Histories of the Future:
Utopia and the Politics of Collective Memory in Post-Apocalyptic Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, apocalyptic thinking has accelerated rapidly. For many, our position in history is perceived as pre-apocalyptic, resulting in a proliferation of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction. Though future-oriented, these narratives express an ongoing preoccupation with the function of memory. In fact, the gargantuan corpus of contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction is almost obsessively focused on remembering the pre-apocalyptic past. Moreover, in engaging with contemporary anxieties, post-apocalyptic fiction frequently employs a unique temporal structure that defamiliarizes the real-world present as though it were the fictional pre-apocalyptic past. This thesis is focused on nine popular North American novels: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980), Emily St John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014), Peter Heller's *The Dog Stars* (2012), George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1951), Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018), and Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017). These narratives serve as examples of the variety of ways that post-apocalyptic fiction represents both individual and collective memories of the future's past. By reflecting on a defamiliarized version of the real-world present, each text wants us to consider the ways that our current conditions may appear in the future. By interacting with these popular narratives, readers are thus prompted to partake in the imaginary process of remembering and reflecting on fictionalized histories that act as the precursor to the end of the world as we know it. As a result, these texts have the potential to enable readers to reconsider our current living conditions and perhaps propose real-world solutions that mitigate the risks inherent in our present.

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Simultaneously, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, posing a very real threat to the human population on a global scale, reminding me just how fragile our existence on this planet is and how important my work is. This project has been one of the most difficult things I have done, in part because of the conditions under which I was writing, but also one of the greatest things I have accomplished. Like the apocalypse, this project has also led to great opportunity and a better understanding of what sort of futures I want to be part of. I am immensely grateful to all those who have supported me throughout this process as I, too, focused on the fictional collapse of something much bigger than myself.

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INTRODUCTION: POST-APOCALYPTIC FICTION AS FUTURE MEMORY

"…the more you remember the more you've lost." (195)
— Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*

Memory in Post-Apocalyptic Fiction

In 1981, amid the Cold War, the Science and Security Board of the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* shifted the time on the Doomsday Clock from seven minutes to midnight to four, as the world seemed to be moving "unevenly but inexorably closer to nuclear disaster" (Feld 1). As the second phase of the Strategic Nuclear Arms Treaty faltered, the United States and Soviet Union entered a new stage of the nuclear arms race, increasing the accuracy and agility of their rapidly growing stores of atomic missiles (Feld 1); globally, the total number of nuclear warheads reached 56,371 (*Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* "Doomsday Dashboard"). Publicly, neither of the involved parties would reject the possibility of a pre-emptive strike. Even worse, both nations stated that nuclear war was indeed "thinkable," professing the misguided belief that such a conflict could "remain limited or even be won" (Feld 1). The ongoing nuclear stalemate between these two global superpowers resulted in "growing public concern over the drift toward disaster"—the end of the world seemed not only possible, but perhaps imminent (Feld 1).

That same year, the French cartoonist Georges Blondeaux, better known by his pseudonym Gébé, published *Lettre aux Survivants*, a graphic novel that served simultaneously as a warning about the compounding risks of the present and a call-to-action. The story takes place in a post-nuclear future and focuses primarily on a small family made up of a father, Jean-Paul, a mother, Monique, and their two unnamed children, living in an underground bunker. Before the bomb was dropped, they had been "the perfect family": a mother, father, son, daughter, and a dog (Gébé 7). In the narrative present, the family unit, minus the dog, remains intact. Daily, a hazmat-suited postal worker, rides a bicycle through a barren nuclear wasteland, delivering letters to the family of survivors residing underground. After the apocalypse, mailboxes no longer exist, so he reads the letters out loud through the bomb shelter's ventilation system.

After several days of stories, the postman delivers a tale about the Bonelles, a small family not unlike their own, who have stopped on a hot and sunny Sunday at a hotel restaurant to relax with some cold beverages. As the family enjoys their drinks, an old man looks at Marie-Véronique, the youngest daughter, and begins to play a song for her on his mandolin. Once the song is done, the old man asks if she would like him to play her another song. Instead of graciously accepting this seemingly innocent offer, the daughter "catches the old fellow trying to sneak into her memory," and vehemently declares "No! I don't want to remember" (Gébé 44). Marie-Véronique then imagines a future in which she is looking back on this moment, seeing herself and one of her brothers as adults. Her brother

> says to her, with a smile that invokes the past: remember that old musician? It was after a walk. What a hot summer! And Papa, boy could he ever walk! So we had to keep up!...Sparkling lemonades. "Drink slowly, you're drenched in sweat." A mandolin, right? Wasn't it? He played for you, and then he asked if you wanted him to play anything else. Do you remember? (Gébé 45).

In response to this imagined future moment of remembrance, Marie-Véronique grows even more agitated, declaring once again, "No! I don't want to remember!" (Gébé 45). After being pressured to accept the old man's offer, she thinks to herself:

> I see every root of every tree underground. I see every drop of water in every cloud. I see the roots of people's thoughts. I see their lives. Their whole lives. Beige. I see people's

> desire for sweet little memories, all sticky. For sucking on later, when dusty. My heart aches. (Gébé 47)

In this moment, *Letter to Survivors* reflects on the function of memory. Here, the act of purposefully making happy memories to look back on showcases a belief that the future can only become worse than the present. Instead of living in the moment, people collect and save memories to reflect on as the years go by and life loses its vibrancy, thus becoming "beige" (Gébé 47).

Ironically, the postman who tells this story uses this function of memory to his advantage. Before the nuclear disaster, the family's life was defined by an abundance of space, mobility, wealth, and leisure. The present, by contrast, is markedly different from their past. Since the disaster, the family has lived cramped in a small and sparsely furnished underground bunker. The privileged amenities they had once been accustomed to have been stripped away. Moments of freedom and relaxation are no longer available and can thus exclusively be accessed through memory. Reflecting on these moments only serves to emphasize the vast divide between the past and present, reminding the family of the gravity of all they have left behind, invoking a sense of overwhelming nostalgia for a past that cannot be returned to. As Marie-Véronique suggests, the family's "sweet little memories" are brought out like sweet but nutritionally empty candies to "suck on later," when their lives are undeniably worse (Gébé 47).

However, the postman's propensity to dwell on the elements of the past that the family cannot access is not without purpose. Though, at times, the family feels that he has just come to torment them, these letters have been produced with an ulterior motive. Pleasant memories, placed in comparison with the desperate conditions of the present, urge them to consider the circumstances that enabled the apocalypse in the first place. Radicalized by the postman's stories, the family gains a growing awareness of the ways that the reckless decisions made by the world's most powerful political leaders, partnered with the subsequent complacency and inaction of the masses, enabled the apocalypse. Reflection thus empowers them to imagine alternatives for the future. Significantly, at the end of the text, readers learn that the postman is not working alone. Instead, he is just one member of a large political organization whose primary function is to radicalize the population. By reminding survivors of the vast divide between past and present, the postal workers successfully utilize nostalgia to inspire revolution amongst the masses. *Letter to Survivors* thus meditates on the complex functions of memory, identifying the ways that it is influenced by the conditions of the present and how it can be used to bring forth future change.

Though Gébé's text is a timely and notable addition to the graphic novel genre, the narrative is not unique in its focus. In the introduction of *Letter to Survivors,* the translator, Edward Gauvin, notes that "[o]ver thirty-five years after its initial publication, this letter from one era of staring down the missile silo has reached another, none the wiser . . . It has been *almost midnight* for such a long time" (xiii; emphasis added). The post-apocalyptic genre has only proliferated in the intervening years, reflecting anxieties both similar and dissimilar from those Gébé and his contemporaries grappled with. However, the preoccupation with the function of memory has remained a staple of the genre. In fact, the gargantuan corpus of contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction, though oriented toward speculative visions of future worlds ravaged by countless catastrophes, is almost obsessively focused on remembering the pre-apocalyptic past.

Simon Spiegel notes that during our daily lives "we often perceive things only superficially," meaning that we do not, and in many cases cannot, "really *see*" the world around us (369). To "*truly see*," we must be forced to overcome our tendency toward unconscious observation, which is only possible through the act of rendering the familiar strange (Spiegel

369). Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky claims that the role of art is to counter this pervasive habit of automatization, which ultimately eats “away at things, at clothes, at furniture, at our wives, and at our fear of war,” until “life fades into nothingness” (5). In other words, as habituation grows, so too does apathy. Art, however, maintains the potential to counter this growing cultural indifference through the act of estrangement. In presenting “things out of their usual contexts,” a work of art ultimately allows the “object,” or concept, in question to be perceived “in a special way” (Shklovsky 9-10).

Though estrangement is not unique to any particular artform, Darko Suvin claims that science fiction, and speculative fiction more generally, are genres defined by cognitive estrangement. However, Spiegel argues that Shklovsky and Suvin’s conceptions of estrangement are fundamentally different, as the former is “primarily a formal operation,” while the latter “denotes a phenomenon on the level of the story” (382). Speculative fiction is focused on the naturalization of that which is not, or not yet, possible through the depiction of the narrative’s “novum” as an ordinary and believable feature of the text’s reality (377). Within this context, the “defamiliarizing effect” is that which depicts the impossible as “possible only inside the fictional world” (381). In “imagining strange worlds,” the genre thus enables us to “see our own conditions of life in a new and potentially revolutionary perspective” (Parrinder 4).

Historically, the estranging function of speculative fiction has often been located in “unknown and even unknowable” futuristic landscapes, distant from our real-world present, both in time and space (Kitchin and Kneale 7). The genre has traditionally been situated in distant, futuristic locales— “outer space, the space of distant planets and imagined landscapes” (xi). Although estrangement has arguably always been a defining feature of future-oriented genres, like science fiction, speculative fiction, solarpunk, and cli-fi, the temporal structuring of contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction demonstrates a shift in the *locus* of estrangement from geography to chronology. These narratives remain "most concerned with the current moment of history, but they present it in an estranged manner," focusing on "that one place where some hope for a better life for all humanity still lingers" and the place in which we may see the culmination of the threats in our current moment: the future (Moylan *Demand the Impossible* 35). This memory-obsessed genre thus offers a unique temporal structure that essentially defamiliarizes the real-world present and repackages it in the form of fictionalized memories and histories of a pre-apocalyptic past that have not yet—and may never—come to pass. In estranging the real-world present, post-apocalyptic fiction offers a meditation on a history of our world that has not yet happened—a future history.

The origins of these speculative narratives of disaster are rooted in ancient religious scripture. The term "apocalypse" comes from the ancient Greek word *apokalyptein*, meaning to uncover or reveal (Murphy and Schedtler 6). The earliest examples of apocalyptic writings we have access to are dated around 167-164 BCE (DiTommasso "Apocalypticism in the Contemporary World" 319). Though rooted in ancient Judaism, the popularity of Apocalyptic thinking and speculation grew amongst the Abrahamic religions throughout the Middle Ages (DiTommasso "Apocalypticism in the Contemporary World" 319). The context of these ancient apocalypses was largely religious, expressing a belief system where all events in all of history—past, present, and future—were governed by "superhuman agents," like God, angels, and demons (Collins 20). Accordingly, the plot of these narratives usually followed a particular pattern, which John J. Collins describes as a " revelation" or *mystical unveiling* "mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another supernatural world," like heaven or hell (5). More simply, Marlene Goldman claims that the "basic elements of the apocalyptic narrative include a transformative catastrophe and subsequent revelation of ultimate truth," describing "the end of the world and the creation of a heavenly world reserved for God's chosen people" (4). In these narratives, humanity's future is predetermined, which means that "the course of events cannot be altered" (Collins 22). However, although the fate of the world is predetermined, the fate of the individual is not (Collins 22).

Where the ancient religious form of apocalypse "evokes images of catastrophic destruction and final judgment," apocalyptic motifs today "have been reinvigorated by secular predicaments to make sense of the terminal condition of our world in the context of climate injustice, nuclear politics, or territorial warfare" (Stümer 1). These non-spiritual forms of apocalypse initially "grew out of Renaissance humanism and Enlightenment rationalism" (DiTommaso "Apocalypticism in the Contemporary World" 320). As the West became increasingly secular throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these religious narratives of apocalypse dipped in popularity but never disappeared. In recent years, secular forms of apocalypse, distinct from their religious precursors, have only grown and burgeoned in popularity. Unlike their forebearers, these narratives are not governed by the supernatural frameworks traditionally applied to the genre, ultimately removing the defining structure of "a supernatural intermediary," giving "a pseudonymous prophet secret knowledge of the end times" (Lynskey 20). Moreover, many of these contemporary narratives do not take place during a moment of catastrophic rupture but are instead located in a post-apocalyptic landscape after the end of the world, which places their realities in conflict with those described in religious scripture. Traditionally, the concept of anything *post*-apocalyptic is redundant, because in ancient religious narratives, the Earthly world is destroyed, and all of humanity is met with God's "final postmortem judgment" (DiTommaso "Apocalypticism in the Contemporary World" 323). Anything after the end of the world is an "oxymoron" because "[b]efore the beginning and after the end, there can only be nothing"— "[a]t the beginning something begins; and at the ending, it ends" (Berger XI).

Accordingly, while these current manifestations of apocalypse are intimately related to their religious progenitors in their depiction of catastrophe, there are key generic differences. Outside of religious contexts, the apocalypse has become synonymous with catastrophic violence or large-scale disaster. As a result, I believe that these narratives are better defined as a subset of the contemporary dystopian genre. The history of dystopia is rooted in conceptions of utopia, a Latin term with Greek origins. Utopia combines the prefix "*ou*," meaning "not," or "*eu*," meaning good, with the root word "*topos*," meaning "place." Thus, the good place that is no place—a perfect place that cannot exist. Tom Moylan notes that utopian writing is inherently "complex and contradictory," serving the purpose of meeting "the unfulfilled needs and wants of specific classes, groups, and individuals in their unique historical contexts" (*Demand the Impossible* 1). The impulse that drives utopia is thus the collective yearning for a "world free of oppression and full of satisfaction" (*Demand the Impossible* 20). The concept of dystopia takes utopia to mean "good place" and flips it by adding the prefix "*dys*," meaning bad, or abnormal, to "*topos*." *Ergo*, a fictional "bad place." Contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction presents scenarios in which some form of large-scale secular catastrophe has occurred, thus pushing survivors into this fictional "bad place." Consequently, these new forms of apocalypse "articulate anxieties related to aspects and side effects of the project of modernity, such as industrialisation, imperialism, urbanisation and environmental degradation" (Germanà and Mousoutzanis 4).

Utopia expresses humanity's inherent longing to develop a future that is better than the world of the present (Moylan *Demand the Impossible* 20). However, during the twentieth century, "dystopian accounts of places worse than the ones we live in" grew in popularity, especially after World War II (Baccolini and Moylan 1). Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan argue that dystopia presents "a detailed and pessimistic presentation of the very worst social alternatives" (6). These expressions of the dystopian imagination, "served as a prophetic vehicle, the canary in a cage, for writers with an ethical and political concern for warning us of the terrible sociopolitical tendencies that could, if continued, turn our contemporary world into the iron cages portrayed in the realm of utopia's underside" (Baccolini and Moylan 2). Nonetheless, these narratives frequently "maintain a horizon of hope (or at least invite readings that do)" (Baccolini and Moylan 6). Within the classical dystopia, Raffaella Baccolini claims that the utopian impulse can only be maintained outside the narrative, as it "is only if we consider dystopia as a warning, that we as readers can hope to escape such a pessimistic future" ("Gender and Genre" 18). By contrast, the critical dystopia, maintains "the utopian impulse *within* the work," presenting readers with "a locus of hope that contributes to deconstructing tradition and reconstructing alternatives" (Baccolini "Gender and Genre" 18). These narratives are frequently "motivated out of a dystopian pessimism in that they force us to confront the dystopian elements of postmodern culture so that we can work through them and begin again" (J. Miller 337).

Moylan argues that for "humanity to develop, we must keep an open faith in the future and guard against the memory which draws us back into the past and the anxiety which consumes us in the present" (*Demand the Impossible* 21). However, I believe the estranging impact of the contemporary post-apocalyptic genre's propensity toward remembering our present is driven by a dystopian pessimism regarding the future as well as a utopian desire for change.

While Stephanie Lemenager has claimed that engaging with these sorts of disaster narratives can provide "therapeutic catharsis to silent readers, who will privately cope with—and perhaps put aside" their fears for the future, it is possible that these narratives can also inspire change in the present (476). If we understand literature, like all art, to potentially be "anticipatory," then it can function as a "stimulant for revolutionary praxis" (Moylan *Demand the Impossible* 21). Indeed, Ruth Levitas argues that one of the most important functions of utopia is to "catalyze change" (Levitas and Sargisson 14). However, as Lucy Sargisson notes, mere "desire is not enough," so the value of utopian dreaming lies in its potential to inspire transformative action (Levitas and Sargisson 16). Indeed, the role of utopia in the "revolutionary arsenal" is to articulate the fact that there are alternative ways to live and be within the world (Moylan *Demand the Impossible* 25-26). The "utopian transformation doesn't have to be located in the future, in a far distant hope for a better place," but instead "can be part of transformation in the now" (Levitas and Sargisson 17). And while the task of the utopian imagination is not to present a singular plan for revolution, it enables us to envision a variety of alternatives that prioritize "autonomy, mutual aid, and equality" that would ultimately negate the conditions imposed by "contemporary capitalism and the hierarchal state" in our present (Moylan *Demand the Impossible* 26). Ultimately, if utopia enables the exploration of alternatives and inspires transformative action in our present, then so too does dystopia.

In alignment with the dystopian turn of the latter half of the twentieth century, Lorenzo DiTommaso also claims that the "late 1960s and 1970s witnessed the start of a dramatic rise in the extent to which, and intensity with which, people in general came to regard their situations apocalyptically" ("Apocalypticism in the Contemporary World" 320). This "apocalyptic shift," as he terms it, rapidly accelerated in 2001 and has since "become a defining feature of the twenty-first century" ("Apocalypticism in the Contemporary World" 320). In literary fiction, especially in the speculative fiction genre, apocalypse has been a pervasive theme for over a century, and this popularity has only been increasing. In 2014, DiTommaso noted that contemporary narratives of apocalypse are primarily located in fiction, and over 80% "date from after 1970, while over half the works are post-1995, or less than 20 years old" ("Apocalypticism and Popular Culture" 476). However, in 2020, DiTommaso noted that "the percentage is even more inclined towards the present day" ("Apocalypticism in the Contemporary World" 323).

While this imaginative fixation on "apocalypse is a pervasive cultural habit," it is undeniable that the twenty-first century has been deeply impacted by a steadily accelerating shift toward apocalyptic thinking (Palmer 158). DiTommaso argues that "now, possibly more than any other time in history, people are inclined to understand the world and their place in it through the lens of the apocalyptic worldview" ("Apocalypticism and Popular Culture" 473). For many, we live in a time that is often perceived as dystopian and potentially pre-apocalyptic. Globally, there is a growing sense that the social and political systems to which our world adheres are no longer functional, and are, in fact, only worsening (DiTommaso "Apocalypticism in the Contemporary World" 321). Indeed, the "apocalyptic angst" that has defined humanity throughout many moments in our history seems to have "become a constant: all ebb and no flow" (Lynskey 6).

While humanity has a long history of believing the end is imminent, we are currently living in unprecedented times that threaten our existence. Considering the compounding threats facing humanity, it is unsurprising that apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions have grown increasingly popular. Our present moment is rife with threats, acting both on their own and in conjunction with one another. We are constantly residing under the shadow of climate change, mass species extinction, pandemic outbreaks, and the capacity for incredible violence, the likes of which the world *has* already seen—colonization, war, and, of course, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, which have once again become a concern.

