to the nonhuman world, the concept of *Resonance* by the sociologist Hartmut Rosa is used. Rosa states that humans are stuck behind the postmodern social acceleration which does not align well with nature, politics and psychology for instance and so creates desynchronization (TED 2015), echoing Solnit's argument mentioned in the theoretical framework on disembodiment. Rosa argues how this phenomenon of acceleration fundamentally modifies the form and quality of the relationship between the subject and the world (TED 2015). A speed and growth constraint increases alienation – which depicts a specific form of relationship to the world in which the subject and the world are indifferent or hostile – as well as forces to view the world as a capital to be invested (Rosa 2018: 480). The first chapter of this thesis about the commodification of the world and zombies walking in a Capitalocene exemplifies this argument. Therefore, Rosa argues that in postmodernity, there is a crisis of relationship to the world and his solution is a return to a mode of resonance.

The resonance is a form of relationship with the world – the world being the others, nature, artefacts, own bodies or emotional manifestation (Rosa 2018: 223) – where the two sides are talking to each other and are transformed, feel entangled with each other (Rosa 2018: 200). These resonant moments can be found in several literary works on walking where characters keep walking and at some point, share a transforming epiphany with art or nature for instance. As Rosa recalls, this is the human body that maintains a responsive relationship to the world as a whole and so forms an organ of resonance (Rosa 2018: 87). Consequently, this last subsection analyzes how open or not the walking bodies of the characters are to find deep, meaningful connections with non-humans in spheres of family, community, nature or even religion in a post-apocalyptic world that often encourages disconnection and alienation. To this end, the three novels are examined through the characters' capacity for resonance while walking alongside non-humans, as well as their walking behaviors, the traces they leave on the earth and thereby their collaboration or appropriation of their environment.

The post-apocalyptic figure of the deer

First, *Station Eleven* is ambivalent in the representation of the characters' relationships with non-humans, showing both capacities of change and return to postmodern alienation. The analysis of their relationship with non-humans while walking can begin with the deer figure. Post-apocalyptic roads usually become this empty space on which characters choose to keep

walking, but also become a space shared by humans and nonhumans as well, requesting reconsideration of the anthropocentric grip on this space:

Kirsten and August walked mostly in silence. A deer crossed the road ahead and paused to look at them before it vanished into the trees. The beauty of this world where almost everyone was gone. If hell is other people, what is a world with almost no people in it? Perhaps soon humanity would simply flicker out, but Kirsten found this thought more peaceful than sad. So many species had appeared and later vanished from this earth; what was one more? How many people were even left now? (SE: 148)

In this extract, the deer crosses the road disconcertingly for the characters, as the road has always symbolized human control over space. Deer in several cultures symbolizes rebirth, the dawn of a new world, especially because of its woods that make think of the Tree of Life (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1982: 226). This image of the deer crossing the road is an allegory of the collapse of the human system and the rebirth of a new one which leaves nature in peace. *Station Eleven* indeed represents an apocalypse only for humanity as non-humans are not touched by the plague. The last sentence from Kirsten's thoughts highlights the shift from the extinction of animal species to that of humans, revealing again a sense of peace in the face of humanity's role in the environmental crisis. Deer are prey and not predators, which contrasts a lot with the aggressive behavior of humanity in post-apocalyptic fiction. The figure of the deer, free to walk at peace, here denounces the postmodern desynchronized harmony between humanity and non-humans as well as the exploitation and commodification of nature that led to a decrease in wildlife. In conclusion, in this post-epidemic setting, the symbolic crossing of the deer visually overturns the relation of power; Nature has reclaimed the world that humans once perceived as their own.

However, humans do not lose their desire for power as shown in the character of the Prophet. Seeing himself as a God, the quintessence of Anthropocene, he wants devotion from all humans and non-humans walking at his side. Kirsten, on the opposite, deconstructs human exceptionalism: "There was a clicking of claws on the floor as Luli came to find her. He sat by her side and rested his chin on her lap. 'That dog seems devoted to you.' 'He's my friend.'" (SE: 309) The character talks about the Prophet's dog, Luli, who followed her after the last's death, with whom she says she has an equal relationship, the dog being her friend rather than devoted to her (SE: 309). The Travelling Symphony also travels with horses (SE: 35) but walks on foot to reduce the load on horses when they suffer from heat (SE: 301). Therefore, *Station Eleven* shares a possibility of a return of respectful relationships with non-humans, represented as members of walking communities, having an equal two-way relationship and collaboration with humans. However, the novel also ends in an ironic return to technological alienation,

Kirsten walking towards a new city, still obsessively preoccupied with the past and looking for a comeback to the technological world, its fast travels and electricity. Rather than reconnecting with the more-than-human world available to them, human characters instinctively return to a postmodern mindset.

As said in the first chapter, the father and boy in *The Road* depict an alienated mindset in a world where humans pursue their consumption and wasteful behavior. The characters walking in a devastated environment no longer can meet an animal on their way. The figure of the deer represented in this novel is not even alive, but a plastic deer in a yard (*TR*: 197). This passage recalls that all animals are extinct, and everything left is plastic and waste from capitalism. The post-apocalyptic world of *The Road* does not have hope for the environment anymore, there is no beauty of natural innocence like in *Station Eleven*, but only devastation.

In *The Marrow Thieves*, nature is damaged but still standing. Moreover, Indigenous people have historically regarded nature as sacred and an integral component of their culture. The representation of their powerful and spiritual relationship with nature echoes capacities of resonance with non-humans in the novel. French hunting in the forest, listening to the sounds of nature and hearing movement and footsteps, hoping to kill a deer, meets a moose. The animal, compared to trees, wind, and an old creature that lived history (*TMT*: 49), symbolizes the more-than-human world itself. The moose informs French that he knows he is here (*TMT*: 49) and when he decides not to kill him, the moose starts a curtsy and then turns back into the trees (*TMT*: 50). In this scene, French is proven not to be emotionally detached while hunting and so not alienated by consumption. The character would rather leave the moose alive than eat him but leave more than half of his meat to rot. Unlike the Recruiters who extract the Earth and Indigenous people, French respectfully refuses to waste the resources, and this is why the moose thanks him. Moreover, by using “he” and “his” instead of “it” and “its”, French also positions the animal as his equal and not just a prey. Ingold explains how this respect comes from the hunting native culture: “The human hunter relates to the animal as one such being to another, and the encounter is a moment in the ongoing dialogue between them. Among hunters who take this view of animals, there is a general feeling that one should not kill an animal that does not consent to be taken.” (Ingold 2000: 122) This hunting hence illustrates the concept of resonance by Hartmut Rosa where an unexpected dialogue between humans and non-humans happens and interconnects the two in a relationship of respect.