In 2023, the Science and Security Board working for the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* shifted the doomsday clock forward, stopping just 90 seconds from midnight, the closest it had ever been, at least until now. As recently as January 28, 2025, the clock was shifted "from 90 seconds to 89 seconds to midnight," meaning that we are living through the most dangerous moment in human history thus far (Mecklin). While a single second may not seem like a large shift, the board argues that "a move of even a single second should be taken as an indication of extreme danger" since "the world is already perilously close to the precipice" (Mecklin). Last year's statement notes that humanity is facing several threats that continue to edge us "ever closer to catastrophe," including global conflict and political tensions that may result in the use of nuclear weapons, the growing threat of climate change, natural and manmade biological threats, disruptive technologies, and the spread of misinformation (Mecklin). The Science and Security Board indicates that these threats, both in isolation and in combination with one another, bring us "closer than ever" to global catastrophe (Mecklin). Considering these compounding threats against the human race, it is thus unsurprising that people in the present are more likely than ever before to feel that they are on the brink of the apocalypse. Without swift and collective action, our dystopian present may turn into an apocalyptic epoch, defined by global catastrophe and mass extinction.

Despite the catastrophic risks that are undeniably embedded in our present, for many minority populations, the apocalypse has already occurred. Indeed, disenfranchised communities, like "Black, Indigenous, migrant, queer, and trans people," have already "lived through and continue to live with the many ends of their worlds" (Stümer 5). As Maral Attar-Zadeh argues, "the end is already here" and "the end is yet to come" (55). Apocalypse is not just our future; it is our past, and our present. It is now. We are undoubtedly living in what German sociologist Ulrich Beck has described as a "risk society," where people have become obsessed with the "projected dangers of the future"— "hazards which, if they occur, would mean destruction of such a scale that action afterwards would be practically impossible" (34). These sorts of risk societies are defined by the past losing "the power to determine the present," and thus the attention of the masses is refocused on an imagined, or even "fictive," future (Beck 34). In addition, the more that people and communities can identify these risks, "the more vulnerable [they] become towards anxiety" (Wilkinson 5). In other words, in our current socio-political climate, many people are worried about the future, or the potential lack thereof. And as a result, narratives about the apocalypse, which reflect the potential future outcomes of the risks that define our present, speak to the dystopian anxieties percolating amongst the masses.

The act of remembering, even when the past is fictional, is necessary for conceptualizing "better or worse possible futures" (Hanson *Memory and Utopian Agency* xviii). In the narrative present of many stories from the post-apocalyptic genre, readers are positioned to examine their real-world present as though it were the pre-apocalyptic past. This shift in perspective generates a form of dramatic irony between character, plot, and reader, functioning as a historical warning, as dystopia often is, aimed at our own precarious position. By maintaining a sustained focus on memory, both in terms of structure and as a thematic touchstone, post-apocalyptic fiction heightens readers' awareness of the risk society in which we live. Simultaneously, the genre insists upon an active and critical engagement with the past, revealing how the present influences the future and creating a "feedback loop between fiction and reality" (Lynskey 13). In this way, even imagined histories function as both a dystopian warning and a utopian resource for thinking about the future: they caution us against repeating catastrophic mistakes while also offering conceptual tools for living more deliberately and sustainably in an unstable world.

Chapter Summary

Because the "corpus of end-of-the-world stories is immense and ever-growing," it would be impossible to represent them all, and any attempt to do so would become "a catalogue" that lacked any sort of in-depth analysis (Lynskey 13). In endeavouring to discuss the entire corpus of contemporary apocalyptic fiction, one would be at risk of presenting a diverse genre as being homogenous in its structure, ideology, and goals. Instead, I have chosen to focus my analysis on nine popular North American novels published over the last 75 years, each of which offers a valuable perspective on the significance of memory, both in terms of the individual as well as the collective, and history in the contemporary apocalyptic narrative. Each of these texts uses cognitive estrangement to defamiliarize the author's real-world present by figuring it as the pre-apocalyptic past, offering readers the opportunity to reflect on the varied risks our world is currently facing. Beyond the temporal structuring, the novels are also thematically focused on memory, reflecting on the risks of losing access to history, idealizing the past, and the rendering of memory into myth, as well as the importance of learning from our past and maintaining a living and critical relationship with the knowledge of our ancestors.

The thesis is presented in two halves. The first two body chapters are focused primarily on how post-apocalyptic fiction defamiliarizes and comments on the present. These narratives represent futures in which the pre-apocalyptic past becomes an object of longing, subject to interpretation and accordingly misinterpretation. Though defamiliarization remains present in the structure of all the texts I focus on, in the second half of the thesis, my argument shifts to consider how these narratives imagine what forms of historical memory might be most helpful in enabling communities to endure the post-apocalyptic conditions of their present. As such, the last two body chapters represent futures in which the historical past or intergenerational knowledge are revalued as tools that enable survival and change. The argument thus moves between futures in which idealized cultural memory or collective amnesia place survivors at risk of reproducing the conditions that originally enabled the apocalypse, and more hopeful futures in which the past is mobilized as a resource for building something new. Within these chapters, I have identified four distinctive modalities of memory: mythmaking, nostalgia, reclamation, and decolonization. I argue that this ongoing historical fixation that I have identified as being characteristic of the genre demonstrates that a collective forgetting of the past, or a misinterpretation of historical objects and events, leads to dire consequences. By the same token, the preservation of past knowledge and historical record-keeping are represented as highly valuable and, in fact, imperative to the survival of the population post-rupture. Moreover, these narratives suggest that a return to preindustrial or Indigenous lifeways may be necessary in the future. By defamiliarizing the author's real-world present as the pre-apocalyptic past, these narratives have the potential to inspire readers to reflect on their current conditions, helping us identify and mitigate the risks inherent in our present. Most significantly, the ongoing fixation on memory reminds us of the importance of maintaining a critical and active relationship with our past, and these stories allow us to do so not only with our real-world history but also those histories we imagine for our future.

The first chapter, "Future Fragments: The Mythologizing of Future History," examines Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), and Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980). Stacy Kozakavich argues that because things are lost and destroyed over time, our understanding of history is always impacted by "limitations of documentation and memory" that restrict what sort of analyses and interpretations are available in the present (51). Significantly, one of the central concerns of post-apocalyptic fiction is how memories of modernity are preserved after moments of profound historical rupture. Each of these texts presents a disaster that results in both human casualties and the loss of physical records. As a result, knowledge of the pre-apocalyptic past dwindles, and common referents lose their contemporary linguistic meaning. With limited access to history, the past becomes highly mythologized, which obscures the component of human accountability and even fault from the incidents and devices that triggered the apocalypse in the first place. The real-world present is turned into mythology by a fictionalized cultural memory of the lost world. As such, the historical narratives constructed by survivors and their descendants are highly mythologized.

In his book, *Utopics: Spatial Play*, Louis Marin notes that "mythic narrative picks up history or past," even that which precedes "time," or does not yet exist, "and gives it its own rhythm and order" (36). Myth, consequently, transforms history into symbol "and it therefore constitutes the history of the group" in the form of story (Marin 36). Nicole Pohl argues that the rendering of history into a myth functions in the form of "ideological smokescreens that obscure the material conditions of the respective society" (131). Indeed, in these novels, the stories told of the past, which are widely shared and accepted, often tend to remove the component of human accountability from the incidents and devices that triggered the apocalypse in the first place. As a result, knowledge of the risks associated with unfettered technological advancement is not available to the population, which increases the likelihood of recreating, in the present or future, the precarious conditions that enabled the original catastrophe. Readers, who essentially occupy the real-world equivalents of the fictionalized pre-apocalyptic pasts of these novels, retain access to cultural knowledge that the characters and their communities have lost. As a result, these novels urge us to reflect on the vulnerability of cultural memory and the ways it can be manipulated, while also reminding us of the importance of maintaining critical connections with our past.

The second chapter, "(Mis)Remembering the Past: Nostalgia After the End," focuses on Emily St John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014) and Peter Heller's *The Dog Stars* (2012). In both novels, the real-world present is defamiliarized as the recent pre-apocalyptic past, and readers are thus prompted to imagine the loss of our current world and to reflect on the conditions of our present. The apocalyptic pandemics that occur within these narratives, though undoubtedly catastrophic to the human population, do not have an immediate impact on the landscape, whether built or natural. As a result, the world of the recent past remains visible, but is not accessible to survivors, allowing various types of nostalgia to thrive in the community's shared memories. Objects, especially technological ones, from before the catastrophe, however, are rendered non-functional. As a result, the characters' pre-apocalyptic past and their post-apocalyptic present are placed in stark contrast. The world of the recent past, and the amenities that came with it, are immediately visible, but not accessible to survivors, which allows nostalgia to thrive through the community's shared memories of the pre-apocalyptic world.

Significantly, there are multiple forms of nostalgia present within the texts. Reflective nostalgia allows characters to examine the world of their past in a way that enables a balanced analysis of the assets and inadequacies of that past (Boym xviii). Remembering in this way, communities may experience longing but can progress into the future unhindered by the yearning to rebuild the past exactly as it was. Restorative nostalgia, by contrast, is purported to be an infallible and entirely accurate representation of history (Boym xviii). Survivors experiencing this second form of nostalgia are often in danger of cultural stagnation as they attempt to rebuild the world of the past exactly as they misremember it. Consequently, this form of nostalgia can result in the formation of *degenerate utopias*, in which the world of the past is uncritically idealized. In doing so, future generations once again remain at risk of recreating the same conditions which triggered the apocalypse in the first place.

The third chapter, "Fruitful Returns: The Reconstructed, Reclaimed, and Repurposed Past," examines George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1951) and Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993). While in the first two chapters, a return to the past is presented as unfavourable, these texts showcase that the past can, in fact, be a tool for survival. The apocalyptic events presented in these narratives result in a reversion to the conditions and lifestyles reminiscent of a pre-industrial era. In these texts, survivors and their descendants ensure their continued survival by scavenging the past for knowledge, positing that a "return to the primitive" may be necessary (Katerberg 23). As a result, these stories depict catastrophe as having the potential to force communities to rely on knowledge that they have inherited from the past and engage more directly with the natural environment where they live, thereby enabling a more sustainable relationship between communities and the natural world.

Historical knowledge is represented as being the foundation that enables post-apocalyptic communities to survive in their current conditions while also allowing characters to determine which elements of the past they will uphold and which they will discard as they progress into the future. With access to the knowledge of the past, the communities that form after catastrophic rupture are imbued with the possibility of examining the positive and negative elements from their past, and, from there, focusing on the development of more sustainable ways of living in the future. Therefore, the reclamation of historical knowledge allows small-scale post-apocalyptic communities to draw on pre-industrial skills, such as sustainable agriculture, gardening, and foraging, to survive, which thereby also decreases the risks of another mass extinction event in the future.

The fourth and final chapter, “Beginning at the End: Decolonizing the Future,” is focused on Anishinaabe author and journalist Waubgeshig Rice’s *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018) and Métis author Cherie Dimaline’s *The Marrow Thieves* (2017). In his 2018 article, “Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene,” Potawatomi scholar Kyle P. Whyte argues that “Indigenous peoples do not always share the same science fiction imaginaries of dystopian or apocalyptic futures when they confront the possibility of climate crisis” or other potentially apocalyptic events because the resulting “hardships many [non-Indigenous] people dread most … are ones that Indigenous peoples have endured already due to different forms of colonialism” (226). Apocalypse narratives tend to “posit the possibility of an optimistic future” despite the fact that the “Native apocalypse,” as Grace L. Dillon, an Anishinaabe scholar, has termed it, “has already taken place” (8).

These distinctly Indigenous narratives of apocalypse frame catastrophe as part of an ongoing history of settler violence and as an opportunity for decolonization. These texts are both stories of what Gerald Vizenor terms “survivance,” which is inherently tied to the ways collective memory enables Indigenous communities to survive and thrive. In these texts, the apocalypse is not seen as a hard break from conditions of the present. Instead, these events are typically representative of the ongoing violence perpetrated by colonialism and the settler-state, as well as Indigenous resistance to these oppressive forces. Survival is dependent on oral storytelling and narrative memory, which is developed through what Neal McLeod calls “an interconnection between space, memory, and ancestor” (170). Accordingly, while settler communities in these narratives struggle to survive, Indigenous communities, due to their longstanding relationships with the land and the knowledge that has been passed between generations, are better able to survive and thrive in a new world. As a result, these novels demonstrate the ways that the apocalypse can be rendered as a decolonizing event that enables the rekindling of traditional ways of knowing and being within the world, once again preventing future catastrophe.

Together, these chapters present four distinctive modalities of memory in contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction. In these narratives, a collective forgetting of the past, or a misinterpretation of historical objects and events, leads to dire consequences, which at times are even apocalyptic in scale, ushering in a subsequent catastrophe that mirrors the first. By contrast, maintaining a living and critical relationship with the past, especially through the preservation of historical knowledge and records, is necessary for survival. By presenting the real-world present as the pre-apocalyptic past, these narratives enable readers to go through the imaginary process of remembering the world that we currently live in and considering how these conditions may eventually culminate in disaster. History, even fictional future history, and the knowledge and memory that come with it are “dangerous elements that can give the dystopian citizen a potential instrument of resistance” (Baccolini “A useful knowledge” 155). If we posit that we, as contemporary readers, are the dystopian citizens living through times that are simultaneously pre-, post-, and presently apocalyptic, these fictionalized histories serve as an important reminder that our future remains malleable. Readers are thus provided with opportunities to better understand their position in the present as creators of the future. As Martina Mittag argues, “conventional utopia and apocalypse are complicit in their desire for a better world” (264). As a result, the pervasive cultural habit of imagining apocalypse and reflecting on the fictional memories and histories the genre provides may offer opportunities for reconsidering the ways we are currently living, while proposing actionable solutions that mitigate the risks embedded in our present. After all, “it has been almost midnight for such a long time” (Gauvin xiii).

CHAPTER I – FUTURE FRAGMENTS: THE MYTHOLOGIZING OF FUTURE HISTORY

> “Listen, are we helpless? Are we doomed to do it again and again and again? Have we no choice but to play the Phoenix in an unending sequence of rise and fall?” (266)
>
> — Walter M. Miller’s *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

> “Im crying for what ben Im crying for whats going to be” (108).
>
> — Russell Hoban’s *Riddley Walker*

> “He doesn’t know which is worse, a past he can’t regain or a present that will destroy him if he looks at it too clearly. Then there’s the future. Sheer vertigo” (147).
>
> —Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*

Defamiliarizing the Past in Post-Apocalyptic Fiction

Narratives about the end of the world tend to offer a unique temporal structure that defamiliarizes the present world in which the text was produced by representing it as a pre-catastrophic past. While estrangement has always been a defining feature of the science fiction genre, the temporal structuring of post-apocalyptic fiction demonstrates the “historical shift in the *locus* of estrangement from geography to chronology” (James 30). In presenting a history of our world that has not yet happened, these texts ultimately function as future histories. As a result, one of the central concerns of post-apocalyptic fiction is how memories of modernity are preserved after moments of profound historical rupture. The real-world present is turned into mythology by a fictionalized cultural memory of the lost world. In his book *Utopics: Spatial Play,* Louis Marin’s notes that “mythic narrative picks up history or past, even one that precedes time,” or does not yet exist, “and gives it its own rhythm and order” (36). Myth, consequently, transforms history into symbol “and it therefore constitutes the history of the group” in the form of story (Marin 36). Examining Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*, Walter M. Miller’s *A Canticle for Leibowitz,* and Russell Hoban’s *Riddley Walker*, I argue that post-apocalyptic fiction, especially narratives that involve massive destruction of the human population and their physical records, can be read as a mythology of the future. Moreover, these myths function in a way that defamiliarizes the real-world present as the pre-apocalyptic past and imagines the future of our world where knowledge of this past has dwindled, and common referents have lost their contemporary linguistic meaning but remain preserved as symbols of the past. Due to this loss of knowledge, the stories told by survivors tend to remove the element of human fault from the events, machines, and technologies that triggered the original catastrophe and subsequent collapse of modern society, and the potential dangers of technological advancement are thus concealed. As a result, these texts demonstrate that limited access to history increases the risk of recreating, in the present or future, the dangerous conditions of the past that originally led to the apocalypse in the first place.

Oryx and Crake was published in 2003 by Margaret Atwood. The novel is the first in the dystopian *MaddAddam* trilogy[1], which details a speculative future devasted by genetically engineered lifeforms and catastrophic plague. In a *Daily Telegraph* article, Helen Brown notes that Atwood's "bioengineered apocalypse" represents an "impeccably researched and sickeningly possible" future that is set in a world that is only "few steps ahead of our own." Writing for *Quill & Quire*, Bronwyn Drainie says that while "[e]nvironmental degradation, global warming" and floods "provide the backdrop," for the novel, "the central action involves our most disturbing current headlines: cloning and genetic manipulation, toxic microbes and viruses," which are all "close enough to the present for us to be able to recognize the seeds of catastrophe in our morning newspaper." Part of the popularity of genre fiction comes from the fact that many of the authors who write speculative fiction do so by imagining the possibilities, both positive and negative, that could develop from our present living conditions. As such, *Oryx and Crake*, like much apocalyptic fiction, follows in the tradition of speculative fiction serving as a “cautionary tale in which writers take advantage of the freedom and distance from reality” inherent in the genre to “scrutinize our nightmares and warn about the future” (Urbanski 8).

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[1] The *MaddAddam* trilogy was adapted into a ballet production by the critically acclaimed choreographer, Wayne McGregor, in 2022 (The National Ballet of Canada). The American subscription streaming service, Hulu, which has already adapted Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as a successful television series, is potentially working on a television adaptation of the *MaddAddam* trilogy, as well, but no hard deadlines have yet been released (Liptak).

Atwood’s reputation and influence have meant that the popularity of *Oryx and Crake* has generated a great deal of critical analysis, especially considering that it is a relatively recent novel. Some scholarship considers the place of *Oryx and Crake* in the genre of utopian and dystopian speculative fiction (Auguscik et al.; Mohr; Yoo), climate change fiction, or Cli-Fi (Dunlap; Hengen; Höpker), and apocalyptic fiction (Bosco; D. B. Dillon; Silva de Sá). Many scholars analyze the representation of post-Humanism, looking at the genetically modified Crakers as a form of genetically advanced superhumans (Bergthaller; Bouson; Ciobanu; Cooke; Du; Kang; Koziol; Mohr; Mosca; Özmen and Vardar; Pordzik; Yoo) and the ethics of bioengineering (Bouson; Cooke; Pordzik). Other scholars focus on the welfare of the novel’s non-humanoid animal life that was also impacted by genetic testing (Castle; Gilbert; Lance; McHugh; Moss), especially with regards to farming and meat consumption (Castle; McHugh). The scholarly research that has already been done on *Oryx and Crake* is extensive in terms of publications, as well as in terms of the topics covered, but to date scholars have not adequately addressed the ways that memory and history function within the context of Atwood’s novel.

Despite being published decades before *Oryx and Crake*, the 1959 novel, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, by American science fiction author, Walter M. Miller Jr., confronts many of the same issues surrounding the preservation and use of past knowledge. A fix-up novel, *A Canticle for Leibvowitz* started as three short stories that were initially published in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* and were inspired by Miller’s involvement in the bombing of the monastery at the Battle of Monte Cassino during World War II. These narratives were then revised and combined into an intricately woven three-part novel that spans across the centuries that follow a devastating nuclear war as society rebuilds.

In a 2005 review published on *SF Reviews*, Thomas M. Wagner notes that *A Canticle for Leibowitz* was written "at a time when the Fear of the Bomb was at full steam." In a 2014 review published in *The New Yorker*, Jon Michaud claims that dystopias and post-apocalyptic fiction provide an "index of the collective anxieties of the era," and though *A Canticle for Leibowitz* serves as a "repository for [Miller's] fears about the bomb" it has still mostly "aged well" for a contemporary readership. Though deeply rooted in novel fears of nuclear annihilation, the novel remains popular even now, which demonstrates both the enduring fear of nuclear annihilation and the universality of the novel's themes, which include the preservation of memory and history, humanity's destructive nature, and the perseverance of survivors and their descendants. The popularity of *Canticle for Leibowitz* remains high even now: as of 2025 it has not yet gone out of print and is still considered to be a science fiction classic.

Most of the academic study on *A Canticle for Leibowitz* has looked at the ways that history is represented (Griffin; Manganiello; Minne), especially in terms of the preservation and interpretation of historical texts, memorabilia (Seed; Slater and Jacobs; Spencer), and ruins (Hillier; Sponsler). Other research on Miller's novel has focused on the religious themes and symbolism present within the text, which takes place in a Catholic monastery (Hillier; Tietge; Young). Considering the novel's religious context, other scholars have examined the unique and overlapping roles of state, scholars, priests, and prophets in this post-apocalyptic future (Texter; Tietge). Though the research on *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is quite thorough in its scope, the scholarship focusing on the representation of history tends not to consider the novel in conversation with other examples of post-apocalyptic fiction, which thus limits genre-based analysis.

Unlike texts like *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, *Earth Abides*, *Station Eleven* and *The Dog Stars*, where the catastrophe causes mass casualties, but not immediate environmental destruction, the detonation of nuclear bombs in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* has destroyed both. The representation of history and cultural memory is significantly impacted by the physical destruction of the pre-apocalyptic structures and artefacts and massive loss of life that followed the detonation of the bomb. As such, the nature of the catastrophe limits access to cultural memory, and therefore greatly impacts the comprehension and interpretation of artefacts by the descendants of the initial survivors.

Riddley Walker was published in 1980 by Russell Hoban. The novel is notable for its original and experimental use of language, but that style may have hampered its popularity. However, the format has nonetheless caught the attention of scholarly communities. Much of this attention has been focused on the experimental language use present within *Riddley Walker*, examining the ways that English has been reconstructed and thus made to appear strange (Boselli; Boyne; Maclean; Maynor and Patteson; Porter; Sorline). The genre of the novel has also been a point of focus, especially looking at the ways that Hoban uses apocalypse to discuss the possibility of nuclear war and its subsequent outcome (Granofsky; Gyngell; Hurley; James and Schwenger; Porter; Seed; Schwenger). The intersection between history and theology has also been analyzed (Roache) as well as the relationship between history, myth, and fiction (Davies; Mustazza; O'Sullivan). While these facets of the novel are indeed imperative to any analysis, it is significant to note that the mythologization of history, which refers to the rendering of cultural memory into fiction by the agents of preservation, is deeply linked not only to the fact that the text is post-apocalyptic, but also to the nature of the apocalyptic event. The use of nuclear weapons means that both the physical environment and human population is highly impacted, so access to knowledge from the past is limited.

In each of these novels, the human population has been greatly reduced by a catastrophic event and the persistence of historical memory and record-keeping is threatened, in part, by the physical destruction of archives, documents, and artefacts, but also by the reduction of the population and their access to human memory infrastructure. Speech becomes one of the only ways to transmit history and as a result cultural memory is performed in an oral and itinerant fashion. As the populations in these texts become increasingly distant from the initial survivors, words become decontextualized, and the meaning of the stories being told about the past changes. Since these are fictionalized future histories, readers, (who are living in the pre-apocalyptic past of the novels), maintain access to layers of meaning that have become inaccessible to the characters within the texts, and are thus able to see the ways that history is changed and misinterpreted. Moreover, these texts depict future versions of our world where scientific advancements, such as genetically engineered diseases and nuclear weaponry, that are developed and deployed by humans, serve as the trigger for the apocalypse. However, the future versions of this history tend to exclude the human and technological actors involved, which neutralizes the moral direction of these innovations and prevents risk-informed decision-making in their potential re-development. And since these texts make use of a sort-of historical dramatic irony, readers remain aware of the potential consequences of rebuilding the world of the past, while the characters do not. As a result, post-apocalyptic novels like *Oryx and Crake*, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, and *Riddley Walker* emphasize the fact that cultural memory is therefore fragile and subject to dangerous misunderstandings especially when history is understood only in the context of the present moment.

Language in *Oryx and Crake*

Oryx and Crake is split between pre-apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic timelines. The text focuses primarily on a human survivor, Jimmy, who goes by the chosen name Snowman. Each chapter moves back and forth between Snowman's experiences in the present and his recollections of the pre-apocalyptic past. Flashbacks woven throughout the text reveal that the past was defined by powerful corporations and unfettered advancements in genetic engineering. By comparison, the novel's present is set in a post-apocalyptic near future where humanity has been wiped out by a deadly plague, while genetically engineered chimeras, whose traits were grafted together to ensure their usefulness and resilience, have gone feral and taken over the natural environment. Unlike other pandemic narratives like *Station Eleven*, *The Dog Stars*, *The Marrow Thieves*, and *Earth Abides*, the virus has been intentionally created in a lab and released, which means that the mass-murder of the human population was predetermined. Snowman lives near a small settlement of a new race of genetically modified humanoid creatures whom he has dubbed Crakers. Because these creatures were created in a laboratory, they do not have knowledge of the outside world and consequently they do not have knowledge of the past.

In taking care of this novel community, Snowman is revered as a teacher who instructs the Crakers on how to survive and who acts as a repository for historical information. Partly due to the complexity of their history, Snowman simplifies the events of the past and creates a mythology for the Crakers. In this mythology, the scientist, Crake, (originally named Glenn), who was responsible for the genetic research that led to the new species of advanced humanoid creatures, as well as the catastrophic virus that led to the decimation of the human race, is reconfigured as a God who watches over the Crakers. Similarly, Oryx was employed in the pre-apocalyptic past to teach the Children of Crake, but in the world of the present is revered as a God who governs over their lives and ensures the well-being of the local plants and animals. History is therefore mythologized for ease of comprehension, which limits the Crakers' understanding of their past and present and thus impacts their future.

The Crakers comprehension of the history of their world is greatly impacted by the loss of referents for the language that is used to describe the past. In *Oryx and Crake*, signified and signifier are regularly separated[2]. For instance, because the Children of Crake were created in a lab and do not have experience with the world of the past, they cannot understand what many words might have meant to the humans who lived in the pre-apocalyptic world. The loss of context thus allows signifiers to exist free of their usual referents and enables words to be re-signified. Initially, Crake indicated that the names chosen for his creations should have no physical equivalent, but after the pandemic the physical equivalent (signified) for many words (signifiers), were rendered obsolete, which allowed Snowman to "adopt this dubious label" (Atwood 7). To the Crakers, "his name is just two syllables. They [do not] know what a snowman is" because they have "never seen snow" (Atwood 7). The sign, "snowman," thus becomes disconnected from its original meaning because there is only one individual with enough proximity to the Crakers who has access to the signified, and this information has not been shared amongst the population. As such, the original meaning of the word will be lost and will instead change to symbolize the Crakers' human mentor, ultimately creating a novel sign. This breakdown of the semantic chain allows signifiers to develop new meanings as their previous referents disappear—the words themselves remain but mean something different to the speakers who are using them.

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[2] According to Ferdinand de Saussure, linguistic units are dualistic in the sense that "a concept and a sound image" are "united in the brain through an associative bond"— "the two elements are intimately related, and each recalls the other" (66). These concepts can be understood using Saussure's terms: *signified*, *signifier*, and *sign*. Signified refers to concept, signifier refers to the sound-image, and sign refers to the combination of the two. In general, "the bond between signifier and signified is arbitrary," which is to say that the word is only connected to the object through our association with it (Saussure 67). Linguistic signs are arbitrary because they maintain "no natural connection with the signified" (Saussure 69). Despite its arbitrary nature, the signifier "is fixed . . . with respect to the community that uses it" because they are bound to the language that they are using (Saussure 71). Language thus "always appears as a heritage of the preceding period" inherited from earlier generations (Saussure 71).

Throughout the narrative, Snowman also recasts signs, which allows existing objects to gain alternative meanings. When the Crakers see the stubble on Snowman's chin, one of the "older ones" asks what the "moss" is that is "growing out of [his] face" and he responds that it is in fact "[f]eathers" (Atwood 8). The signifier for hair, specifically facial hair, becomes reassigned as feathers. Much of the time, the redefining of terms is done to reduce the Crakers' questions about signifiers that have been disconnected from their signified. The adjustments he makes are primarily intended to simplify the truth so that it can be better understood by the Children of Crake, who, as a community, lack many of the referents required to understand the lost world. Snowman often plays these scenarios out in his head, imagining what the Children of Crake might ask him. Even something as simple as the question "'What is toast?'" requires a detailed explanation that seems to lead nowhere:

> *Toast is when you take a piece of bread—What is bread? Bread is when you take some flour—What is flour? We'll skip that part, it's too complicated. Bread is something you can eat, made from a ground up plant and shaped like a stone. You cook it… Please why do you cook it? Why don't you just eat the plant? Never mind that part—Pay attention. You cook it, and then you cut it into slices, and you put a slice into a toaster, which is a metal box that heats up with electricity—what is electricity? Don't worry about that. While the slice is in the toaster, you get out the butter—butter is a yellow grease, made*

> *from the mammary glands of— skip the butter. So, the toaster turns the slice of bread black on both sides with smoke coming out and then this "toaster" shoots the slice up into the air, and it falls on the floor* (Atwood 98).

In this imaginary conversation, the level of detail provided to the Crakers does not seem to aid their understanding because they are lacking too many of the signifieds, so the signifiers remain meaningless to them. The repeated use of questions and answers demonstrates the ways that information from the past only begets further confusion. The language was, of course, created for a world that no longer exists. As a result, knowledge from the past, as well as the lexical framework to even approach this knowledge, is being lost. Since the Crakers have no frame of reference for the words used by Snowman, the novel reveals that the problem of historical memory is not just a problem of content, but of the medium in which knowledge is preserved and circulated.

These shifts in language are significant because the "capacity to remember, reconstruct, and share memories of past events" is deeply linked to language use (Sorokina 2). Memories are arranged into "a narrative" that allows people to "process the past and project into the future" (2). Language thus allows people and communities to "organize, store, and share complex memories," while also enabling "the consolidation of memories through sharing or talking about past experiences with others" (2). Atwood is thus demonstrating the ways that memory and history can be changed, lost, and misinterpreted when the language it is transmitted in can no longer be understood. For instance, Snowman is unable to fully share his experiences from the pre-apocalyptic past with the Crakers because his memories are rendered incomprehensible due to the linguistic barrier. Consequently, when he imagines this scenario of explaining the concept of toast to the Crakers, he chooses to redefine the word and says that

> *Toast was a pointless invention from the Dark Ages. Toast was an implement of torture that caused all those subjected to it to regurgitate in verbal form the sins and crimes of their past lives. Toast was a ritual item devoured by fetishists in the belief that it would enhance their kinetic and sexual powers. Toast cannot be explained by any rational means,*
>
> *Toast is me.*
> *I am toast.* (Atwood 98)

Snowman thus chooses to redefine toast because for the Crakers the accuracy of his definition does not matter. For the most part, both explanations are equally meaningless because the community lacks any concept of what is being discussed—they have not, nor is it likely that they ever will experience toast in their lifetime, and even if they did, it would probably not be associated with either of Snowman's definitions. Ironically, while toast is meaningless to the Crakers, it is meaningful to readers who have access to an additional layer of meaning, which demonstrates the way that memory is fragile. The mirrored declarations of "*Toast is me*" and "*I am toast*" reinforce the ways that the meaning of words become arbitrarily reassigned; the concept of the snowman bears as much meaning as toast to the Crakers (Atwood 98). Simultaneously, Atwood is likely drawing on the common idiom of being toast, which carries the negative connotation of being unsuccessful, defunct, in trouble, or even dead. As one of the last survivors of a lost society, Snowman recognizes that he and his memories of the already destroyed world are closing in on the end. Furthermore, Snowman's definition of toast is rooted in Biblical and religious language and uses a short, simple, declarative sentence structure that links it back structurally and contextually to myths, such as popular Judeo-Christian stories, that Western readers are likely to be familiar with, further emphasizing the fact that that history can easily become mythologized. Snowman, as teacher, is rendered a prophet who has access to information that the rest of the world does not and who is tasked with interpreting and explaining that which is otherwise indecipherable.

Moreover, Snowman, likely due to his isolation as the region's sole human survivor, is losing access to language that he no longer uses on a regular basis. Due to the fact that language is a social contract, in the absence of exchanges where an agreed-upon meaning is maintained, words become arbitrary signifiers. Additionally, the signifier regularly becomes detached from signified without being reassigned, which means that the sign is lost, at least temporarily, and perhaps permanently if the memory of what the word once symbolized is not regained. While suffering in the heat, Snowman notes that "[f]rom nowhere, a word appears": "*Mesozoi*c" (Atwood 39). In his mind, he "can see the word, he can hear the word, but he can't reach the word" and he cannot "attach anything to it" (Atwood 39). Snowman bemoans the fact that this experience "is happening too much lately, this dissolution of meaning" where "the entries on his cherished wordlists [drift] off into space" (Atwood 39). Words, especially those that are more conceptual than tangible, are disappearing due to lack of use. As the concepts lack contextual meaning, the words gradually disappear from his memory or become disconnected from their definition. The signified is completely absent, which destroys the sign, and only the signifier temporarily remains in an essentially meaningless state until it too is forgotten.

The linguistic erosion that Snowman undergoes in the time after the apocalypse occurs is mirrored in the childhood experiences of Oryx, which also serve to represent the process of first language attrition. However, her language loss is due to her moving from one linguistic environment to another rather than the disappearance of native speakers. Reminiscing on her past, Oryx notes that

> She couldn't remember the language she'd spoken as a child. She'd been too young to retain it, that earliest language: the words had been scoured out of her head. But it wasn't the same as the language of the city to which she'd first been taken, or not the same dialect because she'd had to learn a different way of speaking. She did remember that: the clumsiness of the words in her mouth, the feeling of being struck dumb. (Atwood 115)

The acquisition of a second language and reduced or halted use of the first is one of the primary causes of linguistic attrition. Oryx's linguistic environment is changed due to the fact that she has been sold and subsequently trafficked to multiple locations where the general population speaks different languages or dialects than that which was used in her birthplace. And because Oryx was "quite little when she was sold," her first language is forgotten (Atwood 115-116).

Silvina Montrul notes that many people assume that adults retain their first language skills at the same level throughout their lives regardless of the frequency of use and the linguistic environment they reside within (218). Unfortunately, this belief about language is a common misconception. In fact, language proficiency, even for native speakers, can fluctuate over time, especially if the linguistic environment they are residing in is different from the one in which they grew up (Montrul 218). This gradual loss of language is referred to as *first language attrition*, which is when elements of a native language are progressively forgotten due to a lack of use (Montrul 218). Most commonly language attrition causes issues with lexical retrieval, or more simply difficulty in finding the words that properly represent the speaker's intended meaning. As such, the attrition Snowman experiences is specific to language that he no longer regularly uses in his post-apocalyptic present, and it directly impacts the Crakers, who, regardless of their ability to understand the concepts, are gradually losing access to language from the pre-apocalyptic world due to their reliance on Snowman as a repository for language and history. By demonstrating the risks of losing access to varied historical records and the limits of relying on individual memory, Atwood thus exposes the ways that knowledge is lost in the transmission between generations.

Historical Record Keeping in *Oryx and Crake*

Similar to *Riddley Walker* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, historical memory in *Oryx and Crake* is primarily threatened by the reduction of the overall population. The lack of human survivors, paired with the illiteracy of the Crakers— "the Crakers can't read. Any reader Snowman can imagine is in the past"—means that access to both oral and written histories has been reduced (Atwood 41). Human memory infrastructure is thus damaged, perhaps irreparably. As a result, being one of the only human survivors, Snowman is represented by Atwood as the bearer of history for the Children of Crake, who were engineered within a laboratory and consequently do not have direct knowledge of the pre-apocalyptic past. The Crakers thus lack access to instutitionalized knowledge and history, which means that their perceptions and understanding of the world are limited only to Snowman's fallible recollection and dissemination. *Oryx and Crake* therefore demonstrates the potential risks of the displacement of cultural memory by personal memory.

The structure of the novel also reinforces the persistence of personal memory and the reduction of cultural memory. By presenting the historical lead-up to the text's temporal present only through flashbacks, Atwood limits the reader's access to the world of the past. The past is shown only through Snowman's memories, which means that history is reduced merely to the perspective of one individual, rather than that which is accepted by a community as an "official" history. Moreover, the flashback structure puts into question the reliability of memory as a method of record keeping. Atwood regularly demonstrates the fallibility of personal memory by describing the ways that the past has become fragmented in Snowman's mind. For instance, when reminiscing about being gifted the pet rakunk at the age of ten, Snowman is unable to accurately render his father in his mind, though the memory of his mother remains clear.

> What did his father look like? Snowman can't get a fix on it. Jimmy's mother persists as a clear image, full colour, with a glossy white paper frame around her like a Polaroid, but he can recall his father only in details: the Adam's apple going up and down when he swallowed, the ears backlit against the kitchen window, the left hand lying on the table, cut off by the shirt cuff. His father is a sort of pastiche. Maybe Jimmy could never get far enough away from him to see all the parts at once. (Atwood 49)

Snowman's father is reduced to specific details, while his mother can be seen in his mind as though she had been captured in photograph. Significantly though, despite the increased level of clarity, Snowman's memory of his mother is inaccurate as well because she has been idealized. Moreover, photographs are limited in the data they can archive as they can only contain one specific instant in time, in one specific location. Even if Snowman's mother is preserved in a clear, full colour image, viewers cannot see beyond the edges the "glossy white paper frame," which means that their perspective on the moment is limited (49). While his father remained in his life throughout his childhood and adolescence, Snowman's mother abandoned him as a child because she was unable to come to terms with the ethics of the genetic research being done at the company they both worked at. As such, Snowman's memory of both his parents is undeniably influenced by his experiences with them. By depicting the unreliability of Snowman's recollections, the novel is reinforcing the subjectivity of personal memory, which is significant because of his role in the preservation of history. The history professed by Snowman to the

Crakers as well as to the readers through the flashback structures of the novel is therefore incomplete as well as highly inaccurate.

Moreover, Snowman does not want to retain the memories that he does have, which further complicates his reliability in terms of the maintenance of historical memory. Despite his role as what is essentially a living record-keeper, Snowman wants "to forget the past—the distant past, the immediate past, the past in any form" so that he can finally be free to "exist only in the present, without guilt, without expectation" (Atwood 348-349). And in this longing to forget the pre-apocalyptic world, Snowman tells a fictionalized version of history to the Crakers, which further limits their understanding of the past. Marlene Goldman argues that "forgetting to remember" is an important feature of apocalyptic fiction, but despite this selective "amnesia, traces of apocalyptic violence—the fragments and ruin generated by the ongoing catastrophe—remain visible" (26). In Snowman's case, it is the Children of Crake who will not let him forget the past, even if he wants to. They scavenge through the ruins of the recent past, approaching him with questions about objects they find from the lost world.

> "Oh Snowman, what have we found?" they lift out the objects, hold them up as if offering them for sale: a hubcap, a piano key, a chunk of pale-green pop bottle smoothed by the ocean. A plastic BlyssPluss container, empty; a ChickieNobs Bucket O'Nubbins, ditto. A computer mouse, or the busted remains of one, with a long wiry tail.
>
> Snowman feels like weeping. What can he tell them? There's no way of explaining to them what these curious items are, or were. But surely they've guessed what he'll say, because it's always the same.
>
> "These are things from before." (Atwood 7)

These objects are representative of the material culture of the lost world. In terms of structure, like Emily St. John Mandel in *Station Eleven*, Atwood uses the list as a means of cataloguing loss. The difference, however, between the texts is the fact that in *Station Eleven* most survivors have access to direct memories of the pre-apocalyptic past, and even those who do not maintain the ability to access and interpret artefacts and documents, which feeds their nostalgia for an idealized version of their recent past. By contrast, the Crakers in *Oryx and Crake* do not experience the same longing (though Snowman does) because they have no immediate knowledge of the lost world and are thus wholly reliant on Snowman to make sense of the histories and infrastructures of the pre-apocalyptic past. The Children of Crake are performing a sort of rudimentary archeological study, in which they examine the material objects and the "built environment," of the pre-apocalyptic past, which ultimately expose the "ways that people" from the old world would "use and inhabit space" (Kozakavich 64). And without direct knowledge of the past, the Crakers are left to interpret that which they find within the confines of their own experiences, or by asking Snowman for clarification. Either way, their comprehension of the lost world is limited by the fact that they do not have the referents to understand the functionality of the objects. Moreover, in his longing to forget the world of the past, Snowman has mythologized history in such a way that expurgates the development and use of human-built technologies and innovations, which therefore prevents subsequent generations of Crakers from avoiding the re-development of technologies that brought about the collapse of civilization.