The three novels therefore offer different encounters with the symbolic post-apocalyptic deer that each illustrates a different stage of destruction, creating different messages for readers. *Station Eleven*’s deer is like an invitation for humans to enter a harmonious co-existence with non-humans. However, this invitation is half answered as human desires for power and comfort

ironically take over. In *The Road*, this is too late to act, no deer can send any invitation as the nonhuman world is dying. In *The Marrow Thieves*, there is still hope left and the solution provided for a better world is resonance.

To occupy or inhabit and its impact on the relationship with the Earth

In terms of a respectful relationship with the earth, both novels exemplify an opposing way of walking, occupying or inhabiting the Earth. *The Road*'s characters still occupy the world as colonials. Ingold and Vergunst theorizing the idea of leaving footprints in *Ways of Walking* explain how the entire project of colonial expansion conceptualizes the surface of the earth as a space to be occupied and subsequently perhaps abandoned once its resources are used up (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 6). This is the case in *The Road*, where the occupation of space is marked by roadagents controlling roads, and where every remaining human is extracting the last of the Earth's resources before their inevitable death, once nothing is left. Moreover, the man and boy's footsteps destroy nature through a metaphor of walking: "The weeds they forded fell to dust about them." (TR: 4) Human footprints continue to mark the Earth and their walking behavior is hostile to the Earth. The man and the boy also keep throwing their waste like cans and tin on the ground (TR: 72) and into the woods (TR: 176), feeling no need to pay attention to an already dead environment.

In comparison, the characters of *The Marrow Thieves* embody the opposite walking behavior to the Earth, not occupying the world but inhabiting it. Both nonhuman and Indigenous footprints are not destroying the Earth but only useful clues to the whereabouts of local resources (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 7). For instance, Miig teaches how to recognize the natural clues of animal presence (TMT: 35), Rose and French recognize the smell of fresh water (TMT: 156) and another Indigenous community marks its passage by traces on trees (TMT: 155). Their behavior in their environment is of co-presence and respect, even when hunting, as depicted in the first chapter. Compared to humans who poisoned the water, deforested, and pushed nature to its limits causing climate and environmental change as well as animal extinction, the walking characters are careful not to throw away their waste, making "minimal garbage" (TMT: 45). Leaving no traces of humanity on earth while they travel, the characters of *The Marrow Thieves* are living under Symbiocene instead of Anthropocene like the rest of the novel's society or the characters of *The Road*. This Symbiocene manifests initially through the characters' adaptation to their natural environment, as they possess knowledge about plants, weather, seasons, and scents, but also respect their environment and reduce their footprint on Earth. Their seamless integration with nature paints a vision of harmonious coexistence in a world transformed by environmental crises.

Depending on whether human characters act with harmonious coexistence or extractive behavior, the environment, as a character as well, responds either collaboratively or in resistance. Co-presence of humans and non-humans in *The Marrow Thieves* is especially possible because Indigenous people regard non-humans as “possessing characteristics that Western minds typically ascribe only to humans, [for instance] having points of view, exhibiting agency, and engaging in reciprocal communication.” (Robbins 2021). Animals and natural elements are not minor characters in the novel but a part of the character group. Walking through forests, trees are omnipresent characters. They help the characters to survive, by letting them hide, rest, find balance, camouflage and orientate themselves but also by protecting them. They mostly encounter on their way pine trees, representing harmony with nature to the Anishnabe⁹. A human member of the group named Tree at some point blends with the trees in the narration during the revolution: “‘Gun!’ Tree screamed from his spot, just before the driver shot at him. (...) The driver took a second shot into the trees.” (TMT: 207) The indigenous boy named Tree, hiding among the trees, becomes one with them, as the man shoots at both as if they were a single target. The characters’ relationship to non-humans therefore enters the category of “collaborative survival” as a response to the individualist survival behavior mentioned by Rob Nixon in his article “The Less Selfish Gene: Forest Altruism, Neoliberalism, and the Tree of Life”. The scholar argues that “the contemporary appeal of plant communication is rooted in a quest for alternative modes of being that are more accommodating of the coexistence of the cooperation and competition in human and more-than-human communities.” (Nixon 2021: 348) Since *The Overstory* (Powers 2018), cooperative forests are seen as an alternative utopian system of being and *The Marrow Thieves*’ walking characters illustrate this system with their alternative mode of hunting, being and walking by respecting and collaborating with trees and other non-humans.

On the contrary, *The Road* represents a total absence of collaboration between non-humans and humans. The cannibals and the main characters cannot protect themselves and hide under trees as they are all falling into dust (TR: 102) or blocking their way by lying dead on the road (TR: 36). Instead of helping them, the more-than-human world disturbs their walking experience. While the man and the boy must pay attention to cannibals, they also fear the weather as being wet and cold by rain, snow and darkness can lead to death. The weather is an inherent dangerous part of their walk as seen in walking sentences like “The weather lifted and the cold and they came at last into the broad lowland river valley (...)” (TR: 20) which connects directly walking experience with the cold weather by the conjunction *and*.

⁹ See Native Languages of the Americas Website <<http://www.native-languages.org/pine-tree.htm>>

Walking with and towards the earth to heal it

These ways of walking the Earth and the responsive behavior of non-humans in these two post-apocalyptic novels illustrate two opposed ideologies: exploitative capitalism and Indigenous worldviews advocating for respect and sustainable living. Narie Jung in her article “Individualism in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*: The Highway to Unsustainability” states that *The Road*’s uses of cannibalism as a form of sustainable consumer culture highlights the violence in the individualistic and consumptive postmodern system that is, in fact, unsustainable (Jung 2023: 95). The scholar also argues that the illustration of the empathy of the boy offers a counterpart to unsustainability, “for this recognizes both the will of all the livings to live and the interconnectedness of these lives.” (Jung 2023: 104) The boy is the only one in the novel who is open to a form of resonance. In the end, surrounded by non-cannibal and ‘good people’ in nature – or what little of it remains – instead of in symbolic roads, the boy finds resonance in the sphere of religion talking with his father as a God who responds (*TR*: 306). In conclusion, the selfish and individualist identity of the father and cannibals serves as a cautionary illustration of the consumer behavior and environmental neglect that could lead to a dystopian nightmare if humans fail to change to a more sustainable behavior like the character of the boy.