History as Myth in *Oryx and Crake*

Significantly, because Snowman is the only human who lived in, and experienced, the world from before, he, like the government officials in *Riddley Walker*, holds power over the historical narrative. The real-world past is therefore turned into mythology by a fictionalized cultural memory of the lost world. Myth, consequently, transforms history into symbol "and it therefore constitutes the history of the group" in the form of story (Marin 36). In other words, the creation of collective identity is one of the primary functions of myth. In the context of Snowman's interactions with the Crakers, it does not appear, however, that he constructs and mythologizes the past in a malevolent way. Instead, the adjustments he makes to what might be considered *real* history are primarily intended to simplify the truth so that it can be better understood by the Children of Crake, who, as a community, lack many of the referents required to understand the lost world. Knowledge from the past, as well as the lexical framework to even approach this knowledge, are thus being lost, and what is transmitted from Snowman to the Children of Crake is therefore mythologized, which ultimately imbues the collective with a sense of identity that is disconnected from their true origins and conceals both the humanity of the actors involved and the scientific basis for their existence.

In her book, *A Short History of Myth*, Karen Armstrong argues that "[h]uman beings have always been mythmakers" because we are "meaning-seeking creatures" that tend to speculate about concepts that exceed "everyday experience" (1-2). Myths typically form when the human mind has "ideas and experiences we cannot explain rationally": "[w]e have imagination, a faculty that enables us to think of something that is not immediately present, and that, when we first conceive it, has no objective existence" (Armstrong 2). Humanity's imaginative faculty enables the production of religion and mythology (Armstrong 2). From the beginning, Snowman develops explanations for the Crakers that are meant to "*respect their traditions*" and "*confine [his] explanations to simple concepts that can be understood within the contexts of their belief systems*" (Atwood 97). As such, Snowman develops, falsifies, and adjusts historical narratives in order to simplify the realities of the pre-apocalyptic world, which he lacks the ability to explain in a way that they can understand.

Their origin story, for instance, excludes the scientific realities of how the Crakers and the world around them came into existence. Instead, Snowman tells them that

> *Crake made the bones of the Children of Crake out of the coral on the beach, and then he made their flesh out of mango. But the Children of Oryx hatched out of an egg, a giant egg laid by Oryx herself. Actually she laid two eggs: one full of animals, and the other one full of words. But the egg full of words hatched first, and the Children of Crake had already been created by then, and they'd eaten up all the words because they were hungry, and so there were no words left over when the second egg hatched out. And that is why the animals can't talk.* (Atwood 96)

The reality of their conception and the existence of the Crakers and other creatures are thus mythologized for the purpose of simplification. Here, like in many myths, "gods, humans, animals and nature" are "inextricably bound up together" (Armstrong 5). Typically, mythology is related to "the unknown," or "that for which we initially have no words" (Armstrong 2). In the context of *Oryx and Crake*, however, myths do not develop naturally out of an inability of the interpreter to comprehend the world. Instead, Snowman chooses to develop mythology that simplifies the past into terminology and concepts that the Children of Crake can comprehend. These explanations mythologize the origins of the Crakers and root their conception in the supernatural rather than the scientific. As a result, the technological advancements of the past are censored through omission.

Snowman's version of history dances "gracefully around the truth, light-footed, light-fingered" and it was easy for him to change fact into fiction because "they accepted, without question, everything he said" (Atwood 350). Without knowledge of the world outside their enclosure, "these people were like blank pages," which meant that Snowman "could write anything he wanted on them" (349). For example, when Snowman first introduced himself to the Children of Crake, they had never seen clothing before and asked immediately why his skin was so loose. Instead of explaining what clothing was and what purpose it served, Snowman tells them that Crake had made him "in a different way" from them, so he "had two kinds of skin"—"one comes off," and the other stays on (349). Snowman ultimately shapes the Children of Crake's entire comprehension of both the world of the present as well as the world of the past.

In some ways, the present is represented as being safer and more peaceful than the past. There is "no more prostitution, no sexual abuse of children . . .no pimps, no sex slaves. No more rape" and even no more "war" (Atwood 165). But Snowman does not believe the innocence of this society will last; one day the descendants of the Crakers will look at the ruins and ask: "*How did this happen?*" (222). And while "at first they'll say giants or gods . . . sooner or later they'll want to know the truth" (222). But history is quickly becoming inaccessible: Snowman is losing words from his lexicon, his memories of the past are becoming fragmented, and eventually, as with all living things, Snowman will die. When this happens, there will be no one on Earth with direct knowledge of the lost world. The Children of Crake will only have the mythologized history that Snowman presented them with, and because of their innate capacity for abstract thinking, they would inevitably (according to Crake at least) "be inventing idols, and funerals, and grave goods, and the afterlife, and sin, and Linear B, and kings, and then slavery and war" (361). And this future is seen by Snowman as being nearly impossible to avoid because the pattern of history has always cycled the same way: "*First the leaders and the led, then the tyrants and the slaves, then the massacres. That's how it's always gone*" (155). As a result, even, or perhaps *especially*, without access to history, Atwood's novel claims that humanity, or whatever intelligent creature takes our place, is doomed to replicate the sins of the past. Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* thus emphasizes the importance of a living, non-mythologized memory to prevent history from repeating itself.

Language in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* depicts a future version of our world that is still suffering from the long-term impact of a global nuclear war, called the "Flame Deluge," that occurred hundreds of years before the novel even begins. Seeing the horrors of the atomic bomb, survivors of this global catastrophe became increasingly distrustful of technological advancements and scientific progress, which led to a period called the "Simplification," where the literate were hunted and murdered by "Simpletons" and most physical texts were destroyed. During this period, Isaac Edward Leibowitz, a scientist who had survived the war, dedicated the rest of his life to the preservation of knowledge, training members of the monastery he joined to hide, smuggle, copy, and memorize books to ensure that the knowledge would not be completely lost. Tripartite in its temporal structure, the novel focuses on the "Albertian Order of Leibowitz," which is a new Catholic Monastic Order dedicated to the preservation and restoration of knowledge from the lost world at three different points in its post-war history. Due to the fact that much of the world was destroyed, knowledge of the lost world is severely limited; so, like the Crakers, the monks are therefore "always dealing with a filtered and fragmented past" (Kozakavich 51).

The first section, "Fiat Homo," which can be translated from Latin to "let there be man," takes place in the twenty-sixth century, six centuries post-nuclear war. Brother Francis Gerard, working for the Albertan Order, discovers the entrance of an ancient fallout shelter, which contains artefacts like handwritten notes that appeared to be written by Leibowitz. Years later, based on the documents found within the shelter, Leibowitz is officially canonized by the Catholic Church. The second section, "Fiat Lux," or "let there be light," begins in the year 3174. The Albertan Order of Leibowitz continues to focus their work on the preservation of documents from before the Flame Deluge and subsequent Simplification. Despite the knowledge gained over the last few centuries, much of the information remains mostly incomprehensible to even the most highly educated. Using these documents, Brother Kornhoer successfully pieces together fragments of the past and builds a treadmill-powered electric generator that lights an arc lamp, which represents the return of electrical light sources to their post-apocalyptic world. As we will see, this rediscovery of electricity is similar to the final scene in *Station Eleven* where the electrical grid is reignited, and the streetlights turn on. Both scenes demonstrate the potential for a return to the pre-apocalyptic past. Yet, due to their proximity to the catastrophic event, this world of electricity is one that most characters in *Station Eleven* would remember, while the characters in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* would not. As a result, while the characters in *Station Eleven* may choose to recreate the conditions of their past due to nostalgic longing, those in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* remain ignorant to the risks of past technologies and rebuild them without fully understanding the potential consequences. The third and final section, "Fiat Voluntas Tua," which can be translated from Latin to "Thy Will Be Done,"[3] begins in the year 3781. Society has entered a new age of enlightenment and pre-Deluge technological advancements have been rediscovered, including space travel, operational interstellar colonies, as well as nuclear power and weapons. By the end of the story, a nuclear war has begun once more. Those left on the planet are left to suffer and very likely die, and radioactive fallout has once again poisoned the

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[3] The third section title is a direct reference to the line "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in Earth as it is in Heaven" from the "Lord's Prayer" (Matthew 6:10).

Earth. In representing three unique moments in post-apocalyptic history, Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* demonstrates the risks of limited access to knowledge from the past, which is difficult to prevent in situations where there is mass physical destruction and mass casualties. As with *Oryx and Crake* and *Riddley Walker*, history is thus misinterpreted, mythologized, and forgotten, which increases the risks of the catastrophic events of the past recurring in the future because the technologies of the lost world, such as weapons of mass destruction, become disconnected from their function and are thus rebuilt without considering the consequences.

Due to the all-encompassing nature of the nuclear apocalypse, which destroys both population and infrastructure, the surviving population of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* was incapable of preserving a detailed cultural memory of the lost world. Moreover, after the bombs were dropped, a great social distrust of modern science, technology, and institutions of higher learning followed. And from the resulting

> confusion of tongues, the intermingling of the remnants of many nations, from fear the hate was born. And the hate said: *Let us stone and disembowel and burn the ones who did this thing. Let us make a holocaust of those who wrought this crime, together with their hirelings and their wise men; burning, let them perish, and all their works, their names, and even their memories. Let us destroy them all, and teach our children that the world is new, that they may know nothing of the deeds that went before. Let us make a great simplification, and then the world shall begin again.*
>
> So it was that, after the Deluge, the Fallout, the plagues, the madness, the confusion of tongues, the rage, there began the bloodletting of the Simplification, when remnants limb from limb killing rulers, scientists, leaders, technicians, [and] teachers. (63)

The mythologization of history is also reinforced in the above quote through Miller's use of biblical cadence and vocabulary (similar to Snowman's discussion of Toast). In particular, the language and imagery mirror that of ancient Christian apocalypses[4], emphasizing the ways that humanity has transgressed the holy laws, and as a result the sinful are doomed to be punished while the righteous may receive salvation in the new world that follows. In placing blame on the wickedness of a select few, the causes of the apocalypse are also generalized, vilifying all research and innovation as dangerous. As a result, both the records of the past, especially those regarding science and technology, as well as those with a knowledge of these advancements were destroyed. Stacy Kozakavich argues that understandings of history are always impacted by "limitations of documentation and memory" that restrict what sort of analyses and interpretations are available in the present (51). History must be understood as an interpretive project that is inherently linked to the conditions of the present. As a result, by censoring and destroying historical records, the dangers are also concealed, which prevents risk-informed development in future attempts to rebuild the technologies of the past.

These layers of mediation between past and present are especially poignant in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* because all pre-Deluge linguistic artifacts are written in English and must therefore be translated into and interpreted in Latin (23). As the traditional language of classical learning and the Catholic Liturgy, Latin plays a central role in Miller's text as a repository of historical memory. As a result, "The Memorabilia was full of ancient words, ancient formulae, ancient reflections of meaning, detached from minds that had died long ago, when a different sort of society had passed into oblivion. There was little that could still be understood" (146).

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[4] See Isaiah 24:3-5 and Genesis 6:11-13 as examples.

The art of translation “makes available material across a whole range of cultural activities that would otherwise be inaccessible to anyone who does not have access to other languages” (Bassnett 2). Significantly though, translation is not merely the “simple process of language transfer” where “whatever is written in one language . . . can be transferred unproblematically into another language” (Bassnett 2). Each language has unique features, including the “structures, syntax, and vocabulary, so adjustments have to be made to accommodate” those instances where there “is no equivalent” for the word or concept being expressed, so translation always involves “both the interpretation of the source and reformulation in another language” (Bassnett 3). As such, no translation can ever be truly identical to the original. Because there are no longer any surviving native speakers of English in the centuries that follow the Deluge, signified and signifier are regularly separated. Even after translation occurs, many words do not have a direct Latin equivalent, which means the individual, event, place, or thing that the word signifies lacks a referent in the novel’s present. The concept and the sound-image are disconnected, which means that the original sign no longer exists. Through the act of translation, the sign becomes reconstituted and often misinterpreted in the attempt to find a Latin equivalent. This act of translating everything into Latin serves as an attempt at preserving knowledge from the past, which unintentionally transforms and recasts history.

In Miller’s novel, Latin is considered one of the “most simple dialects of the region” (22). Pre-Deluge English, by contrast, is a language that must be mastered and even those who have studied it in more depth, like Brother Francis, find the language confusing, especially in “the way nouns could sometimes modify other nouns” (22). In Latin “a construction like *servus puer* meant the same thing about as *puer servus*, and even in English *slave boy* meant *boy slave*,” but in English this reversal and maintenance of meaning is not consistent, for example “*house cat*” does not mean the same thing as "*cat house*" (22). To the descendants of those who had survived the nuclear apocalypse and Simplification, pre-Deluge English is described as even "more perplexing than either Intermediate Angelology or Saint Leslie's theological calculus," which is to say that it is quite complex (23).

Furthermore, Pre-Deluge English is not universally studied, even within the Abbey. Many of the Brothers living and working in the monastery have "never studied [Pre-Deluge English], except what [they] sing in choir," and find the written language to be essentially "gibberish" (W.M. Miller 40). And outside of the Church literacy of all forms is greatly diminished. In fact, for Brother Francis, "[e]ven in the scattered domains where a form of civil order existed, the fact of his literacy would help him not at all, if he must live a life apart from the Church" (57). While it "was true that petty barons sometimes employed a scribe or two" these sorts of "cases were rare enough to be negligible, and were as often filled my monks as by monastery-schooled laymen" (57). In reality, the "only demand for scribes and secretaries was created by the Church itself" (57). The novel is thus situated in a new Dark Ages where literacy rates are low and essentially devalued by the general public, which means the ability to read, let alone accurately interpret, Pre-Deluge English is incredibly rare.

Historical Record Keeping in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

While a functional knowledge of Pre-Deluge English remains rare, one of the primary tasks of the Church is to collect and interpret documents and objects produced by their pre-apocalyptic forebearers. In their engagement with pre-apocalyptic artefacts, the monks essentially perform the work of historical researchers, analyzing material culture from the past as a means of examining the ways that people used to interact with one another and the physical world around them. In the centuries that followed the Deluge and Simplification, "only a few kegs of original books and a pitiful collection of hand-copied texts, rewritten from memory, had survived" (W.M. Miller 66). As a result, the Order performs careful work to ensure that any recovered documents are carefully safeguarded. The "Memorabilia was there, and it was given to [The Order] by duty to preserve, and preserve it they would if the darkness in the world lasted ten more centuries, or even ten thousand years" (66). Regardless of the amount of time, the monks "still preserved this Memorabilia, studied it, copied and recopied it, and patiently waited" for the time when the information may once again be decipherable and prove useful to their redeveloping society (66). In doing so, the Monks enable these historical documents to be maintained but also increase the possibility of errors in the transcription as the documents continue to be copied and recopied over the years. As a result, by the time the documents may be of use, the information may be incomplete or incorrect, which increases the risk of misinterpretation.

Due to the significant physical destruction caused by the Flame Deluge and Simplification, the Order considers all objects from the past to have great historical value because of both their rarity and their potential to offer insight into the inner workings of the lost world. When Brother Francis discovers the ancient Fallout Shelter, he realizes almost immediately that it "might well be teeming with rich relics" from a pre-Deluge world that could potentially assist them with rebuilding the technological infrastructure of the past (W.M. Miller 24). The papers he found inside were therefore considered a "treasure; for they had escaped the angry flames of the Simplification, wherein even sacred writings had curled, blackened, and withered into smoke" (27). Consequently, he handles the documents, which included "hand-scribbled notes, two large papers, and a small book entitled Memo" as though they were in fact "holy things" (27).

The content of the documents Brother Francis excavates exposes the ways that the landscapes of "fragments and ruins" that are so common to post-apocalyptic novels (like *Station Eleven* and *The Dog Stars*) ask "everyone, including the reader" to "assume the role of seer, linking isolated fragments to create meaning" (Goldman 16). And while both the characters and readers are asked to perform the same function, they are not necessarily intended to interpret these items in the same way. For instance, while Brother Francis is analyzing the documents found in the shelter, he finds "[i]nside the carrying case, a note [that] had been glued" (W.M. Miller 26). The note was not well preserved, and it was difficult to decipher: "the glue had powdered, the ink had faded, and the paper was so darkened by rusty stains that even good handwriting would have been hard to read" and even worse, "it was written in a hasty scrawl" (26). Due to the state of the document, it took Brother Francis "half an hour to decipher most of the message," which read:

> Carl—
>
> Must grab plane for [*undecipherable*] in twenty minutes. For God's sake, keep Em there till we know if we're at war. Please! try to get her on the alternate list for the shelter. Can't get her a seat on my plane. Don't tell her why I sent her over with this box of junk, but try to keep her there till we know [*undecipherable*] at worst, one of the alternates not show.
>
> I.E.L
>
> P.S. I put the seal on the lock and put TOP SECRET on the lid just to keep Em from looking inside. First tool box I happened to grab. Shove it in my locker or something. (26-27)

To readers, this message contains significant information about the state of the world at the time it was written. The pre-apocalyptic world was on the verge of war and Em, as she is referred to here, was not provided a seat on the plane, nor was she afforded a space in one of the fallout shelters. As such, the writer is begging Carl, the person to whom the letter is written, to get her name put on an alternate list, and to keep her at the shelter in case somebody does not arrive so that she can take the space. It is thus clear that the use of nuclear weaponry is expected to occur imminently and that not all citizens would be provided equal protection. By contrast, to Brother Francis "the note seemed hasty gibberish," which indicates that he lacks the context, which we, as readers, possess (W.M. Miller 27).

In that same vein, reading "*Pound pastrami. . . can kraut, six bagels—bring home for Emma*" (another list that catalogues a series of items no longer accessible to the surviving population) is unlikely to invoke the same sense of awe in the reader as it does for Brother Francis, in part because in the real-world present it remains recognizable as a grocery list (W.M. Miller 27). In addition to the grocery list, the Memo pad also contains several notes, including a reminder to "*pick up Form* 1040" for "*Uncle Revenue*" and "a column of figures with a circled total from which a second amount was subtracted and finally a percentage taken, followed by the word *damn!"* (27). Like the earlier note, this document is "scrawled by hand" and "the penmanship was no less abominable," but because it is entitled "Memo" (short for memorandum), it is immediately understood to be significant Memorabilia, regardless of the contents (27). So, to Brother Francis, who does not have the contextual background required to interpret the list, he handles it "with special reverence" (27).

The shortage of initial survivors in the post-Deluge world, paired with the destruction of the Simplification means that the items that have survived these catastrophes, are decontextualized from their original meaning. As such, the descendants who are tasked with the collection, maintenance, and elucidation of the collected relics are thus forced to interpret the texts with limited access to their original meaning, which means that the documents are often unintentionally misinterpreted. Readers, who have contextual information that the characters do not, are thus able to see the errors in the ways that these historical documents are understood. By focusing on the ways in which documents are preserved and interpreted, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* emphasizes the fact that history is always interpreted from the ideological position of the present, which reinforces the dangers of limiting access to history, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

History as Myth in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

The engagement the monks have with historical texts is always an act of interpretation mediated by the facts that they are both written in an ancient language and that they contain information about a world that is no longer accessible. In cases where there are "words that belong exclusively to particular languages and whose full field of meaning cannot be completely transferred to other languages," the translator must find the closest equivalent (Bassnett 8). Consequently, in attempting to translate the concepts presented within these archeological documents, the monks often interpret them through a mythologized symbolic equivalent. For instance, when Brother Francis comes across a Fallout Survival Shelter, he notes that he himself "had never seen a 'Fallout,'" but he had always "visualized a Fallout as half-salamander, because according to tradition, the thing was born in the Flame Deluge, and as half-incubus who despoiled virgins in their sleep" because "the monsters of the world" were referred to as "children of the Fallout" (W.M. Miller 17-18).

While readers would likely understand that "Fallout" is a term associated with radioactive materials that fall back to Earth after a nuclear explosion, the concept is estranged by the character's use of myth as an "explanatory instrument" for understanding the world of the past through a form of symbolic history (Marin 35). Although referring to Fallout as a demon might not be technically correct, this interpretation of history provides the characters with a "mythic founding narrative for their own society" that they are able to understand (Marin 241). Fredric Jameson argues that this sort of cognitive estrangement can function to "defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own *present*" (qtd. in Moylan 91). In other words, because readers have access to the referents that characters do not, they understand the gravity of what has been lost from their world's fictional future and are thus encouraged to examine their own historical position with a different perspective. By characterizing the effects of nuclear radiation in such a way, Miller asks people to reflect on the long-lasting effects that a global nuclear event could potentially cause if it were to occur in the real world. Moreover, the irony in this misunderstanding of fallout, whose meaning has been transformed from historical fact into foundational myth, urges readers to be cautious and scrutinous when interpreting information. In the absence of critical analysis and the ability to cross-reference data, it bears on the potential to gain new and often inaccurate meanings.