The Marrow Thieves conveys a similar message but does so by illustrating the possibility of hope through a walking journey of care and solidarity among all beings. Instead of individualism, all human and nonhuman characters seem to assemble into a *mesh*. This concept, introduced by Timothy Morton in *The Ecological Thought* (2010) to describe the intimate and constitutive connection between humans, animals and material things, stands in contrast to Western culture, which categorically distinguishes nonhuman realities from human ones (Caracciolo 2022b: 5). The *mesh* is visible in *The Marrow Thieves* through the language used to depict humans, animals, and the natural world, which emphasize their interconnectedness. While an “aboveground root” is humanized, described as “bent like an arthritic finger” (*TMT*: 12), Minerva is compared to a tree: “tiny like a tree stump” (*TMT*: 20). Natural elements are often personified – like for instance, “the land was holding its breath” (*TMT*: 48) – and humans, in turn, are given natural and animal ways of being and walking. For instance, after walking for a long time in the forest, they are said to become “bush Indians” (*TMT*: 128). Their hunting, gait, and survival instincts are also often compared to animals as Miig owls (*TMT*: 30, 148) or Chi-boy screeches as an eagle (*TMT*: 46) to alert their companions and their way of moving is similar to the water: “We slid from behind the rocks and cut through the trees *like moving water*.” (*TMT*: 224 – italics added for the argument) Ingold and Vergunst

suggest in *Ways of Walking* that walking with non-humans, following their tracks or moving like it, allows humans to perceive the world as them, developing a feel of the land (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 10-11). As the characters acknowledge the more-than-human world's fall, the acknowledgement of the environment acquired by walking with and like non-humans indeed raises empathy in them. As previously discussed, the resonant encounter with the moose fosters in the protagonist a sense of empathy toward the nonhuman world and leads to the realization that killing it would be ecologically unsustainable.

The empathy towards the Earth and its inhabitants fosters a sense of solidarity among the characters of *The Marrow Thieves*. As seen in the previous section, walking with non-humans, just as with other humans, transforms the land into a home and the non-humans into a destination. The characters are indeed walking toward the "sacred ancestral lands" and as argued earlier, choosing something as a destination in these novels symbolizes love and care. The land is damaged – nonetheless still not as damaged as *The Road*'s land, which leaves room for hope – and, as De Vos claims, while Indigenous people come together in new configurations and locations to protect their families from the colonizers, this does not mean the characters have given up their sense of responsibility towards their original homelands (De Vos 2020: 34):

"All we need is the safety to return to our homelands. Then we can start the process of healing." I was confused. "How can you return home when it's gone? Can't you just heal out here?" Miig and General gave each other knowing looks, and Clarence was patient in his answer. "I mean we can start healing the land. We have the knowledge (...). When we heal our land, we are healed also." Then he added, "We'll get there. Maybe not soon, but eventually." (*TMT*: 193)

In this extract, French first misunderstands what his ancestors tell him. In the post-apocalyptic world where houses are destroyed, he does not imagine another home. However, home can be found in their homelands. Moreover, the protagonist thinks they talk about healing themselves, but to heal themselves, they must heal nature first. The love and care for these homelands the characters are headed towards are close to Soliphilia, another term coined by Glenn Albrecht. Soliphilia means the "love of the interrelated whole", taking the whole as the Earth rooted in interconnectedness (Figueiras 2020). The embedded relationships between human and their home environments "allow them to regenerate and construct healing practices that are circular in unison" (Figueiras 2020).

Therefore, the walking community in *The Marrow Thieves* takes on the responsibility of gathering forces to begin the healing process for the earth. Tim Ingold defends this human concern for non-humans, this being-with, that has a caring, attentive regard suggesting that those cohabiting with non-humans like Indigenous hunters can provide the best indications on

On the path together

how to proceed to avoid disengagement and alienation of humanity from nature (Ingold 2000: 76). By seeing non-humans as equal members of their walking community, acknowledging the environment as both their home and purpose, as well as forming a resonant relationship with non-humans, the walking characters in *The Marrow Thieves* demonstrate how cooperation and caring - rather than individualism – could heal and make survival sustainable.

In conclusion, since it is the central activity in a post-apocalyptic world, walking defines and shapes the development of the characters' relationships with those they walk alongside. In a world where houses are destroyed and where meaning is hard to find, the walking characters of these novels become a new secured home as well as a new meaningful destination for one another. Even if most humans are violent and individualist, all novels end in care and solidarity after walking together, giving hope to humanity. While *The Marrow Thieves* offers a hopeful solution through interconnectedness and the healing of the Earth, the characters in *Station Eleven* and *The Road* follow a darker path, unable to reconnect with nature, yet their narratives still convey a powerful message of alienation and unsustainability. Therefore, walking as a new epistemology, a new way of perceiving the world, not only allows characters to move beyond the mindless, consumptive mode of walking the Earth but also highlights the significance of those they walk alongside – human or not.

Decelerative narrative and slow walking: reconnecting
with the nonhuman world

Reconsidering the resonance or sense of alienation evoked by the deer passages in the three novels, another distinct feature of the new epistemology of walking emerges: deceleration. At the time of resonance between the protagonist of *The Marrow Thieves* and the Great Spirit of the forest that is the moose, the scene is lengthened with a stretching effect of the narrative. This encounter which only lasts a few seconds takes several pages of the novel. Even if the characters are walking in a hurry because they are chased, hunting moments still slow down the way the characters walk and experience time and space. For instance, two hunting occurrences are described by the same words except for the target: “Time is slow in that vacuum space. In this new space, I had time to aim squarely between the moose’s / the man’s eyes, watching his muscles contort and his skin wrinkle (...). Then I decided against it, lowering the barrel to his chest: always go for the sure target. Miig had taught us that on one of my first hunts, and I listen to my Elders.” (TMT: 48 & 136) These two almost identical extracts show the hunting momentum where time and space are experienced slowly. The decelerative experience of hunting enables the character to take the time to reflect on his actions. After these moments, the character decides not to kill the moose but end the traitor’s life. The character indeed resonates with the peaceful and respectful non-human but not with the cruel human.

However, it is not because the other two novels do not show resonance between a human character and a deer that there is no slowdown in their narratives as well that highlights the presence of non-humans in these new post-apocalyptic spaces. These deer scenes might seem not essential for the plot when in fact, the figure of the deer in a normally human space slows down the attention of characters, as well as of readers. Indeed, the animal’s function in the narrative is symbolic because it suggests the presence of non-humans in the “human-scale space of storytelling” (Caracciolo 2022b: 2). The Belgian scholar Marco Caracciolo in *Slow Narrative and Nonhuman Materialities* examines the decelerative techniques that depart the narration from the human-centeredness of the narrative, channelling the vision of human-nonhuman interconnectedness (Caracciolo 2022b: 3): “Artistically and experientially, slowness challenges this vision and reveals the rich interconnectivity of human subjectivity and nonhuman materialities.” (Caracciolo 2022b: 5). Even if animals are mostly placed in the background in *Station Eleven* or are extinct in *The Road*, the deer mentions slow and complicate the reading process which makes the reader notice their presence and reflect on the illustration of human neglect of the nonhuman world. Therefore, slowing down becomes a means for both readers and walking characters to reconnect with nonhuman life in post-apocalyptic worlds that extend the logic of capitalist alienation. A mode of deceleration is another solution than resonance to counter the postmodern crisis of relationship to the world.

Situating the literary mode of deceleration within its broader context reveals it as a response to Western culture and its phenomenon of growth constraint, which fundamentally changes the form and quality of human relationships with the world (Rosa 2018: 478). This growth constraint is accompanied by speed (fast communication, travel, producing) but also sedentarism and individualism which all disembody humans as seen so far in this thesis through the characters' relationship to walking and to the nonhuman world. For instance, *The Marrow Thieves* denounces a society of speed. The walking characters reconnect to a form of slow walking in a natural setting which is opposed to the terrifying speed of the city with its technology, drones, machines, and fast cars. The post-apocalyptic characters of *Station Eleven* also walk slowly compared to the pre-collapse zombie figures representatives of the societal productive needs and the fast disconnected walking due to busyness. Modern civilization itself in *Station Eleven* is ironically defined by technology and its speed: "They were told about the Internet, how it was everywhere and connected everything, *how it was us.*" (SE: 262 – italics added to support the argument) Human civilization defining itself by the Internet explains why at the end of the novel, the characters wish to return to electricity and postmodern comfort and speed rather than (re)learning how to live slowly and in harmony with the natural world.

In response to the visible acceleration that defines postmodern society –caricatured in these novels as well – slowing down emerges thus as a countermeasure. Ursula Heise, scholar in contemporary literature and environmental studies, explains how "the last two decades slowness has become a master trope for the resistance to capitalism, globalization, standardization, mass production, new media, and other new technologies" (Cited in Caracciolo 2022b: 11). This is why the discourse of slowness, Caracciolo points out, is usually seen as a resistance to the "cult of speed that is the signature gesture of modernity." (Caracciolo 2022b: 11) However, the last does not only measure slowness against a certain cultural standard but a way to reconnect with the more-than-human world. In times of environmental crisis, disengagement from the nonhuman world caused by postmodern ideologies is particularly misguided. Marco Caracciolo in *Slow Narrative and Nonhuman Materialities* argues how decelerative writing can help include non-humans in the postmodern far too anthropocentric conception of reality. The scholar is interested in slowness as a "particularly meaningful experience arising in the interaction between narrative form and readers' environmental imagination" (Caracciolo 2022b: ix) as well as how this "experience of slowness in contemporary narrative practices can create a vision of interconnectedness between human communities and the nonhuman world." (Caracciolo 2022b: 3) Post-apocalyptic and Cli-fi narratives respond to Caracciolo's call for both urgency and reflection by offering speculative scenarios that illustrate engagement or disengagement with ecological collapses while

immersing readers in slow mode and contemplative experience of its causes and long-term consequences.

The accelerative Western world and how it disturbs the temporality of the present create, according to Caracciolo, “formidable challenges for storytelling.” (Caracciolo 2022b: 7) The last chapter of this work analyzes how the three novels take this challenge to slow down both narrative and ways of walking to reengage both readers and characters into the more-than-human world. First, observing the decelerative techniques in terms of structure and complex language of *Station Eleven* and *The Road* reveals that both novels offer as much as *The Marrow Thieves*, a way for readers to understand an eco-critical message of slowness. Then, decelerative literary techniques applied to walking characters from all three novels reveal human engagement with non-humans through rhythm, rituals and awareness and invite readers to do the same.

1. Decelerate the reading: slowness through textual strategies

This section analyzes the reading experience created by the narrative structures and walking language of *Station Eleven* and *The Road*. By using foregrounding techniques, the novels interrupt the flow and slow down reading, creating what Caracciolo describes as a “*thickening of attention*” – a state of absorption in the multiple layers of narrative (Caracciolo 2022b: 11). As a result, readers engage more deeply with the text (Caracciolo 2022b: 6). The non-linear and circular narratives in both novels enrich the texture of the reading experience and decelerate its pace, encouraging readers to focus on presentness and thereby engage more deeply with the cautionary aspects of the text.

Circular narratives: deceleration and engagement through the reading pace

The Road does not follow a propulsive narrative nor a fast-paced plot; instead, it invites readers into a slow mode of reading. Its narrative structure revolves cyclically around walking, encounters with secondary characters, looting, and sleeping. Rather than being driven by a linear or teleological progression, the novel is shaped by a sense of circularity that deliberately decelerates the reading experience. This narrative mode aligns with Caracciolo’s mode of *texture*, which contrasts with a narrow focus on plot resolution or the protagonist’s success in achieving specific goals (Caracciolo 2022b: 11). *The Road* thereby values the presentness of experience, resisting the drive toward closure. Through its stylistic and formal choices, this textured mode sustains the reader’s attention. However, *The Road* is not the only one to use a circular narrative. In *Station Eleven*, for instance, some characters, the dog’s name Luli or even the Station Eleven Comic book appear in both timelines, connecting them and creating

continuity. Moreover, a circularity of concepts is found in the novel's structure, particularly through the motif of the airport. The first scene opens with Arthur's death on a theatre stage, which Jeevan perceives as a transitional or terminal space, while the airport is initially introduced as the epicenter of the flu. The novel then comes full circle, concluding with a birth in an airport, reinforcing this thematic circularity.

The three novels offer a non-linear structure in terms of temporality. *The Road* with the father's memories and *The Marrow Thieves* with the several chapters of coming-to stories offer analepsis while *Station Eleven* is particularly known for its complex syuzhet. *Station Eleven* has nine parts and fifty-five chapters and presents both analepsis and prolepsis as well as pauses. Most chapters correspond to two story times, the pre-collapse time which tells the life of Arthur in a descending order and the post-collapse time which tells the travel through days of the Travelling Symphony toward its future. However, the discourse time also consists of less frequent chapters about characters who travelled from the pre-collapse to the post-collapse like Jeevan or Clark, or even short chapters consisting of artefacts (like letters or interviews from any periods) or lists. These digressions enrich the context but also slow down the rhythm¹⁰. These pauses stop the narrative discourse, and occult the main story for a moment, enabling the reader to reflect more deeply on the message behind these short chapters. As the attention is "spread out" instead of focused on the end and a possible closure, more importance is put on the complexity of textual devices and the reading affective experience of the narrative progression is slowed (Caracciolo 2022b: 17). The writing focuses on the walking and life experience of the characters in these novels to highlight the issues raised through the narration rather than inviting a thrilling wait for closure. Slow post-apocalyptic narratives warn and raise awareness to readers more appropriately through the experience of uncertain presentness rather than a message of the ineluctability of a set path to success or the end of the world.