And even for the characters of the novel's present, the mythologizing of historical events proves dangerous. The population understands nuclear war to be an "unleashing of hell-fire" caused by a monstrous entity called a Fallout (W.M. Miller 63). This creature is said to have let demons loose across the land, reducing cities to "puddles of glass, surrounded by vast acreages of broken stone," causing entire nations to vanish "from the earth," and leaving "the lands littered with" the corpses of

> both men and cattle, and all manner of beasts, together with the birds of the air and all things that flew, all things that swam in the rivers, crept in the grass, or burrowed in holes . . . even in those lands where the weapons had not struck, because of the poisoned air. (63).

Missing from this history is the fact that nuclear weaponry was both created and unleashed by people of the last civilization— it is a man-made technology rather than a naturally occurring creature or phenomenon. Rebuilding the lost world exactly as it was before ultimately results in the re-development of nuclear weapons and subsequently another nuclear war. In the third and final section of the novel, a bomb is again set off and "the visage of Lucifer mushroomed into hideousness above the cloudbank, rising slowly like some titan climbing to its feet after ages of imprisonment in the Earth" (335). *A Canticle for Leibowitz* thus reveals the danger of a limited understanding of history, because "it is, of course, the task of critical and reflective thought to understand our condition and to reveal the potentiality for the future imminent in the present" (Harvey 37). The rendering of history into a myth functions in the form of "ideological smokescreens that obscure the material conditions of the respective society" (Pohl 131). As a result, without the ability to critically examine the potential impact of their actions in the present, it seems the population may be doomed to repeat the past.

Language in *Riddley Walker*

Riddley Walker depicts a future version of England that was severely damaged by a nuclear holocaust in the distant past. The novel focuses on a young boy named Riddley Walker living in Inland (a future version of England) two millennia after a global nuclear war that decimated centuries of technological advancement. The descendants of those who survived live in a primarily oral culture and speak in a future version of English. When Riddley's father dies, he is responsible for taking over the role of the community's "connexion man," who is tasked with interpreting and disseminating the meaning of the puppet shows presented by the government. These shows tell the tale of Eusa, a historical figure who assisted with the creation of the detonation devices that destroyed the world of the past. Despite the damage done by the "1 Big 1," political leaders of the present are focused on regaining the technologies of the past. However, these efforts to rebuild the advanced machinery of their lost world are in fact focused on the recreation of the atomic bomb, but without access to detailed historical records, the link between the device and the apocalypse is obscured, which prevents risk-informed decision-making on the part of the surviving community. Upon learning about this ongoing project, Riddley chooses not to assist any further and attempts to stop the weapon from being built. As a result, Riddley finds himself on the run, befriended by wild dogs, and continuing to deliver Eusa, which refers to St. Eustance, shows around the country as a means of warning the public of what may come to pass. By the end of the novel, gunpowder has been invented again, thus demonstrating that society is once again on the way to developing weapons and bombs like those of their pre-apocalyptic ancestors. Though the scientific developments of the lost world are not all dangerous, without access to detailed historical knowledge, survivors cannot adequately assess the risks of rebuilding, which means that even the more benign improvements are eventually displaced by these technologies of mass destruction.

While Miller's narrative states outright that the characters no longer speak English, Hoban goes one step further by writing the entirety of his novel in a future version of English known as Riddleyspeak, which maintains a largely phonemic orthography. Although readers, for the most part, can decipher what the words mean throughout the novel, this fictionalized future language successfully functions as a form of cognitive estrangement that defamiliarizes the text at even the level of basic linguistic structure. English, and all other contemporary languages, are in constant flux (Trask 1). It is inevitable that new linguistic elements appear, while older ones gradually disappear (Trask 1). Since *Riddley Walker* is set thousands of years ahead of the real-world present, it is unsurprising that the language being spoken has shifted significantly. As such, Hoban has successfully created a quasi-realistic representation of linguistic evolution, where language changes as the years go on (Schwetman 212).

Typically, the language is recognizable to readers as it is often written as the phonetic pronunciation of words that they would already be familiar with. As Hoban notes in the Glossary, many "words that look strange will explain themselves when sounded out" (Hoban 233). However, Hoban also indicates that "others may require a little more work" as the text includes more complicated changes as well, which demonstrates that the language of the text has fundamental differences, including changes in morphology (forms of words), phonology (sound patterns), and syntax (word order) from the language of the twenty-first century reader (233). In Hoban's Notes section at the end of the text, he indicates that he "needed to write a lot of notes in order to get [his] head around Riddley's world" and many of these functioned as a means of developing the language (229). For instance, a note from May 28th, 1974, indicates that the rhyme "No trumpets, / No drums, / No dancing / When Eustance comes" becomes "No rumpa, / No dums, / No zanting / When Eusa comes," which thus demonstrates the ways that common words are replaced with novel ones that maintain only some of the same lettering and sound construction as the original (229). Moreover, the meaning of the words has shifted according to Hoban. Rumpa no longer merely refers to the trumpet, or the sound of trumpeting, but instead "has come to meaning any kind of vigorous noise-making" and zanting "is not only dancing but running, jumping, fooling, and larking about in general" (229).

As such, *Riddley Walker* uses a fictionalized “language of the future that is reminiscent of the language of the past” in the sense that the simplification of the language makes it look like “an earlier form of English, and the reader sees the language as appropriate to the level of culture among the people of Inland,” who may be perceived as less sophisticated than contemporary cultures due to their lack of technology and relatively non-scientific understanding of their world (Schwetman 218). These changes simultaneously demonstrate the evolution of language, while also serving to make the familiar strange to the reader. For the characters within the novel, the evolution of the language obscures it from some of its original meaning, thus enabling history to be misinterpreted. For instance, the atom is reinterpreted as “The Littl Man the Addom,” who is pulled apart by Eusa, causing the “1 Big 1” (Hoban 32-33). As such, the collective responsibility of scientists and politicians in discovering the nuclear bomb is reframed as an unfortunate conflict between two entities: Eusa and Addom. As with *Oryx and Crake* and *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the readers have access to additional layer information that the characters do not, further emphasizing the fragility of memory and the risks of a decontextualized history where the original meaning has been obscured.

Historical Record Keeping in *Riddley Walker*

But it is not just the language itself that performs a defamiliarizing function. In fact, much of *Riddley Walker* is focused on the travelling “Eusa Show,” which is a puppet stage-production that depicts the history of their post-apocalyptic world, describing the sequence of events that supposedly resulted in the demolition of the past. The novel’s protagonist is meant to be understood as the individual who is telling the story. Generally, Riddley’s “written language is less scrupulous with sentence punctuation, as might be expected in a society that is largely oral” (Schwetman 214). Contemporary written English tends to follow “more formal rules for marking sentences" than those used within the novel, which is unsurprising considering the general lack of literacy in Inland (Schwetman 214). Only members of the government and the connexion men are taught to read and write. Since most of the population in Inland are illiterate (as with *A Canticle for Leibowitz*), they are unable to access and interpret any form of historical documentation or record keeping.

The general populous is not "allowit to have [the Eusa story] wrote down," which does not matter much regardless since so few know "how to read" (Walker 29). As such, the majority of the population learns everything they know about their pre-apocalyptic ancestors from the Eusa show, which is a propagandistic puppet show propagated by the current government. Pry Mincer Abel Goodparley and Wesmincer Orfing travel between districts to present this mythological version of real historical events that resulted in the demolition of the world by atomic power as a means of entertaining and educating the masses about the glories and failings of the lost world. In fact, "[e]very body knows bits and pieces of it" (29). In the text's temporal present, "[e]very 1," in Inland at least, "knows about Bad Time and what come after. Bad Time 1st and bad times after" (Walker 2). The Eusa story is always performed by a version of Goodparley and Orfing— "no odds what happens to [them] therewl always be a nother Goodparley & Orfing" (Walker 28). These performers, "[b]eing the Big 2 they only done ther 4 shows a year regler plus special 1s now and then," which serves as the primary form of historical education for the general public (Walker 28).

History, more specifically the government's "official" history, is thus intimately linked with oral culture, especially in terms of performance art. The only story that is written down is the Eusa story, which, according to members of the population, has "stayd the same" (Hoban 20). By contrast, "[a]ll them other storys tol by mouf they ben put to and took from and changit so much thru the years theyre all bits and blips and all mixt up" (20). However, even the Eusa story has changed despite the fact that it had "ben wrote time back way back and no 1 ever changit the story befor" (Hoban 52). While in the original story, "Eusa put the 1 Big 1 in barms then him & Mr Clevver droppit so much barms thay kilt as menne uv thear oan as thay kilt enemes" (Hoban 33), in a later version Eusa argues that he "never made no barms nor never droppit one" (Hoban 52). This adjustment serves the purpose of shifting the evils of the atomic bomb away from Eusa who is said to have discovered the atom as a means of warming the population to the idea of rediscovering the "cleverness" they had in the past without acknowledging that it was in fact the moment "when they got the cleverness" that the "cleverness [was] gone as wel" (Hoban 17). These changes demonstrate the ways that historical records are subject to change, especially when the changes serve to benefit those who control the narrative.

History as Myth in *Riddley Walker*

It is significant to note that again this history is highly mythologized. For instance, the splitting of the atom and the subsequent development of the atom bomb are told through the story of Eusa and ""The Littl Man the Addom" (Hoban 32). Eusa was "pullin on the Littl Mans owt strecht arms" when The Adomm "begun tu cum a part" and while this happened "he cryd, I wan tu go I wan tu stay . . . I wan tu dark I wan tu lyt I wan to day I wan tu nyt . . . I wan tu woman I wan tu man . . . I wan tu plus I wan tu minus I wan to big I wan tu littl I wan tu aul I wan tu nothing" (32). These statements are all opposites of one another, and each together makes a whole. And because the Adomm is being "pult in 2," his fractured body serves to represent the process of nuclear fission, which eventually resulted in the development of the atom bomb (32). By pulling the atom apart, Eusa "mayd the 1 Big 1," which refers to a large explosion (33). This novel reaction was employed in the creation of new kinds of bombs, which when deployed made the whole world “poyzen”; “evere thing wuz blak & rottin,” and corpses were littered across the land (33). Here, *Riddley Walker* depicts the potential consequences of nuclear technology, while also thematizing allegory by self-consciously commenting on allegory and its relation to the mythification of history.

However, it must be pointed out that this history does not remain constant throughout the text. While the Eusa story is in fact a form of historical allegory, it is also a propaganda tool used by the current Inland government to counteract the social distrust toward the ideology of technological progress that has developed since the “Bad Time” after the bombs were dropped. Earlier versions of the show said that “Eusa put the 1 Big 1 in barms then him and Mr Clevver droppit so much barms they kilt as menne uv thear oan as thay kilt enemes” (Hoban 51). But in later versions the Eusa puppet says that he “dint do none of them Bad Time things” and that Mr Clevver is to blame because he was the one that took Eusa’s “knowing” and “done it all” (51). This shifting of the responsibility implies that it was not the seeking of knowledge about the atom that was inherently bad, but rather the choice to use that technology to create weapons of mass destruction, which ultimately benefits the current government’s plan to regain knowledge of the past’s technology. By getting “that shyning Pwer back from time back way back” they might be able to “be like them,” the people of the lost world, with “boats in the air and picters on the wind” and “them shyning weals turning” (100). What they “ben” is ultimately what they want to “come to,” which implies a return to the pre-apocalyptic world of the past (100). This rewriting of the Eusa story demonstrates that “it, too, belongs to the discourses that [people] utter about history in order to give it meaning” (Marin 77). *Riddley Walker*, therefore, emphasizes the fact that “history is a fiction” that “obeys the unobserved commands” of the ideological conditions “from which it emerges” (Marin 81).

History, at least in the case of *Riddley Walker* appears to be not “linear but cyclical, and the future is at once something new and a return” (Katerberg 96). Indeed, by the end of the novel, gunpowder has again been discovered:

> He wer pounding the yellerboy stoan to a fine powder. Then he done the same with some chard coal. Done it will a boal and pounder. He took the little measurs and measuring out yellerboy and chard coal and Saul & Peter. Mixing them all to gether then and me watching . . .
>
> I jus begun to roal up a smoak when WHAP! there come like a thunner clap it wer like when litening strikes right close it ekowit up and down the river. There come up a cloud of smoak from the fents it wernt the regler blue smoak it wer 1 big puff of grey smoak and things were peltering down out of the trees like when you shake down nuts. (Hobin 193-194)

Contemporary readers have the historical perspective to know that gunpowder is the first step toward the creation of weapons that make use of explosive chemical reactions like firearms, dynamite, and bombs, which eventually inspire the creation of weapons of mass destruction like the nuclear bomb. But because history is a fiction that is ultimately under the control of those in power, the catastrophe of the past is thus “taken for granted” and likely doomed to be “repeated” (Palmer 160).

Conclusion

Post-apocalyptic fiction exposes us to end-of-the-world scenarios that represent possible future histories of humanity. As history is often characterized as being progressive, these narratives remind readers that it is possible to regress as well. In texts like Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz,* and Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, the real-world present is defamiliarized as a mythologized past. Readers, who live in and close to the real-world equivalents of the fictionalized pre-apocalyptic pasts of these novels, maintain access to historical knowledge that the characters of the texts no longer have, which exposes the fragility of cultural memory and the ways that it can be manipulated both intentionally and unintentionally by those charged with maintaining the records of these lost civilizations. As historical novelist Hilary Mantel notes in an article for *The Guardian*, "[e]vidence is always partial. Facts are not truth, though they are part of it—information is not knowledge. And history is not the past—it is the method we have evolved of organising our ignorance of the past. It's the record of what's left on the record." History is thus exposed as always being different from the past, which means that it is important for people to maintain a critical perspective that acknowledges the ideological conditions in which knowledge of the past is produced. And because "the people from the past become those of tomorrow," these narratives allow people to better understand their position in the present as the creators of the future (Marin 253). Consequently, our pervasive cultural habit of imagining the apocalypse offers us the opportunity to reconsider the way we live in the present to build a better future that avoids repeating the sins of our collective past.

CHAPTER II[1] – (MIS)REMEMBERING THE PAST: NOSTALGIA AFTER THE END

"What I mean to say is, the more you remember, the more you've lost" (195).
—Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven* (2014)

"Grief is an element. It has its own cycle like the carbon cycle, the nitrogen. It never diminishes not ever. It passes in and out of everything." (115).
—Peter Heller, *The Dog Stars* (2013)

Nostalgia in Pandemic Fiction: *Station Eleven* and *The Dog Stars*

Nostalgia can best be understood as a yearning for a lost world that is no longer accessible and perhaps never existed in the first place (Boym xiii). Posing as memory, nostalgia promises to rebuild the fictional space of the ideological home, dangerously confusing reality with the imaginary, meaning that the past can also be reimagined without flaws (Boym xvi). These various sorts of nostalgia, in turn, allow for different conceptions of the past to become part of ideologically loaded collective representations of history, which can directly impact the survivor's fictional future (Boym xvi). While chapter one examined the rendering of history into myth, this chapter focuses on the various visions of society that are developed in the characters' nostalgic memories of their pre-apocalyptic past.

Although nostalgia is a key feature in several post-apocalyptic narratives including Stephen King's *The Stand*, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, Douglas Coupland's *Girlfriend in a Coma*, and even Disney-Pixar's *Wall-E*, this chapter examines the representation of post-apocalyptic worlds ravaged by pandemic outbreak in two popular North American dystopias: Emily St John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014) and Peter Heller's *The Dog Stars* (2012). Even more than texts focused on other sorts of apocalypses, plague narratives demonstrate a high propensity toward nostalgia. While disasters of the more destructive sort, like nuclear war (as seen with Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* and Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*), an asteroid hitting the planet, or a supernova affecting our Earth's sun, leave very little undamaged, pandemics do not have the same sort of immediate structural impact. As a result, the world is left littered with objects from the characters' past that, for the most part, remain structurally intact, but are no longer functional because there are not enough people to maintain the infrastructure in working order.

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[1] An earlier version of this chapter was previously published in *The Australasian Journal of Popular Culture* in 2020.

The entire world is thus rendered a museum. In *Station Eleven*, the secondary character August even says that the whole planet "is a place where artifacts from the old world are preserved" (Mandel 146). This transformation is significant because museums are undoubtably one of the most important social institutions for the preservation of culture and memory, but it is important to note that history is always curated in a manner that shapes the identities of individuals and communities. In her 2013 book, *Mediating Memory in the Museum*, Silke Arnold-de Simine argues that "[n]ostalgia can take many forms in the museum landscape" but museums can also "become objects of nostalgia in their own right" (54). Consequently, by rendering the world a museum, rather than a wasteland, pandemics of an apocalyptic scale can enable high degrees of nostalgia when compared to other, more physically destructive catastrophes, like those discussed in the previous chapter.

Station Eleven was published in 2014 by Emily St. John Mandel. In this novel, a widespread pandemic outbreak follows the death of a famous Hollywood actor, Arthur Leander, who has a heart attack on stage during a performance of *King Lear*. As the novel progresses, moving back and forth between timelines, it focuses on Arthur's early years working in film and, fifteen years later, follows the main protagonists, Kirsten and August, members of a theatre troupe called "the travelling symphony" that wanders the post-pandemic landscape to perform plays and musical numbers.

Since its publication the novel has received several high-profile awards and nominations,[2] and in 2021 it was adapted for television[3]. In addition to *Station Eleven's* ongoing popularity amongst a general readership, scholarly attention to the novel continues to grow. While there are a few critical surveys that compare *Station Eleven* to a handful of other thematically related novels, most of the research takes a close-reading approach, offering sustained analysis of brief passages from the text to discuss the novel's broader themes. Several of these articles are focused on the concept of genre, identifying similarities in form, style, and content. Some focus primarily on how *Station Eleven* fits into the post-apocalyptic genre (De Cristofaro; D'Erasmo), while others posit that the novel can in fact be considered part of the climate fiction category (Barber; Eve; Kabak; Vermeulen). This research is primarily focused on the underlying cause of the apocalypse: climate change, which is theorized to have started the pandemic outbreak in the first place (Barber; Eve; Kabak; Vermeulen). Both Diletta De Cristofaro and Pieter Vermeulen are also concerned with the ways that apocalyptic catastrophe, climate-related or otherwise, impacts temporality. De Cristofaro claims that novels like *Station Eleven* serve to "critique the apocalyptic understanding of time" (2) by instead focusing on "the present and its ethical value" (23). Similarly, Vermeulen explores the modalities of life in relation to the near extinction of humanity, suggesting that novels that fit into the climate fiction genre "can show how it has been disrupted and distorted by the temporally and spatially distributed process we call climate change" (9). De Cristofaro and Vermeulen's work recognize the significance of time in post-apocalyptic fiction, and both emphasize the way that disaster can influence the way that survivors perceive their past and future. However, both texts fail to discuss the way that post-apocalyptic fiction defamiliarizes the real-world present by reframing it as the recent past.

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[2] According to Mandel's personal website, *Station Eleven* was a finalist for the 2014 National Book Award in Fiction and the 2015 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, and the winner of the 2015 Toronto Book Award, 2015 Arthur C. Clarke Award, the 2016 Lire Magazine (France): Révélation étrangère award, and the 2017 Prix des Libraires du Québec in the roman hors Québec category.

[3] Between 2021 and 2022, the *Station Eleven* television ten-episode mini-series, created by Patrick Sommerville, was released. The show was nominated 50 awards, including seven Primetime Emmys, and won in 18 categories overall (IMDB).