Foregrounding and complicating reading experience: the contrast between Western speed and slow walking

Mandel's *Station Eleven* also uses another defamiliarizing strategy to decelerate the reader's experience which is Jan Mukarovsky (2014)'s concept of *foregrounding*. This literary strategy complexifies the narrative, challenges the established conventions, undermining readers' expectations, and thus slowing down language comprehension (Caracciolo 2022b: 10). By thickening readers' attention on the pre-collapse narrative's language showing speed, a contrast is made with the slowness of the walking world of the post-collapse narrative. Indeed,

¹⁰ To read more about *Station Eleven*'s uses of lists and negative enumeration: see Marco Caracciolo, *Contemporary fiction and climate uncertainty, narrating unstable futures* (2022).

in terms of content, we have a lot of writing parallels between the disorientation of fast postmodern life and the slow, exhausting and meditative hyperawareness of the new world. For instance, “Arthur 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?” (SE: 77) The disorienting fever here is a metaphor for the easiness of fast travel and its impact of disembodiment also visible through the unconsciousness of the iPhone zombies mentioned earlier (SE: 160). This disorientation due to “inconceivable speeds” (SE: 134) showcases a contrast with the meditative slowness of walking that creates hyperawareness. In a world where keeping track of time is a struggle (SE: 140) and is only measured in days of distance, walking, the only displacement means, takes a lot of time compared to a plane for instance. Slowness in walking allows the characters to take time to raise awareness of their presence on earth.

Another example of a foregrounding device in *Station Eleven* that enables readers to reflect on what it means is seen in two consecutive contrasted pages. The first one is at the end of a pre-collapse chapter:

In four months Miranda will be back in Toronto, divorced at twenty-seven, working on a commerce degree, spending her alimony on expensive clothing and consultations with stylists because she's come to understand that clothes are armor; she will call Leon Prevant to ask about employment and a week later she'll be back at Neptune Logistics, in a more interesting job now, working under Leon in Client Relations, rising rapidly through the company until she comes to a point after four or five years when she travels almost constantly between a dozen countries and lives mostly out of a carry-on suitcase, a time when she lives a life that feels like freedom and sleeps with her downstairs neighbour occasionally but refuses to date anyone, whispers "I repent nothing" into the mirrors of a hundred hotel rooms from London to Singapore and in the morning puts on the clothes that make her invincible, a life where the moments of emptiness and disappointment are minimal, where by her midthirties she feels competent and at last more or less at ease in the world, studying foreign languages in first-class lounges and travelling in comfortable seats across oceans, meeting with clients and living her job, breathing her job, 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. (SE: 107)

Emily St. John Mandel uses here the literary technique of the parataxis in a sort of omniscient narrator voice mixed with stream of consciousness which allows the reader to paradoxically slow down his reading and focus on the meaning of this fast-paced illustrated journey of thoughts and movement. Moreover, the speed of international movement contrasts with the more stationary life of the post-apocalypse mentioned on the next page: “If you were to talk about the other towns you’ve passed through, that would count as news to us. The world’s become so local, hasn’t it? We hear stories from traders, of course, but most people don’t leave

their towns anymore.” (SE: 108) In this extract, the character mentions how news is slow to share because peddlers and traders must walk to communicate it, which is particularly disturbing for the imagination of the reader who faces the pre-collapse narrative as an “information age” (SE: 171) and a personification of information that “runs” (SE: 172). While slowing down the language comprehension of the reader, the novel enhances the radical contrast between alienating speed and conscient slowness. The foregrounding strategy especially focused on motifs of slow walking and style figures around movement shows how the content and form in *Station Eleven* come together in a return to slowness to counter the culture of acceleration and disembodiment.

Another foregrounding technique can be identified in the manipulation of duration within the narrative discourse of *Station Eleven* where the rhythm varies according to whether the storyline unfolds in the pre- or post-collapse setting. Acceleration in societal overconsumption and the fast era are visible in the pre-collapse narrative itself through accelerative literary devices. For instance, the narrative is summarized, going through various events and topics, employing ellipses to cover a lot of information throughout the entire life of Arthur and the characters around him. Moreover, the omniscient narrator enables the reader to travel from time to time, from one character’s mind to another, but also to have some information about the future of the characters. Informing about the upcoming death of a character or even beginning the novel with the death of the pre-collapse main character as well as providing a mixed timeline order, the novel removes any suspense, thus accelerating the pre-collapse narrative reading experience. The sense of speed in the pre-collapse story is also obtained through short sentences, small facts, and short chapters – sometimes 1 page, allowing a sense of fast reading and a fast page-turner. In contrast, the reading of the after-collapse narrative tends to slow down with sequences of continuous action, and long sentences, the reader immersing in the thoughts and reflections of the characters through their hours and days of walking. There is a deceleration, learning about details through descriptions of hour events in just a few days instead of an entire life, creating tension and suspense again slowing down the reading experience.

A decelerating foregrounding strategy is also detected in *The Road* through, first, a cyclical writing creating endlessness. As previously mentioned, the novel provides a repetitive thematic structure, as the two characters are primarily engaged in walking, stopping to sleep, resting or waiting for better conditions, looting places, hiding or confronting others, and observing the desolate land. These few activities recur in an arbitrary order, forming an endless cycle punctuated by the repeated phrase “They went on” which appears twenty-five times. This sense of slowness and endlessness is further reinforced by the writing style: descriptive

passages, the absence of punctuation (no commas, hyphens, apostrophes, or quotation marks), and the pervasive use of polysyndeton all serve to slow the reader's pace and help in the assimilation of the text.

In terms of content, the absence of time reference ("The days sloughed past uncounted and uncalendared." *TR*: 292) and the characters' impossibility to situate themselves in terms of month, year, and age ("What time of year? What age the child?" *TR*: 279) also enhance slowness and relentlessness. As seen in the last quote, *The Road* shows unusual grammar. Many verbless phrases contribute to a sense of immobility, particularly as they often describe an environment that is itself motionless: "Slow water in the flat country. The sloughs by the roadside motionless and gray. The coastal plain rivers in leaden serpentine across the wasted farmland. They went on." (*TR*: 214) In these three sentences, for instance, no verbs are used, emphasizing the static state of the environment. Furthermore, there is no sense of advancement in the characters' journey: "Long days. Open country with the ash blowing over the road. The boy sat by the fire at night with the pieces of the map across his knees. He had the names of towns and rivers by heart, and he measured their progress daily." (*TR*: 229) The first verbless phrase conveys a sense of slowness and heaviness, despite referring to the characters' walking journey, thus highlighting an ambivalence – as if walking itself leads to no real progress. The mention of the open country in the second sentence emphasizes the borderless, and therefore endless space of the post-apocalyptic world through which the characters wander aimlessly. Finally, the boy's knowledge of old place names reflects a glimmer of hope, even within a shattered and meaningless world.

Moreover, the distinctive stylistic and linguistic choices in *The Road*, which break from conventions, disrupt readers' expectations and draw their attention to the vocabulary of walking. Most of the novel consists of the two characters walking, with no great action nor many details, because there is nothing more than "stopping" and "moving again" (*TR*: 94). Readers thus notice a varied use of walking-related verbs that emphasize slowness, danger, exhaustion and physical weakness: "fording" (*TR*: 13), "trudged (on/out/up)" (*TR*: 13, 34, 80, 98, 103, 217, 238, 251, 295), "plodded on" (*TR*: 17, 92, 188), "pressed on" (*TR*: 34), "set off up the old roadway at a dead run" (*TR*: 69), "tottering" (*TR*: 14, 28, 122, 250), "made his way to it in a walking crouch" (*TR*: 48), "dragging one leg slightly" (*TR*: 50), "stumbled/ing" (*TR*: 70, 74, 132, 198, 252), "trundling" (*TR*: 193, 206, 227, 273), "r(an) limping" (*TR*: 282, 289), "slow going" (*TR*: 142, 294), from the pace of a "jogtrot" to the pace of walking (*TR*: 272). Therefore, although the conversations between the father and the boy rely on a sparse and repetitive vocabulary – often reusing the same haunting terms – the narrative itself employs rich and nuanced language to depict the act of walking. Through foregrounding strategies that

slow the reading experience, the text draws attention to these varied walking verbs, underlining the ironic slowness of a post-apocalyptic world still haunted by the mechanisms of capitalist alienation.

2. Slow walking: listening and reconnecting with the more-than-human world

Just as decelerative narratives allow readers to become more conscious of details, the slow walking of characters enables them to be more aware of their surroundings. In this section, the focus is on the characters' ways of walking that help them to acknowledge and relate again to human biological rhythms, rituals and senses, challenging speed and zombie alienation. The slow pace and heightened awareness of their surroundings enable characters to reconnect with time and space visually and sensually, forging a deeper connection with the more-than-human world. Additionally, the section concludes by highlighting how this challenge to reconnect with the present and the environment requires characters to develop an ability to listen – not only to others but also to non-humans who are often silenced by Western society.

Slowness through rituals and rhythm: what it is to be human

First, the narrative decelerating while depicting slow-walking characters illustrates a reconnection with human rhythms. As Hartmut Rosa explains in *Resonance, une sociologie de la relation au monde*, if humans do not perceive their bodies and treat them as a pure resource – like Arthur and characters from the pre-collapse fast society in *Station Eleven*– it is because they are in another kind of world whose rhythms and imperatives are not synchronized with their biological ones (Rosa 2018: 113). Western bodies are unhindered and disembodied because enclosed in hyperproductive ideologies. In these post-apocalyptic worlds, characters from the three novels return to walking which is, Rebecca Solnit argues, the intentional act closest to the unwilled rhythms of the body, to breathing and the beating of the heart (Solnit 2001: 5). Creating a delicate balance between being and doing, walking produces nothing but thoughts, experiences and arrivals (Solnit 2001: 5). Slow walking is thereby a solution for characters to restore awareness and control over their bodies and not stay zombies who no longer reflects and acknowledges life because of the accelerative postmodern society. For instance, counterbalanced by alienating speed, the experience of slow walking in these novels helps the characters process thoughts. Walking is used as a motif for characters in *The Marrow Thieves* and *Station Eleven* to mourn and grieve, or in *The Road* to reflect on and process events, all characters walking before talking about hard subjects.

Decelerative narrative and slow walking: reconnect with the nonhuman world

Furthermore, in *Station Eleven*, characters can transform their relationship with the world through a slower pace and rhythm which settle humans in a meditative experience rather than just in performance. Recalling the concept of resonance by Rosa, Rebecca Solnit argues that walking is a state in which the mind, the body and the world are aligned, “as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord.” (Solnit 2001: 6) For instance, Jeevan, a character from both timelines, experiences a “momentum” outside the fast reality and daily life while enjoying a walk instead of taking a cab to quickly return home. During a lengthened narrative scene, the character explains how he finally feels alive in the world, before the momentum stops when he reads a message, the technological world catching him. Two other passages in *Station Eleven* use a stretching effect to illustrate characters walking meditatively thanks to the rhythms of walking, reconnecting with the post-apocalyptic world and their own identity in it:

Some of them took turns trying to sleep in the moving caravans, others walking and walking until their thoughts burned out one by one like dying stars and they fell into a fugue state wherein all that mattered or had ever existed were these trees, this road, the counterpoint rhythms of human footsteps and horses' hooves, moonlight turning to darkness and then the summer morning, caravans rippling like apparitions in the heat, and now the Symphony was scattered here and there by the roadside in a state of semi-collapse while they waited for dinner to be ready. (SE: 121)

This extract demonstrates how slowness through pace and rhythm can be found, according to what argues Caracciolo, in verbal strategies or stylistic devices like repetition and rhythm. This very long sentence indeed creates length as it illustrates a long journey but also offers isocolon parallelism (“walking and walking”, “one by one”, “these trees, this road”, “here and there”) as well as the alliteration “horses’ hooves” which adds a percussive rhythm to the reading of a moment already illustrating the rhythms of footsteps. Moreover, this extract shows dissociation through walking which allows the characters to focus only on what surrounds them (the trees, the road, the sound of the footsteps, the moonlight). Ingold and Vergunst analyzing walking with literature recalls that just as there is more to walking than the iteration of footsteps, there is more to narration than the concatenation of words (Ingold and Vergunst 2008: 10) This extract is indeed not only a representation of the conditions and environment of their slow walking but shows how rhythmic walking helps characters to reconnect with sounds, sight, their world, but also their identity as seen in this other extract:

It was becoming more difficult to hold on to himself. He tried to keep up a litany of biographical facts as he walked, trying to anchor himself to this life, to this earth. My name is Jeevan Chaudhary. I was a photographer and then I was going to be a paramedic.