The bulk of the work that has been done on Mandel's novel is focused on the ways that the novel represents cultural expression, including theatre, music, art, literature, and popular culture (Baumlin; Conaway; Feldner; Maurer; Méndez-García; O'Dair; Smith). These studies note the marked resilience of various art forms (both high and low), like Shakespearean drama, classic symphonies, comic books, and television series like *Star Trek*. James S. Baumlin, Charles Conaway, Maximilian Feldner, and Margaret Maurer's articles are particularly interested in the ways that "[b]oth the Travelling Symphony and the narration" of the text "assert Shakespeare's exceptionalism and relevance in a post-apocalyptic world" (Maurer 32), while also emphasizing the ways that Shakespeare's narratives continue to "mirror aspects of our current lifeworlds," which reinforces the novel's claims about the significance of art (Baumlin 13). These studies emphasize the demonstrated significance in *Station Eleven* of preserving the "bastions of humanity" through "communal effort," which ultimately demonstrates the significance of all art forms, even after cataclysmic disaster (Méndez-García 125).

While these articles offer a comprehensive study of the representation of art in *Station Eleven*'s post-apocalyptic setting, they are less focused on the role that cultural artefacts, more generally, play in the curation of social memory. Matthew Leggatt's research responds to this gap by moving beyond the representation of art to discuss the ways that the "now useless objects" that litter the present in *Station Eleven* become "aesthetic links to the past," spurring a utopian romanticization of the "lost objects of our world," that allows survivors to imagine that "economic inequality and racism have also been displaced" (3). Vera Benczik's research responds to "objecthood after the apocalypse" by focusing on "the manifold use of objects, their relationship to memory[,] and the peculiarities of thingness" (22). Benczik argues that the "objects turned into things" in Mandel's novel are representative of the characters' underlying "trauma" and their attempts to reconstruct their own identities (33). While Benczik briefly mentions the role of individual restorative nostalgia in *Station Eleven*, she does not offer a comprehensive study of the various ways that nostalgia manifests within the novel and what the potential implications of collective memory are for communities.

The Dog Stars was published in 2012 by the award-winning American author Peter Heller. This novel follows its protagonist Hig, who by chance survived the flu outbreak that killed everyone he knew. Hig lives in the hangar of a small, abandoned airport with his dog, Jasper, and another survivor named Bangley. While spending his days flying the perimeter of their land in a 1965 Cessna, Hig receives a transmission on his radio that inspires him to seek out more survivors and a better life.

Despite its popularity amongst general readers and reviewers, *The Dog Stars* has not garnered much attention from scholars. Xin and Cao claim that Heller's novel serves as a meditation on loneliness and the importance of building social connections in a post-apocalyptic world. Moreover, Adeline Johns-Putra examines the rising prevalence of climate change in literature, citing *The Dog Stars* as a recent example. Regardless of limited scholarly attention thus far, since its publication, the novel has been included on several bestseller, best book, and recommended reading lists from a variety of publications,[4] and it has been optioned for a feature length film[5].

In both Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* and Peter Heller's *The Dog Stars*, the real-world present is reconfigured as the contemporary pre-apocalyptic past. As such, these popular narratives urge readers to imagine the loss of their own world and reflect on our current conditions. The apocalyptic events of these texts, though catastrophic to the human population, are not immediately physically destructive. The world is left littered with non-functional objects from before the catastrophe. As a result, the vast divide between the character's pre-apocalyptic past and their post-apocalyptic present is immediately visible to them. Being able to see the world of the recent past and the infrastructures that came with it, but without having access to it, creates the conditions in which nostalgia thrives through the collective memories of the pre-apocalyptic world.

Significantly though, the surviving communities demonstrate two forms of nostalgia—reflective and restorative. The reflective form of nostalgia enables a balanced analysis of the past that acknowledges both its benefits and its drawbacks (Boym xviii). Restorative nostalgia, by contrast, is highly idealized but is presented as though it were an entirely accurate representation of history (Boym xviii), increasing the likelihood of the development of *degenerate utopias*. Without an accurate assessment of the past, communities are at risk of reproducing the same conditions that caused the apocalypse in the first place.

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[4] According to Heller's personal website, *The Dog Stars* has been named a New York Times Bestseller, an Indie Bestseller, the 2012 Atlantic Monthly Best Book of the Year, a Guardian UK Best Book of 2012, an Amazon Best Book of 2012, a Hudson Booksellers' Top Fiction Title of 2012, a Publishers Weekly Best Book of 2012, A Flavorwire Book that Made the Most 'Best of 2012' Book Lists, an Indibound Pick for August, an Oprah Book Club Pick of the Week, an Apple Best Book of the Month, and an NPR First Read.

[5] Ridley Scott is set to direct *The Dog Stars* film, which was adapted by Mark L. Smith for 20th Century Studios (Stephen).

A Brief History of Nostalgia

The term nostalgia originally comes from the medical field. In her book *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym notes that this diagnosis was first used by a Swiss doctor by the name of Johannes Hofer in his 1688 medical dissertation to describe the mental stress caused by an individual's longing to return to their homeland (Boym 3). Etymologically, nostalgia comes from two Greek words: *nostos*, which means return home, and *algia*, which means longing (Boym xiii). Historically, the recorded symptoms which were said to be experienced by patients afflicted with nostalgia included "nausea, loss of appetite, pathological changes in the lungs, inflammation, cardiac arrests, high fever, as well as marasmus[,] and a propensity to drink" (Boym 3). The treatment for these symptoms regularly included medical interventions like "[l]eeches, hypnotic emulsions, opium," the "purging" of all stomach contents, and, more pleasantly, vacations to the Swiss Alps (Boym 4). However, the most effective cure for nostalgia was allowing for the patients to return to the homeland they were longing for in the first place (Boym 4).

The frequency of a nostalgia diagnosis shifted depending on the historical conditions in which people were situated. For example, in 1733 there was an outbreak of nostalgia amongst the Russian soldiers who were entering Germany (Boym 5). For them, the idea of living in a foreign nation, away from their homeland, felt similar to experiencing death, or at the very least seemed nearly as bad (Boym 5). But as time progressed, nostalgia began to shift from being an individual diagnosis to a social one which made it much less treatable (Boym 6). Around the world, nostalgia shifted from being an illness with a set treatment plan to a chronic disease that had no cure available for those who had been infected (Boym 7). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, doctors noticed that sending patients back to their homeland was no longer curing their nostalgia (Boym 6). Instead, the locus of their nostalgia shifted elsewhere, beyond the borders of their country of origin, which indicated that the exact location was more imaginary than it was literal. Modern nostalgia mourns "the impossibility of a mythical return" to a home that is at once "both physical and spiritual" (Boym 8).

By the twenty-first century, nostalgia, which was previously considered an entirely curable disease, became a permanent condition of modernity (Boym xiv). Indeed, this "global epidemic," as Boym terms it, demonstrates "an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, [and] a longing for continuity in" an increasingly globalized and "fragmented world" (xiv). In his book, *Retromania*, which focuses on the popular culture's obsession with its own past, Simon Reynolds notes that while "[e]arlier eras had their own obsessions with antiquity," the contemporary infatuation society has "with the cultural artefacts of *its own immediate past*" is entirely unprecedented (xiii). Moreover, the advent of digital media has made it easier than ever before to access countless records from our immediate past (Reynolds xxi). Modern conceptions of progress have only exacerbated these sentiments of nostalgia, which have now become a pervasive feature of contemporary popular culture. This retromania, as Reynolds terms it, "has become a dominant force in our culture" to the extent that "it feels like [society] has reached some kind of tipping point" (xiv). The world is changing quickly, but not necessarily for the better, spurring a surge in nostalgic longing.

Looking to the future, Reynolds wonders "what could possibly fuel tomorrow's nostalgia crazes and retro fads"? If we are curious about an answer, we may want to look at post-apocalyptic fiction, as it allows readers to imagine their present moment through a historical lens. Indeed, we are living in what many would term a pre-apocalyptic moment. While "[t]he great majority of interpretations of Apocalypse assume that the End is pretty near" (Kermode 8), the past few years have been characterized by unprecedented overlapping crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, extreme political polarization leading to the erosion of democratic institutions, terrorism, global political tensions, and economic turmoil. And because collective fantasies about the past are shaped by the conditions and “needs of the present,” (Boym xvi), some of the dystopian “realities we took for granted in the last century might well turn into utopias themselves” as the threats of global catastrophe that we have lived with for so long come to fruition (Mittag 69). In other words, in comparison with the conditions that could develop after apocalyptic rupture, our reality could seem almost utopian—what seems bad now may become the object of fond remembrance once things get worse. Set in the near or distant future of this planet, many post-apocalyptic narratives look back nostalgically at our present moment. This is perhaps unsurprising since “catastrophe [generally] invites nostalgic feelings because of the collective trauma and the emotional weight attributed" to the disaster at hand (Arnold-de Simine 67), and narratives of apocalypse are, by definition, focused on the concept of global, and, occasionally, galaxy-wide, or universal, catastrophe. In imagining these post-apocalyptic futures, narratives about the end of the world demonstrate the fact that the living conditions of the present can indeed get considerably worse. By defamiliarizing the real-world present as the pre-apocalyptic past, contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction urges readers to critically examine our present circumstances, which might result in a reconsideration and revaluation of our current conditions.

Significantly, though, there is not just one type of nostalgia. Boym differentiates between two forms of nostalgia, “reflective” and “restorative.” The first form “thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately” (xviii). Instead of focusing on one absolute truth, reflective nostalgia “dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity" (xviii). In post-apocalyptic fiction this form of nostalgia can manifest in a balanced analysis of both the merits and the shortcomings of the past. By critically analyzing both the conditions of the past and the present, individuals and communities engaged in this sort of nostalgia can move forward unhindered by the longing to rebuild the world of the remembered past exactly as it was before.

By contrast, the second form of nostalgia "stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home" (xviii). This form of nostalgia does not consider itself to be nostalgia but rather believes itself to be an accurate and uncontestable representation of history (xviii). Restorative nostalgia aims to rebuild the world and fill memory gaps or errors by attempting to recreate the past exactly as it was (Boym 41). And yet, these "new traditions are characterized by a higher degree of symbolic formalization and ritualization than the actual present customs and conventions after which they were patterned" (Boym 41). In post-apocalyptic fiction, this nostalgia can result in cultural stagnation and the world of the past being rebuilt in a manner that is highly ritualized and very often falsified.

Similarly, nostalgia can also manifest in the form of *degenerate utopias*, which are defined by the French philosopher, Louis Marin, as an Althusserian form of *ideology* (the "representation of the imaginary relationship individuals maintain with their real conditions of existence") that has been "changed into the form of myth" (239). Marin understands this myth as a "narrative that resolves formally a fundamental social contradiction," and thus, the degenerate utopia represents a "collective fantasy" that overwrites "*real* history" (239-40). Consequently, these seemingly utopian spaces are falsified representations realized "in a geographical space of the imaginary relationship that the dominant groups of . . . society maintain with their real conditions of existence, with [their] real history" (239). A degenerate utopia is thus not really a utopia at all, but rather an ideological myth that elevates the past to a state of false perfection. In post-apocalyptic fiction this can manifest in the form of characters who fondly, nostalgically, and uncritically remember features of their collective past as hallmarks of a better world, instead of recognizing the more dangerous conditions of that past as being the catalyst for the apocalypse. In post-apocalyptic fiction this can result in an indiscriminate idealization of the lost world that reshapes it into a false utopia that puts survivors at risk of eventually recreating the same conditions that caused the catastrophe in the first place.

Moreover, the boundaries between the various forms of nostalgia are not always clear. It is for this reason that Boym characterizes these different forms of nostalgia not as types, with clear borders and delineations, but rather as tendencies that provide meaning to yearning and desire (41). In fact, they might even "overlap in their frames of reference," but they tend not to "coincide in their narratives and plots of identity" (Boym 49). Very often each of these forms of nostalgia can be spurred by the "same triggers of memory and symbols" (Boym 49). Nonetheless, they are not inspired by the same urges—their memories "tell different stories" and inspire different actions (Boym 49).

Reflective Nostalgia in *Station Eleven*

In post-apocalyptic fiction, the perspectives that characters have on their past are impacted by the conditions of the present, which often results in the development of nostalgic longing for their remembered past. This longing for the past demonstrates an unhappiness with the character's present, which is, of course, found lacking when compared to the remembered world of their recent past. Moreover, nostalgia is not always related to the past that individuals actually experienced, but it can also be related to the aspirations and possibilities that never came to fruition, or, in other words, hopes for the future that were rendered obsolete when the catastrophe occurred. In *Station Eleven* loss defines the present world, which is but a shell of what it once was, scattered with the physical reminders of what was taken by the pandemic outbreak that wiped out most human life. In these sorts of apocalyptic futures, the present is characterized by absence, which is contrasted with the perceived world of plenty that the survivors' cultural memories of the past provide.

Mandel emphasizes the pervasiveness of the loss that the survivors of the Georgia Flu suffered by including what is titled an "Incomplete List" early in the novel. This list, whose author is unnamed, delivers to readers a catalogue of the items and experiences that no longer exist in the present as they once did in the recent past. Significantly, Eric Griffiths notes that the word list very often "attracts 'merely', 'only', 'no more than' and the like into its vicinity," because people tend to view lists as being "inherently dull, prosaic things," rather than the complex sematic tool that they truly are (10). Lists are typically considered to be a form of "storage" that "permits communication over time and space, and provides [people] with a marking, mnemonic[,] and recording device" that ultimately maintains "a kind of inventory of persons, objects[,] or events" (Goody 78 and 80).

Lists increase "the visibility and definiteness of classes, [which] makes it easier for the individual to engage in chunking, and more particularly in a hierarchical ordering of information which is critical to much recall" (Goody 111). While lists are often presented in an order that indicates "a sequence of ascending or descending priority," this is not always the case (Griffiths 13). Yet, whether or not the list appears inherently hierarchal, "the order of items" is always in and of itself "an item of communication"—"why what comes first, comes first and why what comes second, comes second is something we need to understand the whole communicative act" (Griffiths 13). The list in *Station Eleven* moves in stream-of-consciousness style between loosely connected memories with no obvious hierarchy, which indicates that each pre-pandemic piece of history is an equal symbol of destruction. Moreover, the rhythmic anaphoric refrain of "no more" occurs twenty-seven times over the course of this passage, which emphasizes the fact that the features of the past that were once present, have now been lost. As a result, the list characterizes the world of the novel's present through absence; it is a world that is in the process of being emptied out.

The list begins with the loss of sports and recreation, stating that after the pandemic there was "[n]o more diving into pools of chlorinated water lit green from below" and "[n]o more ball games played out under floodlights" (Mandel 31). By contrast, almost all physical activity in the characters' present is related to their continued safety and survival.

Similarly, the list indicates later that there are "[n]o more films, except rarely, with a generator drowning out half the dialogue, and only then for the first little while" (Mandel 31). There are also "[n]o more screens shining in the half-light as people raise their phones above the crowd to take photographs of concert stages. No more concert stages lit by candy-coloured halogens, no more electronica, punk, electric guitars" (Mandel 31). Essentially, after the pandemic, the technology that supported and enabled modern modes of recreation and entertainment has become obsolete. And for the most part, so too did the activities themselves become antiquated because of the loss of functional infrastructure in the first few decades after the outbreak occurred. Despite this absence of entertainment infrastructure, the collective of survivors that the novel follows through the narrative present are part of a travelling symphony who present musical and theatrical performances to the communities they pass through, which indicates that art persists, both as a leisure activity and a mode of survival in its prevention of despair.

The list's earlier reference to the lights in the pool and the baseball diamond's floodlights then spurs the statement that there are also "[n]o more porch lights with moths fluttering on summer nights" (Mandel 31). By shifting from the lights associated with recreational activities to the space of the home, where lights would usually be used daily, the text implies that all lights have been shut off. As a result, readers are urged to recognize that even basic electrical amenities have been rendered non-functional in the post-pandemic years.

Transportation technology is also impacted. The list indicates that there are "[n]o more trains running under the surface of cities on the dazzling power of the electric third rail" (Mandel 31). And since "automobile gas goes stale after two to three years" and "aviation gas . . . was difficult to come by," all vehicular transportation powered by petrol has ceased as well (Mandel 31). Indeed, the list indicates that after the apocalypse, there was

> No more flight. No more towns glimpsed from the sky through airplane windows, points of glimmering light; no more looking down from thirty-thousand feet and imagining the lives lit up by those lights at the moment. No more airplanes, no more requests to put your tray table in its upright and locked position—but no, this wasn't true, there were still airplanes here and there. They stood dormant on runways and in hangars. (Mandel 31)

While planes are a particularly significant symbol in *Station Eleven* because they represent the vast divide between past and present (more on that later), the loss of transportation technologies has a major impact on the way that survivors can engage with the world around them. The distance that can be feasibly travelled is greatly reduced. As a result, the global consciousness is lost as well, because without air travel or global movement in general, there are "[n]o more countries," no more "borders," and ultimately no world map (Mandel 31). Unsurprisingly, space travel has also ended, so there are, of course, "[n]o more spacecraft rising up from Cape

Canaveral, from the Baikonur Cosmodrome, from Vandenburg, Plesetsk, Tanegashima, burning paths through the atmosphere" and into the Milky Way (Mandel 31). The individuals in Mandel's novel "cannot liberate [themselves] from the three basic constraints of: (1) where [they] can see . . . from, (2) how far can [they] see, and (3) where [they] can learn . . . from" (Harvey 254). As a result, there is no longer a means to accurately construct a global (and especially not a galactic) image in what seems to have become a "postnational world system" (Tally 73).

And without the electricity and transportation technology, much of the infrastructure that allows contemporary society to function is demolished, ultimately collapsing routine healthcare and emergency response systems. In this post-pandemic world, there are "[n]o more pharmaceuticals," which means that there is also no longer any "certainty of surviving a scratch on one's hand, a cut on a finger while chopping vegetables for dinner, [or even] a dog bite" (Mandel 31). In other words, the advances in medical treatments and technologies that once prevented serious illness, injury, disability, and death are no longer available, which means that health-related issues that were once considered minor are now significantly more serious. Moreover, the public organizations that typically dealt with ongoing emergencies are also essentially non-existent—there are "[n]o more fire departments" and "no more police" (Mandel 31). In almost all ways, the world is undeniably more dangerous than it was in the recent years before the outbreak occurred.

Feldner argues that in "this list *Station Eleven* reveals that it is much more prone to lament the loss of amenities and pleasures of the early twenty-first century, than to criticize the excesses and destructive effects of the capitalist system that enable these pleasures" (173). And while that is true, it cannot be argued that the list represents all elements of the past as good, and all elements of the present as inherently bad. The world is much more complex than that binary sort of logic indicates. And in fact, I would even go so far as to argue that Mandel's narrative evinces a profound ambivalence about the high-tech global society of our present. She uses the apocalypse as a means of defamiliarizing our world, showing us what we take for granted, and pointing out the beauty and magic of how we live, as well as its flaws. In particular, the last section of "Unfinished List," demonstrates this complex mixture of good and bad when discussing the fact that there is "[n]o more internet," which ultimately means

> No more social media, no more scrolling through litanies of dreams and nervous hopes and photographs of lunches, cries for help, and expressions of contentment, and relationship-status updates with heart icons whole or broken, plans to meet up later, pleas, complaints, desires, pictures of babies dressed as bears or peppers for Halloween. No more reading and commenting on the lives of others, and in so doing, feeling slightly less alone in the room. No more avatars. (Mandel 31-32)

While the internet here seems to be filled with things that might be considered mundane, it also enables people to connect across vast distances. Even when people lose touch with one another, they are still able to see, like, and comment on the other person's life, and vice versa. In the real world, at least colloquially, it seems that many people believe that modern technology is causing people to become disconnected from one another, and yet, without the internet, these sorts of interpersonal connections that Mandel describes would not be possible. But with these "cyberintimacies," people are also at risk of "cybersolitude"—"with constant connection comes new anxieties of disconnection," which ultimately degrade the relationships individuals maintain in the real-world (Turkle 16).

As such, in *Station Eleven*, the loss of electricity frees people from the near-constant updates and the pressure to curate palatable versions of their lives on social media. The loss of these digital avatars is only made more significant because of the novel's ongoing focus on celebrities and celebrity culture; those who are constantly in the public's eye are forced to maintain an idealized image of themselves, both online and in the real world. For the average person using social media, we can "recreate ourselves as online personae and give ourselves new bodies, homes, jobs, and romances," but, nonetheless, in these virtual communities we often experience profound loneliness (11). Even though the avatars we use online are not exact replicas of ourselves, they can still cause discontentment when individuals cannot live-up to their digital persona (12). So, by ending the list with the claim that without the internet, there are "[n]o more avatars," Mandel is essentially arguing that individuals' social media presence is no more than a representation of who they want other people to believe they are, which means that perhaps in a world without social media the survivors are freer to be themselves (32). There is a loss of mediation as the apocalypse pushes survivors back into a corporeal present.