(...) But these thoughts broke apart in his head and were replaced by strange fragments: This is my soul and the world unwinding, this is my heart in the still winter air. Finally whispering the same two words over and over: “Keep walking. Keep walking. Keep walking.” He looked up and met the eyes of an owl, watching him from a snow-laden branch. (SE: 194)

Once again, word repetition echoes the rhythmic footsteps of the character as if “keep” was a step and “walking” was another and so on. In a sort of walking trance, Jeevan seems to change his conception of his identity from a societal norm presentation – a biography – to his true identity as a human in the world. As Solnit argues happens while walking as mentioned above (Solnit 2001: 6), the character aligns his mind (“my soul”) and his body (“my heart”) with “the world unwinding”, becoming more connected and grounded to the earth. In doing so, Jeevan can reconnect with non-humans in the new post-apocalyptic world, such as the owl mentioned in the last sentence.

Therefore, walking is not perceived as a mere form of performance but enables to understand and engage with the world. Slowing down serves not only as resistance to the fast pace of postmodern life but also as a way to reconnect with what truly matters: experiencing the journey and valuing the world encountered along the way rather than focusing solely on reaching a destination. Within the corpus of novels, one method of countering the modern emphasis on productivity, efficiency and task-oriented thinking is through the practice of rituals. Like walking, rituals are soothing, deliberate repetitions that create space for slowness and presence. They allow for a reconnection with the essence of being human: traditions and bonds with the earth. In *Station Eleven*, one “familiar” ritual of the Travelling Symphony when they stop walking is to take care of the horses (SE: 43). Another character from *Station Eleven*, Jeevan, smokes tobacco from a pipe as a “soothing ritual” which helps him to focus on landscape and sounds of nature instead of horrors (SE: 274). Likewise, the evening stop rituals of the characters in *The Marrow Thieves* consist of smoking tobacco, or sacred grass, that smells of earth, and sharing water while hearing Story (TMT: 22). In *The Road*, they also share food as a Eucharistic ritual where they see the worth and value of each natural element. In a world where there is “no list of things to be done. The day providential to itself.” (TR: 56), the man and the boy only must walk and rest as getting up and keep walking becomes a ritual of hope itself. Thus, the rituals embedded in their walking journeys help them to remain human, while also fostering a respect for the value of nature.

Danger slows the steps but sharpens the senses

Slow walking is also a consequence of constant danger in a post-apocalyptic setting where every sound and presence could be a threat. The characters are hence all compelled to

hyperawareness while walking. For instance, in *The Road*, the characters are always “on the lookout”; the father is defined by vocabulary of constant anxiety like “scared”, “cautious”, and “watchful” (TR: 160). However, awareness also enables the characters in the three novels to observe, listen, and smell, hence reconnecting with natural sensorial aspects. A synesthetic style reveals a new relationship established between humans and environmental elements. For instance, the characters in *The Road* pay attention to sounds which makes them wait and stop often while walking. At night, the father is ready to defend them at every noise, listening to the point of perceiving the usually denied sound of the wind: “He dozed and woke. What is coming? Footsteps in the leaves. No. Just the *wind. Nothing.*” (TR: 121 – italics added to support the argument). Be on the lookout allows the character to acknowledge his surroundings, the nonhuman environment, through various senses as demonstrated in another extract: “They (...) *listened* to the roll of the surf in the bay. The long shudder and fall of it. He got up in the night walked out and stood on the beach wrapped in his blankets. Too black to *see*. *Taste* of salt on his lips. *Waiting. Waiting.* Then the *slow boom* falling downshore. The seething *hiss* of it washing over the beach and drawing away again.” (TR: 233 – italics added to support the argument) The father here experiences a slow contemplation of the beach and the sea through vision, taste and hearing which makes him live in the present and allows him, as the extract continues in the novel, to reflect on his condition and that of nature.

In *Station Eleven*, the characters also must be hyperconscious of their surroundings to avoid the Prophet and his hunters. As the father in *The Road*, listening and observing opens the main character of *Station Eleven*, Kirsten, to her natural environment: “Every *sense* attuned to the *air* around her, trying to sense the prophet’s position – behind or ahead? – and met only by the *racket of the world around them*, the cicadas, the birds, dragonflies, a passing family of deer. (...) ‘Do you see something?’ (...) I see everything. ‘It’s *nothing.*’” (SE: 297 – italics added to support the argument) Comparing this extract and the one of *The Road* on page 121, the two characters devalue the relevance of nature in their quest for sounds by saying that it is “nothing”. Therefore, even if the characters seem to acknowledge and reflect more on the condition of the post-apocalyptic world, they are still unable to listen to the voice of the more-than-human world.

In contrast, the characters in *The Marrow Thieves* in addition to looking for a presence also take the time to acknowledge the sounds of nature: “The world out here was quiet, like the *land was holding its breath. But if you listened, really put conscious action into listening, things began to sing.* Insects with wings pirouetted (...). From the hole where the tree had once held on to the earth came the sound of deep movement (...). And a group of small birds chatted (...). And then there were footsteps.” (TMT: 48 – italics added to support the argument) Before

noticing the footsteps he was looking for, French hunting in the forest welcomes the voice of the personified nature which at first seemed to hold its words.

The theme of awareness and the importance of sounds alongside the slow walking in these three novels align with the Phonocene – the age of Earth sounds – in two different ways. On the one hand, *The Marrow Thieves*' characters listen and enjoy the sounds of the environment as Vinciane Despret, Belgian philosopher of science, praises to do: to pay particular attention to the earth that is still alive and not only endangered is to understand that there is still the stake of preserving what remains of it (Jean-Calmettes 2022). On the other hand, the “nothing” word choice, resulting from both *Station Eleven* and *The Road* characters' listening, ironically recalls the silence and estrangement associated with the Anthropocene regarding the environmental crisis.