A similar ambivalence arises in *Station Eleven* when the novel discusses the loss of television programming. While the lack of electricity in the survivors' present means that electronic devices are rendered non-functional, they still exist in the world physically. As a result, when Kirsten and August, members of the travelling symphony in *Station Eleven*, break into abandoned houses to find things that may be useful for their troupe, "August always gazed longingly at televisions" as though he was still a "pale and scrawny" child "with dark hair falling in his eyes and a serious, somewhat fixed expression, playing a child-sized violin in a wash of electric blue light" (Mandel 39). Without the visual images and sound that would have once been broadcasted and reproduced on-screen, these inoperative devices serve as nothing more than a reminder of the inaccessibility of the past's happier days. To counter the fact that the televisions no longer turn on, let alone play programming, August searches for copies of the *TV Guide*, which he studies in the evening to supplement his memory and to help him imagine that the blank screens were again filled with images.

While television is, of course, associated with recreation and leisure, it also served the purpose of broadcasting information to the public about recent or noteworthy events, which means that it was often the bearer of bad news. In fact, at the beginning of the novel, this is exactly how many people would have found out about the pandemic outbreak in the first place. Although Jeevan was originally told about the severity of the outbreak by his friend Hua who worked in the emergency room, one of the first things he did once he found out about the situation was call his girlfriend, Laura, and ask if she was "watching the news" and he insisted that if she was not, that she should immediately "turn on the news . . . [or] go read it online or something" (Mandel 23-24). Even in the local grocery store, "there was the television" playing the "unsettling news" of the pandemic outbreak for all the staff and customers to see, which demonstrates that while the information broadcasted was perhaps useful, it was not necessarily pleasant, or entertaining (Mandel 25). However, in the post-pandemic present, the television is functionally useless to survivors except as a memory-stirring idol. For August, who was a child when the outbreak occurred, technology is viewed as being almost entirely positive, and for Jeevan, who was an adult, it is likely to be viewed more ambivalently. Here, the novel thus demonstrates that the memory of survivors "does not [necessarily] follow a single plot," but instead "explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones," which means that the text's ambivalence toward the technologies of the past demonstrate a form of reflective nostalgia (Boym xviii). As a result, the novel represents the ways that diverse perspectives enable a more balanced, and perhaps more accurate, representation of their pre-apocalyptic history.

Restorative Nostalgia in *Station Eleven*

In the wake of a fictional apocalyptic pandemic outbreak, the future holds the possibility of being measurably different from the present, pushing forward the potential to rebuild the world that has been lost. As Jameson argues in "Progress Versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?," the past becomes an imagined utopia through a process of ideological collective remembering that focuses primarily on the positive elements. The "fantasies which a collectivity entertains about its past and its future" are often, though not always, rooted in the "mythical, archetypal, and projective" (Jameson 148).

In *Station Eleven*, loss defines the present world, which is but a shell of what it once was, scattered with the physical reminders of what was taken by the pandemic outbreak that wiped out most of the human life. Rather than look at the shape of what the world has become, the novel describes the present as being characterized by absence, which is contrasted with the perceived world of plenty those cultural memories of the past provide. As a result, within the context of both novels' narrative present, it is those who "remember the old world most clearly" that struggle the greatest with accepting their current situation (Mandel 195).

Having access to a knowledge of the past makes the present situation worse because they are held in contrast to one another. Baccolini states that the concept of utopia is "maintained in dystopia," which shows that neither vision of the world can exist independently (520). The past and present are each considered in relation to the other, and the differences between them reshape survivors' recollections of their lost world. The novels represent multiple worlds—past, present and future—shaped by collective memory. In Mandel's post-apocalyptic world, the past and the present are placed in contrasting positions, marked by the cataclysm of the outbreak as a dividing line. These novels thus demonstrate that the ways a community understands and engages with its history is deeply informed by the present moment, which means that the apocalypse reframes the characters' recent past.

In post-apocalyptic fiction, this dynamic exposes the fact that survivors of catastrophic events are often incapable of imagining future alternatives and rather tend towards rebuilding new spaces and times that rehash the world of our present. This urge is rooted in restorative nostalgia, which attempts to recreate a mythologized version of the lost home, reaching "beyond the present into an illusory golden age past—when things were simpler, and hence better" (Benczik 26). In reality, this impulse represents "a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return" (Boym 12). Raffaella Baccolini asserts that recovering memory for the individual as well as the whole of society allows for the past to be reframed by current conceptions of historical fact (520). For the community of survivors, recovered memory frequently serves the purpose of feeding restorative nostalgia. As a result, the collective vision of the past is shaped by a deep longing for a return.

In her article, "'A heap of broken images': Objecthood, Apocalypse and Memory in *Station Eleven*," Vera Benczik notes that the "archaeological expeditions of Kirsten and August not only serve the goal of cataloguing and repurposing the abstracted object world, they also enrich their private collections of things" (28). These personal items often serve the purposes of restorative nostalgia as survivors tend to use them in their attempts to reconstruct their lost world (Boym 13). Kirsten's backpack, which is described as a "child-size, red canvas with a cracked and faded Spider-Man" symbol on it (Mandel 66), holds both "practical" and "sentimental" items (Benczik 29). In her bag, Kirsten is carrying "two glass bottles of water that in a previous civilization had held Lipton Iced Tea, a sweater, a rag she tied over her face in dusty houses, a twist of wire for picking locks, the Ziplock bag that held her tabloid collection and the *Dr. Eleven* comics, and a [glass] paperweight" filled with "storm clouds" (Mandel 66). The final three items in Kirsten's bag function as "comfort object[s]" that "weave a web of connecting threads between pre- and post-collapse world, between the people whose entangled lives the narrative follows," ultimately linking Authur, Miranda, Tyler, and Kirsten through their shared experiences with these objects (Benczik 29-30).

In *Station Eleven*, the present lens is thus defined through shared cultural memories of the lost world, which means that this "[h]ome is not made of individual memories but of collective projections" and illusions (Boym 43). This focus on individual and collective memory is exemplified by the fact that Kirsten has some sort of amnesia that affects her personal childhood memories of the pre-pandemic era and the first years that followed the outbreak. She holds few memories "from before the collapse" (Mandel 113) and "no memory whatsoever of [the] first year" afterwards (Mandel 61). As a result, the non-functional objects that Kirsten carries on her person—the comics, the clippings from gossip magazines, the paperweight—depict the memories of her past that Kirsten is willing and able to access. The objects are thus used symbolically to supplement the memories of the pre-apocalyptic world that Kirsten cannot recall, enabling her to curate and build her identity through her personal archive.

Moreover, the novel also depicts Kirsten searching for clues to help reshape her vision of the past. Within Kirsten's present, nostalgia renders "memory as sacred" (Hanson "Memory's Offspring" 249-250). Without access to her own visions of the past, Kirsten must rely on other sources, which demonstrates that "[i]ndividual memory can . . . be developed and fostered in a social context," because different "groups and communities [are able] provide the framework and stimulus for these memories" (Arnold-de Simine 20). For instance, when searching through an abandoned school while travelling to the symphony's next destination, Kirsten looks at "a couple of mildewed binders to study the stickers and Sharpie incantations" as a means of finding "any clues . . . about the lost world" (Mandel 130). The inability to recall memories of her childhood leaves Kirsten with a nostalgic longing for a world that she cannot remember—a world that is built through her personal reconstructive efforts, the "collective pictorial symbols" left behind from before the pandemic, and the oral history of survivors (Boym 49).

To compensate for her amnesia, Kirsten's memory is supplemented by the memories of those within her peer group, which become indistinguishable from her own memories. For instance, Kirsten's favourite line of text is the phrase "[s]urvival is insufficient" from *Star Trek Voyager*, a show that she was not "sure if she actually remembered" (Mandel 119-120). Despite potentially having no first-hand knowledge of the series, Kirsten asks August to remind her, as she allows "herself to imagine that she remembered it": "a television in a living room, a ship moving through the night silence of space, her brother watching beside her, their parents—if she could only remember their faces—somewhere near" (Mandel 121). From the beginning, it becomes apparent that Kirsten's vision of the past is constructed, which means that her individual memories are in fact shared with others. As a result, collective memory takes the place of individual memory, which thus enables the construction of a mythic idealized path.

Shared cultural memory is also developed through the formation of Clarke's Museum of Civilization. This development is particularly significant because museums are "one of the vital social institutions responsible for transforming living memory into institutionally constructed and sustained commemorative practices which enact and give substance to group identities and foster memory communities" (Arnold-de Simine 1-2). Ironically, this institution is constructed in the

"Skymiles Lounge in Concourse C" of the Severn City Airport, causing the space, which was once a signifier of mobility and transience, to become a repository of memory and belonging (Mandel 232). The museum contains objects that were left behind by people who were stranded when the outbreak first occurred, as well as objects that were "collected over the years, from the airport and beyond" (Mandel 232). The collection includes things like "laptops," "iPhones, the radio from administration desk, the electric toaster from an airport staff lounge, [and even] the turntable and vinyl records that some optimistic scavenger had carried back from Severn City" (Mandel 232). And while these items are integral to the museum, these sorts of institutions are "places of recollection" that are "not so much driven by objects but by narratives and performances" (Arnold-de Simine 1-2). Clark, who survived the pandemic and who is grateful "not just to have seen the remembered splendours of the former world, the space shuttles and the electrical grid and the amplified guitars, the computers that could be held in the palm of a hand and the high-speed trains between cities, but to have lived with those wonders for so long," acts in the role of curator (Mandel 231-232). In particular, Clark's focus remains on the elements of the past that had once been pervasive and taken for granted. His intentions in managing the museum were to pay homage to how lucky he had been, not just to have survived, but also to have "seen one world end and another begin" (Mandel 231). Because he has first-hand experience with the world of the past, Clark can explain the role of the items that he has collected to those who either did not experience the world of before, or those who did not remember it, which means that he is the one who controls the "narratives and performances" that define the museum's collection (Arnold-de Simine 2). The museum allows nostalgia to become institutionalized, and as a result, individual memory—Clark's memory—becomes the official memory of the collective.

Degenerate Utopian Nostalgia in *Station Eleven*

Paradoxically, forgetting is also an important aspect of memorialization. In recent years, many researchers working in memory studies have noted that the relationship between remembering and forgetting cannot be understood in the binary (Dessingué and Winter 1). Alexandre Dessingué and Jay Winter argue in their collection, *Beyond Memory* that remembering and forgetting are always connected to time, which means that both remembering and forgetting are deeply influenced by the present moment (1). This effect is referred to as the "'past-in-present' focus of memory"—people, of course, remember in the space of the present, so as a result the past is always fully integrated with the present (1). In other words, the relationship between remembering and forgetting is always facilitated and negotiated by contemporary conditions (1).

In these novels, the construction of the pre-pandemic world as a utopian space requires both the selective remembering of the positive attributes of that world and the active forgetting of the negative ones. Imperfections are forgotten for the sake of maintaining the mythology of the lost world as a utopia. Post-apocalyptic worlds are defined in relation to the key features of the lost world that are continually pined for, even by those who have no direct memories of them. Recovering memory allows for the past to be reframed, but in this context, it is reframed without flaws by a deep communal longing for return to a better world.

While there are instances in which the characters accurately remember the ambivalences of the pre-pandemic world, both texts are also frequently characterized by a collective forgetting of the problems that plagued the past. Benczik argues that "[p]ost-apocalyptic works that display a nostalgic longing for a better past offer a critique of the present often rooted in anxieties in the face of techno-cultural developments that are perceived as possible threats" (26). In both novels, this degenerate utopian nostalgia is particularly apparent in the depictions of aviation technology and air travel. In the real world's present, "planning for a possible influenza outbreak" is an "extremely high priority" for many governments all over the world (Epstein et al. 1). In this globally connected era, "no country is isolated from the potential spread of infection" (1). International air travel in particular increases the speed and scope of the spread of pandemic outbreaks, and it is for this reason that international travel restrictions and national isolation tactics are used to "delay dissemination of the disease until targeted medical and other interventions can be developed and deployed" before further tragedy ensues (1). And yet, even these restrictions have been shown to be ineffective because they are often implemented after a manageable threshold of infected bodies has been exceeded and international travel has already occurred (4). In other words, air travel facilitates the spread of disease at such a rate that it cannot be prevented, enabling global outbreak.

This is the case in *Station Eleven*; when the Georgia Flu begins to spread, it comes into Toronto on a plane from Moscow. The global epidemic was thus enabled by the human capacity to travel. And yet, throughout *Station Eleven*, air travel is one of the key features of the lost world that is continually longed for, even by those who have no memories of it. For instance, when Clark, the museum curator living in the airport, watches a plane leave, he wonders "why, in his life of frequent travel he had never recognized the beauty of flight" (Mandel 247). This demonstrates that the significance of objects is dependent on the historical position from which they are being looked at. What is believed to be a utopian future return is "historical and dated," exposing it as "merely the future of one moment," which reveals the fact that the various futures of science fiction are often reconstructions of the time in which they were written (Jameson 151). Characters long continuously for the return of aviation. In *Station Eleven* a member of the

Travelling Symphony named Dieter even says that “for a whole decade after the pandemic, [he] kept looking at the sky” and sometimes he still even dreams that when he looks up “the plane had finally come,” indicating that “[t]here was still civilization somewhere” (Mandel 134). The post-pandemic world is continuously defined by the fact that it has been twenty years since “the end of air travel,” which glorifies the invention of aeroplanes and demonstrates the fact that the survivors collectively remember only the wonder and beauty associated with flight and forget the risks (Mandel 35). The survivors’ fixation on air travel demonstrates a sense of discontentment with the current localized nature of existence and a longing for mobility and globality, marking these features of the past as being representative of an idealized civilization.

When Clark “looks up at the evening activity on the tarmac . . . he has no expectation of seeing an airplane rise again in his lifetime” (Mandel 332). Yet, because “there are again towns with streetlights,” there is the possibility that “vessels are setting out . . . travelling toward or far away from him, steered by sailors armed with maps and knowledge of the stars”; people who want to see “whatever became of the countries on the other side” (Mandel 332-33). And if that progress is feasible, implying a return to the lost world of the past, then so too may be the potential for air travel, and its beauty and convenience, along with the heightened risk of global pandemics, in the near future. While it is possible that this technological re-boot will produce a different socio-historical conjuncture, it is also likely that in their longing for the comforts of their lost world, survivors will attempt to recreate the past exactly as it was, which risks the development of a cyclical history.

Station Eleven’s present is configured as a graveyard; the remnants of society’s past serve as demarcations of death, destruction, and the devastating loss of a way of life. Beyond that, the global consciousness is lost as well, because without air travel or global movement in general, there is no world map. As previously indicated, despite everything, we "cannot liberate ourselves from the three basic constraints of: (1) where we can see . . . from, (2) how far can we see, and (3) where we can learn . . . from" (Harvey 254). As a result, there is no longer a means to accurately construct a global image, which points to the fact that perhaps these visual reconstructions are no longer necessary in what has become a "postnational world system" (Tally 73). By describing the ways in which global consciousness is related to the means of transport, *Station Eleven* evinces a profound ambivalence toward the high-tech globalized society of the novel's fictionalized past, which is meant to represent our real-world present. However, by idealizing elements of the past, like air travel, the survivors remain at risk of reframing their pre-pandemic history as a degenerate utopia, ultimately enabling the reconstruction of the same conditions that allowed the apocalypse to occur in the first place.

Reflective Nostalgia in *The Dog Stars*

Peter Heller's *The Dog Stars* reflects on loss in a way that demonstrates the significance of individual memory. The current world of *The Dog Stars* is defined by the characters' recollections of the lost world. The hierarchy of the past, like the "Incomplete List" in *Station Eleven*, is reordered to emphasize what was lost. For instance, while Hig, who lives in the United States, acknowledges that the catastrophe meant that exotic animals like "[t]he tiger," "the elephant, the apes, the baboon, [and] the cheetah" as well as local wildlife like "[t]he titmouse, the frigate bird, the pelican (grey), the whale (grey), [and] the collared dove" had gone extinct, he does not experience any emotional response to their loss because these animals are not a part of his world (Heller 3). While the loss of these species is, of course, substantial, Hig, in a somewhat narcissistic way, remains ambivalent to most forms of destruction that do not have an immediate and direct impact on his life.

By contrast, at the beginning of the novel, Hig laments that last October was the last time that he had seen geese. There had been “five all fall” and by the next April there were none (Heller 4). But despite noticing their absence, nothing impacts him like the loss of freshwater fish; Hig even claims that he did not “cry until the last trout swam upriver looking for maybe cooler water” (3). To Hig, the loss does not feel equal. Before the pandemic outbreak, Hig often enjoyed fishing; in fact, he “used to love to fish for trout more than almost anything,” but wildlife populations, as with the human population, dwindled (3). Tormented by these happy memories of the past, Hig often wakes up from the middle of his dreams crying “because the trout are gone every one”: “brookies, rainbows, browns, cutthroats, cutbows, every one” (3). As the years go by, the wildlife populations dwindle further; “losing the trout was bad” enough but “losing the creek [was] another thing altogether” (56).

Despite this environmental degradation, Hig “still fished” for “suckers and carp” in the “mountain,” which Hig’s companion, Bangley, describes as “Recreating” (Heller 56). This term denotes situations that do not involve activities related to the characters’ “direct survival,” but rather function as a nostalgic attempt to recreate memories of the past (Heller 56). While Bangley means it as a slight, emphasizing the time being wasted on recreation, the novel also plays on the double meaning of re-creating, in leisure, a lost lifestyle. The difference between Hig, a naturalist, and Bangley, an ex-farmer, demonstrates on the micro-scale that while all survivors would likely be aware of the mass extinction event that had occurred, each would experience the loss differently based on their location as well as their personal interests and experiences.

Furthermore, memories of the past in *The Dog Stars* are often focused not only on what might be considered significant individual experiences, but also on the seemingly minute details of everyday life that were once taken for granted. For example, Hig claims that apples were "one of the sweetest things" in all North America, alongside "honey," "molasses," "maple sugar" and "candy cane[s]" (Heller 99). Yet, the apples are not completely lost because there is still an orchard North of Longmont where there are "acres and acres of apples" of all sorts of varieties (99). Although "most of the trees [are] long dead for a lack of water," there are still some "living along the still flowing old ditches"— "scraggly, bristling with new shoots, reverting to some kind of wildness, the apples stunted and pecked, ravaged by caterpillars, but sweet" (99). To Hig, the apples seem almost "sweeter than before" because "they're sweeter than" anything else of the present, a metaphor for much of the past (99). After the outbreak things like apples are seen as markedly better than the past, if only because they are now valued by individual survivors in ways that were not before. The apocalypse enables objects to find novel value or regain lost value. When focusing particularly on Hig's "individual sentimental longing" (Boym 8), *The Dog Stars* is engaging with a fictionalized form of reflective nostalgia, that is "more about individual and cultural memory" than any singular "national past" or "future" (Boym 49).

Restorative Nostalgia in *The Dog Stars*

Nonetheless, since the novel is set in what used to be Colorado, Hig's reflection on the past is based in a particular national context—it is very much a novel that is about the American West. In his book *Future West*, which examines the concepts of utopia and apocalypse in frontier science fiction, William H. Katerberg argues that the American myth of the West is inherently a utopian conception of the frontier space, which is influenced by several different compulsions. Simultaneously, it "celebrates the progress of American political and economic institutions," while also maintaining a sense of nostalgia for the nation's past that emphasises the need for society "to return to nature" and, ultimately, to the frontier (Katerberg 23). And in the context of

The Dog Stars, the apocalypse creates an opportunity for this return to occur because the world is rendered into a "new *place* where history will start fresh," and the Western frontier always "dreams of starting over" (Katerberg 60). When Hig is flying, the landscape is described as being in the process of returning to nature—the train track and the road are "grown in," while the forest is "still living," with the dessert trees growing "gnarled and thick" (Heller 163). Katerberg claims that the "specific American myth of the West as a place of escape and renewal overlaps with and ultimately is rooted in myths of wilderness spaces," and here, in Heller's novel, the natural world is resetting itself, while human constructions gradually decay (Katerberg 79). While similar conditions may be occurring simultaneously across the United States, and perhaps even around the world, the novel demonstrates the ways that the apocalypse creates an opportunity for the West to return to its untamed state and become a frontier space once more.