The neglect of the Earth's voice by humans is also visible in all three novels' unresponsive or silenced characters. In *Station Eleven*, where the more-than-human world could finally take over humanity and make some noise, the characters still do not enter into conversation with it, as they are, in turn, “speechless in a world of riotous birdsong” (SE: 136). In *The Road*, the father keeps “shhh” his son (22 occurrences), keeping him quiet, cutting off every uncomfortable conversation with his “come on” (TR: 89, 102, 103, 104, 112, 143, 171, 248, 249, 250) or “let's go” (TR: 109, 139, 178, 276). The father wants them to remain oblivious and keep moving forward, avoiding the harsh reality. In contrast, the boy is ready to die instead of eating a living being or is willing to sacrifice his lifetime to share his food with a dog. While the father always asks the boy to listen to him, the father however fails to listen to his son who is the voice of humanity. “What was that? I didnt hear anything. Listen. I dont hear anything. They listened. Then in the distant he heard a dog bark.” (TR: 86) In this extract, the son is the one who perceives the dog, one of the lasts animals still on earth, while the father struggles to listen both his son and the sounds of non-humans. This novel thus caricatures the extreme individualism of a world that still does not want to listen to the last calls for help from an already almost disappeared nature and the last calls for action from a ‘good’ boy. Finally, in *The Marrow Thieves*, the Indigenous people are represented as the ones who are silenced and ignored when they warn of the environmental disasters coming: “Too bad the country was busy worrying about how we didn't pay an extra tax on Levi's jeans and Kit Kat bars to listen to what we were shouting.” (TMT: 24) Focused on capitalism, the society depicted in the novel pursues consumptive behavior after the apocalypse, too busy drawing dreams from Indigenous bodies to listen to what the earth needs. However, these walking characters are attentive to the needs of nature, learning slowly while walking how to listen to its calls and the warning stories

of the ancestors, sending a hopeful message of communication between humans and non-humans.

In conclusion, even though the characters in *The Road* and *Station Eleven* struggle to reconnect with the non-human world, alienated by capitalist roads and behaviors, the novels also offer hope by fostering an awareness of this world through deceleration. Ultimately, all three novels converge in a shared purpose. Through themes of slowing down and embracing presence, they underscore a fundamental problem: a communication breakdown caused by humanity's disconnection from its environment and failure to listen. These novels emphasize the necessity of slowing down to reestablish a relationship with the non-humans and learn to listen to their calls. From a meta-perspective, post-apocalyptic novels serve as warnings, urging readers to reflect on the urgent eco-critical challenges raised by the anthropocentric values in postmodern society. By engaging with these decelerative narratives, readers are encouraged to focus on the non-human world and recognize the need to reconnect with it – before it is too late. In both content and form, these novels represent a call – or a march – for a world less consumed by speed and reharmonized to human and natural rhythms.

Conclusion

Walking defines human identity, culture, and relationships with others and the world. It impacts and influences both the walker and the world he inhabits. So, what happens when walking humans become desynchronized, disconnected, and strained by the relentless pace of life? There are psychological, biological, and physical consequences that can turn humans into alienated creatures. However, walking is also a way of learning. Post-apocalyptic fiction offers a new, yet mimetic and ironic, space to reconsider the effects of postmodernity on humans and the world. In these kinds of narratives, characters return to walking, enabling them to learn or fail to. From a meta-perspective, post-apocalyptic survival spaces, where some of the very factors that led to collapse persist, allow readers to reflect on what must change in the real world to avoid such a future. The three novels under consideration, though different in their representations of post-apocalyptic settings and critical approaches, share a common thread: they depict characters walking through the ruins of the past to learn from them. Furthermore, with characters who reproduce past errors and potentially lead to the true end, a point of no return, post-apocalyptic literature offers not just a second chance to these characters, but also readers; a chance to change path before it is truly the end.

These novels demonstrate that walking in a post-apocalyptic setting is a complex act: scary, dangerous, and problematic when characters pursue consumerist behaviors. Through symbolic roads, the figure of digital capitalists and corporate zombies, the act of carrying a cart in *The Road*, or even the obsessive chases of certain characters, the narratives ironically extend the image of alienated humanity. Yet the novels still suggest ways to escape this alienation. The characters eventually find paths away from capitalism into the woods and non-consumerist modes of life; breaking the zombie pattern by freeing future generations from the alienated thought; or in *The Marrow Thieves*, they even learn a more respectful and sustainable way to live and consume.

Walking, as a new epistemology, teaches the characters how to break free from past behaviors by reflecting on the path they take. The characters, symbols of humanity, are not only progressing toward a future but also walking in the footsteps of those who came before. *The Marrow Thieves* and *The Road* present two ways of learning from the older generation's path to avoid repeating their mistakes. The former celebrates Indigenous culture, where children learn actively from stories and experiences in nature. The latter denounce a deceptive, overprotective mode of learning rooted in denial. While they follow different paths, both novels converge on the idea that the Western trajectory must be abandoned to act and hope for a better

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future. Like a dark post-apocalyptic version of bildungsroman, the boys in the two novels grow through contacts with the world and their walking experiences. By reading these narratives of growth, readers are invited to identify with the characters, develop critical thinking, and learn indirectly through a cathartic walking experience.

As the characters turn away from capitalist paths, they move toward others, whether human or non-human. Through walking metaphors, communities become the new home or destination. If post-apocalyptic plots are framed through walking, relationships are likewise conveyed through the language of walking. While *Station Eleven* and *The Marrow Thieves* portray solidarity and compassion from the beginning, *The Road*, with its darker setting, only abandons exclusionism at the very end, offering a faint hope for the continuation of humanity. However, *The Marrow Thieves* stands alone in its positive portrayal of human and non-human entanglement. Through the figure of the deer, the novels evoke different postmodern positions: the Anthropocene in *Station Eleven*, the Capitalocene in *The Road*, and the Symbiocene in *The Marrow Thieves*. These frameworks highlight the doomed unsustainability of the first two and suggest the third as a possible solution for healing both humans and non-humans.

As complex and ambivalent as walking in these novels may be, there is still hope in a reconnection to the non-human world through deceleration. By slowing the readers' pace through defamiliarization techniques and having characters slow down through rituals, rhythms and awareness, the novels convey a message of engagement and attentiveness to both human and non-human needs. This is a message, of form and content, that invites humans to detach from the zombified, consumerist walk. Reading these cathartic post-apocalyptic narratives, where walking is a way to learn, teaches as well how to disconnect from alienation and reconnect with the rhythms of all beings inhabiting the earth.

In essence, these texts, centered on walking, create a new epistemology by portraying a new way of knowing, observing, living and understanding the world. At first glance, they seem apocalyptic and devastating, but a deeper reading reveals decelerative strategies, moral storytelling, and the triumph of solidarity over individualism as paths to survival. These post-apocalyptic novels deliver an urgent message: a call to return to what makes humans human. With ambivalence, walking in post-apocalyptic worlds embodies both a warning against possible futures and a hopeful gesture toward lessons that should be followed.

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UNIVERSITÉ CATHOLIQUE DE LOUVAIN

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

Place Cardinal Mercier, 31, 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgique | www.uclouvain.be/fial