The Dog Stars is deeply influenced by this American sense of nostalgia for the blank space of the frontier. Katerberg argues that the "America of myth, especially the American West, beckons as a New World frontier, a 'promised land' of opportunity where people can escape civilized society and the constraints of the past, start life afresh, and reinvent themselves" (1). These sorts of cultural narratives about the frontier imply that time starts over when people enter a new geographic space, allowing them to begin again without the burdens of the past. And in *The Dog Stars*, the apocalypse allows familiar locales to be re-rendered as frontier spaces. Indeed, "[i]n the primitive conditions that ensue" after catastrophe occurs, survivors are then "forced to start over" and develop a new world in the novel space of the post-apocalyptic frontier (Katerberg 5). The novel itself is thus an expression of the restorative nostalgic urge by means of the return to the national symbol and mythology of the American Western frontier.

For instance, *The Dog Stars* is deeply focused on the landscape of the American West. Heller depicts in detail the views from Hig's aircraft, cataloguing the Colorado terrain. For instance, when Hig describes his patrol, he describes his path in terms of topographical landmarks.

> The patrol goes west to the mountain front then south. I follow the line of trees that mark the river. At the stacks of the power plant and the reservoir I swing back north-west. The Mennonites are on the creek. In an old turkey farm. Eight metal sheds in two rows of four set at angles like diagonally parked cars. Tall century old trees strung along a windbreak and clustered in a grove in the middle of which cants the asphalt roof of a big brick farmhouse. Two ponds fed by the creek. In one I can see floats, an empty canoe. An array of solar panels to the south of the sheds and two windmills, one mechanical for drawing water. Why they came here in the first place. (Heller 23)

The landscape is a mixture of human constructions, some of which have already been rendered non-functional by the apocalypse, and longstanding natural features, including the mountains, which have existed since long before Europeans arrived in the Americas in the first place. By emphasizing that these features, like access to water, are why the settlers chose this location, Hig is drawing a connection between the Western Americans who currently reside in this land, including himself, and their nation's history, which emphasizes that the future of this space "cannot exist without its past" (Katerberg 96). And as the structures of the pre-pandemic world fall into a state of disrepair due to lack of use and regular maintenance, survivors are left with "nowhere to go but back, to another frontier, imagined or real" (Katerberg 15). This connection to the past is further emphasized by the fact that the community Hig describes are Mennonites, a group that has frequently rejected modern technologies and favoured traditional rural living. In a sense, their community may have already maintained a lifestyle reminiscent of the pre-industrialized past, and as such their transition would have been less jarring. The landscape is thus represented through a lens that acknowledges its current state, while also linking it to both the recent and distant past— “American history is less about time than about space” (Katerberg 21).

By allowing survivors to return to this mythological American frontier space, the apocalypse also enables “a return to frontier conditions, in which institutions of law and order have failed,” forcing survivors “to create their own extralegal order” (Katerberg 76). In *The Dog Stars*, violence becomes part of the characters’ daily lives. Throughout the novel, the protagonists are at constant risk of attack. Those who survived after the flu and the blood disease ravaged the population were “mostly Not Nice,” which is why Hig and Bangley took shelter “on the plain” and why Hig surveys the surrounding area, looking for threats each night (Heller 9) while Bangley is set up with a “.408 CheyTac sniper rifle” (Heller 6). Frequently, “intruders” would attempt to enter their home “at night” and they would come “singly or in groups . . . with hunting rifles” and “with knives,” trying to gather any of the limited resources available (Heller 9). In the context of the Western frontier, this need for constant protection from other survivors further emphasizes how the apocalypse has created the conditions to renew the once-outdated notion that men “always need enemies to fight in order to be men,” as if their masculinity is inherently tied to violence, thus re-emphasizing the traditional values and conceptions, however true, of what it meant to be a man in America (Katerberg 75).

In the context of Heller’s novel, this frontier space implies that the problems of the past can be erased, which thus enables the development of better futures, while simultaneously indicating that in these post-apocalyptic “new worlds[,] the past cannot be swept away easily”

(Katerberg 5). Indeed, the customs and "traditions that people inherit continue to shape the future in subtle ways" (Katerberg 5). As I previously mentioned, in *The Dog Stars* "anything that doesn't directly involve [the character's] direct survival, or killing, or planning to kill" is called "Recreating," which implies an attempt to reconstruct an experience from their lost world (Heller 56). To Bangley, Hig's companion, fishing counts as "Recreating" because it involves a much higher level of risk, and its yield of "quality protein" is much lower when compared to deer hunting (Heller 56). Nonetheless, Hig continues to fish. He would find a "stretch of the woods that had not died, or that was coming back," set "down [his] pack against a still green tree" and enjoy the scent of "running water, of cold stone, of fir and spruce" while he fished (Heller 57). Hig had fished all his life:

> When I lost my high school girlfriend, I fished. When in a fit of frustration and despair I quit writing anything, I fished. I fished when I met Melissa and barely dared to hope that I had found someone I could love that surpassed anything I had known. I fished and fished and fished. When the trout got hit with disease, I fished. And when the flu finally took her in an Elks Hall converted to a hospital and crammed with the cots of the dying not five hundred yards from our house, I fished.
>
> I was not allowed to bury her. She was incinerated with the rest. I fished. In the increasing chaos of dwindling supplies and longer gas lines and riots, I fished. (Heller 58)

The anaphora of "I fished" demonstrates not only that Hig fished before the pandemic outbreak, while it was occurring, and well after it had ended, but demonstrates the way that this recreational activity became a coping mechanism for him. Since Hig is never fishing for sustenance, this activity is purely recreational, which means that in his post-apocalyptic present, it represents an attempt to reconstruct the elements of his old life that once brought him joy and comfort. And in these moments where Hig was fishing, he "could almost imagine that it was still before when [they] were young and many things still lived" (Heller 57). Although it pertains to individual, rather than collective, memory, fishing in *The Dog Stars* can thus also be considered a representation of restorative nostalgia, at least on a personal level, because it serves no other purpose than to rebuild the world of the past— it is a "reestablishment of stasis" (Boym 49).

As a result, it is only the good moments of the past that surface, side by side with their inadequate recreations in the present. The space of "remembered utopia" always functions as a "reconstruction of the past" that draws on cultural memory work (Levitas 20). In other words, the world is reduced to an incomplete vision of the past within the minds of the current population. And building from Jameson's idea that the past can be reconstructed "in such a way that 'reality' disappears without a trace," nostalgia flourishes in a collective remembering of the past—our present (156).

Degenerate Utopian Nostalgia in *The Dog Stars*

Similar to *Station Eleven*, *The Dog Stars* also glorifies the concept of air travel, partially because it is one of the only functional methods of long-distance transportation left, but also because Hig enjoys the sensation of flying—flight is built into the novel at both the level of plot and theme. The aerial perspective reinforces the novel's sense of place, reminding readers of the vastness of the landscape and the insignificance of human life in the grand scheme of things. Each day, Hig flies "patrols from the air" in order to "secure the perimeter" of his base (Heller 14). Flying, Hig describes, is something he had been meant to do "all [his] life," exhilarated by the sensations of "unbounded freedom" and the "soaring spirit" (Heller 49) that comes from seeing "the vertical map" (Marin 267):

> The way the earth below resolves. The way the landscape falls into place around the drainages, the capillaries and arteries of falling water: mountain slopes bunched and wrinkled, wringing themselves into the furrows of couloir and creek, draw and chasm, the low places defining the spurs and ridges and foothills the way creases define he planes of a face, lower down the canyon cuts, and then the swales and valleys of the slopes, the sinuous rivers and the dry beds where water used to run seeming to hold the hills and the waves of the high plains all together and now the other way around. The way the settlements sprawl and then congregate at these rivers and mass at every confluence. (Heller 49)

And yet, the press reported that the "mutation of a superbug" had come from New Delhi and into London, where the first cases were noted (Heller 253). The alternative rumour surrounding the initial spread of the virus was that it came in on "a simple trans-shipment," "a courier on a military flight," taking a sample of the virus to England when "the plane crashed in Brampton" (Heller 253). Either way, the initial spread of the virus is intimately tied to air travel's ability to connect distant places in short periods of time. Though the novel remains ambivalent about air travel, the virus itself allegorizes the dangers of modernity, pointing to the fact that the novel's real past has been idealized through the collective memories of the survivors.

Despite the destructive attributes associated with flight, airplanes are frequently referenced as a symbol of the lost world that exposes the vast technological divide between the past and the present. In both novels, it becomes apparent that there is an ongoing cultural forgetting that characterizes the depiction of airplanes as being entirely positive elements of a functional modern society. Unlike *Station Eleven*, in *The Dog Stars*, air travel still exists, but only in a limited capacity, travelling short distances and lasting perhaps only another ten years after “the additive . . . no longer keep[s] the fuel fresh enough” (Heller 10). In the novel’s present, it appears that Hig’s plane is “the only plane” still flying, but he is hopeful that “maybe on another planet in another universe they will again invent the Cessna,” meaning that he hopes air travel will again be possible (Heller 28). Towards the end of the novel, Hig sees “two vapor trails” and hears the “distant doppler of receding engines” (Heller 318). On the radio, the pilots can be heard having a conversation in Arabic, implying that they had perhaps come from overseas, marking the return to international air travel and with it, the global world image, something that was not initially thought possible but continuously longed for anyway. Cognitive maps are thus brought back into play, reconstructing a lost world image, in which all geographies are interconnected, thus marking the potential for an eventual return to “the age of globalization” and perhaps to the conditions that enabled the apocalypse in the first place (Tally 60).

Remembering the Present: The Role of Fictional Nostalgia

Both Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven* and Peter Heller’s *The Dog Stars* are post-apocalyptic novels that work to defamiliarize the reader’s present and represent it as a recent pre-pandemic past. Because of the minimal physical damage caused by the outbreaks in the texts, these fictionalized versions of our future Earth are rapt with sentiments of “loss, absence, and trauma” for the world that has been destroyed (Benczik 33). By meditating on the pre-apocalyptic past, these texts demonstrate the various ways that nostalgia can form after crisis. Readers are thus urged to reflect on a “past that is not yet past” (Benczik 33), thus spurring an illusory sense of longing for the world of their present. This fictional imagined nostalgia for a past that actually takes place in our own present plays upon a common sense of ambivalence about our global network society and the unfettered technological advancements of late capitalism, demonstrating both the beauty and the dangers of modernity.

Reflective nostalgia dwells in the ambivalences of the past, acknowledging both the positive and negative elements of the that which has been lost. In post-apocalyptic fiction, the world of the past is, of course, remembered positively because, for the most part, the infrastructure that enabled health, safety, and comfort no longer exists. Nonetheless, the past is not viewed as perfect, which demonstrates that "longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another" (Boym 49). In these cases, the tendency for survivors to affectively remember and mourn the world that they lost does not "absolve [them] from compassion, judgement[,] or critical thinking" (Boym 49). These novels demonstrate the fact that under these circumstances, it is entirely possible to be both "homesick and sick of home" all at once (Boym 50). Survivors can simultaneously mourn the loss of modern conveniences, like television, the internet, cell phones, institutionalized healthcare, and transportation technologies, while also acknowledging that these elements from their past were never readily available, or accessible to all. With this inequality in mind, survivors are better able to develop plans for a future that does not emulate their past exactly as it was.

For example, Hig meeting Cima also presents an opportunity for restoration. After his wife died, Hig did not seek out romantic or sexual partnership, and had instead focused primarily on his immediate survival. In the years after the outbreak, "Bangley had become his family"—he was always "returning home him," rather than a wife, child, or mother (Heller 300). Cima, however, awakened something in Hig that had "been hibernating in the canyon" and forced it out "into the sunlight" (309). Together, Hig, Bangley, Cima, and her father settle in a series of houses next to one another, beginning to form a more traditional community, focused on leisure and labour, rather than merely surviving. Hig would work in the garden, "squashing potato bugs between [his] fingers," while Bingley and Pops would sit "on the porch of [his] house in the creaking chairs" and play chess (319). While Hig gains a family, it is not as it was before. This family is not a one-to-one replacement for the connections he lost, but rather an opportunity to move forward. The novel thus resolves with the reaffirmation of the human capacity to seek out love and connection even amidst times of great uncertainty.

By contrast, instead of focusing on the ambivalences of their lost past, restorative nostalgia urges survivors to "return to the original stasis" (Boym 49). The past is thus reduced and represented symbolically to offer those living in the novels' post-pandemic present "a comforting collective script for individual longing" (41). The memories of the individual quickly become intertwined with the memories of the collective, which ultimately results in the tendency to "rebuild the lost home and patch up any memory gaps" (41). History is therefore unified by the development of a cohesive version of the pre-apocalyptic past—all complexity is erased in the attempt to create "a single transhistorical plot" that can encompass the entirety of the survivor's past (43). This form of collective memory attempts to unify the community through the creation of one absolute truth, which ultimately results in an overarching "sense of complicity" in the population (42). In other words, regardless of the perceived productivity of their actions in the present moment, the survivors of the catastrophe just continue to do the same things that they always did, whether that means that they stare at blank television screens, fish in bodies of water that are practically empty, perform Shakespeare and *Star Trek*, or preserve and memorialize objects from the past in an airport hangar turned museum. Consequently, "[r]estorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past" that prevent any sort of future development that is antithetical to "the restoration of [their] origins" (41-42).

Similarly, the perception of the survivors' current situation, in the recent years after the outbreak, as dystopic allows the past to be comprehended as a lost utopian state, which can result in the formation of degenerate utopian nostalgia. This form of nostalgia relies on the survivor's ability to recall only the positive elements of the past, while also forgetting the negatives, thus creating a "symbolic history" that "constitutes the history of the group" through the development of "mythic narrative" (Marin 36-37). This sort of memory successfully "alienates" survivors with a "distorted and fantasmatic representation of daily life" before the outbreak, which then becomes perceived as "the mythic founding narrative for their own society" (240-241). In *Station Eleven* and *The Dog Stars* airplanes become symbols of the technological advancement associated with their lost world, but survivors often forget the risks associated with flight, and globalization more broadly, instead focusing only on the beauty and wonder that is no longer accessible in their present. Survivors are thus driven to recreate the world of the past exactly as it was, which puts them at risk of recreating the same conditions that enabled the apocalypse to occur in the first place.

Selective remembering is partnered with forgetting to create a mythology that idealizes the world of the past. In the process of carefully constructing a utopian world out of just pieces of the past, the population is pushed towards longing for a return to a world that never really existed. As a result, this vision of utopia is not one of, to use Lukacs and Hegel's term, "totality" (qtd. in Tally 61) because it cannot make up the whole of its past, nor become whole in the future. While Jameson's theory regrets the loss of cognitive maps, I argue that in the context of *Station Eleven* and *The Dog Stars*, the cognitive maps of a better world are built in an ideological collective memory, represented merely as degenerate utopias. While returning to a technologically advanced world in which international air travel is again possible is favourable, the complex and multi-faceted nature of technology means that, without the development of new protocols and safety measures, this return also creates the chance that another catastrophic worldwide pandemic outbreak may occur if a virus with a similar transmission and mortality rate to the ones described in these novels develops, which allegorizes the potential risks of uncritical nostalgia. More generally, rebuilding a world to fit the exact measurements of the past without looking for spaces to improve runs the risk of repeating recent history. Hence, apocalypse provides an opportunity to start over by recreating an idealized version of the past and offering a space to dream about building a different, though often degenerately utopian, future.

In some ways, the conclusions of each novel are also representative of this degenerate utopian nostalgia that longs to recreate the past in its entirety. In her article, “The Plague of Utopias,” Elana Gomel argues that “[t]he plot of pestilence is driven toward narrative exhaustion” (409). While other sorts of disasters tend to have a clear beginning and end, those focused on disease outbreaks on a pandemic scale could, in theory, continue ad infinitum (409). Pandemics can be controlled by large portions of the population gaining immunity, either through the development of vaccines and pharmaceutical therapies, or exposure, by “cordon sanitaire,” which refers to the development of protective barriers between individuals, communities, or nations by way of quarantine, and by viral or bacterial mutation that makes it less transmissible, less deadly, or both (Gomel 409). That said, none of these methods is permanent; bacteria and viruses remain idle for long periods of time, which is why “most contagious diseases manifest the pattern of sporadic outbreaks followed by periods of latency” (409). As a result, it seems that “[t]he only intrinsic closure of a pandemic is total extinction” (409).

While “sequentiality presupposes a closure followed by a new beginning,” narratives of plague and pestilence are instead “governed by the logic of repetition,” which Gomel believes defers “any kind of meaningful closure” (409-410). But in these periods of latency, however long, I believe that there are still opportunities for renewal. In the years after the outbreak, even if large amounts of the population have been killed by the pathogen, the opportunity for survival remains (Gomel 411). The conclusions of *Station Eleven* and *The Dog Stars* take place in this period of latency, following the “ambiguous, open ending” that allows for the characters to “hope” for a return to the past to continue after the disaster (Baccolini 520). There is the possibility for a return to the lost world presented in the image of “a town, or a village” far in the distance “whose streets were lit up with electricity” forming the image of “pinpricks of light arranged into a grid” (Mandel 311). This image of electricity signifies the potential for a return to the prior state of society before the collapse. Likewise, when Hig witnesses what he believes to be evidence of the reappearance of international air travel, Heller is perhaps confirming that other parts of the old world may return as well. As a result, the “horizon of hope” that Baccolini describes is manifested quite literally in both novels through the images on the horizon, which demonstrates that a return, or even a partial return, to the world of the past may indeed be possible (521).

While there is the capacity at the end of each novel to redevelop the world exactly as it was before, a reversion to the past will never be reconstructed as utopian because it was not utopian to begin with. Without the means to truly experience utopia, the contradictions inherent in any representation of utopia will expose its flaws. Consequently, it is through the “utopian imagination” that past contradictions within the nostalgic vision of perfection, even ironic ones, can be ignored (Jameson “Progress versus Utopia” 230). Utopia cannot fully be returned to or represented under these circumstances because experiencing the state of what was considered perfect will expose its flaws. Thus, throughout both texts, the survivors' incomplete memories glorify the past; nevertheless, their hope for a return to this degenerate utopian vision is left only as a possibility, and not a hopeful one. The post-apocalyptic environments brought forward by the devastating pandemic outbreaks in *Station Eleven* and *The Dog Stars* prompt a nostalgic longing for an imagined past utopia. The lost world is elevated to perfection in the survivors' minds through a selective remembering of the past. Importantly, however, these worlds are defined by the aftermath, or as Curtis describes it, the moment when "the end becomes a new beginning," (3) one in which the potential for change can be squandered by the belief that a return to the past is the survivors' best option.

Post-apocalyptic fiction enables readers to imagine what it might be like to lose the world that we are currently living in. Novels like Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* and Peter Heller's *The Dog Stars* defamiliarize the real-world present as if it were the recent past to reflect on the inconsistencies—the beauty and the danger—that are inherent to our contemporary socio-political landscape. While the characters in both texts experience different forms of nostalgia, including the reflective, restorative, and degenerate utopian variety, the novels themselves demonstrate a profound ambivalence toward the pre-pandemic world, indicating that they are simultaneously dwelling in the spaces of irony, wonder, humor, and tragedy, which is a form of fictionalized reflective nostalgia in and of itself. Fundamentally, I believe that these sorts of stories encourage readers to recognize the risks and benefits of a fictional return to our present, thus providing us with "ways to think [about] the possibility of real alternatives" (Harvey 156) for the future. So, in order to change the world, we need to understand it as best we can and then create new practices that make sense with regards to contemporary realities. Harvey argues that “it is, of course, the task of critical and reflective thought to understand our condition and to reveal the potentiality for the future imminent in the present” (37). If that is true, then perhaps the function of fictionalized nostalgia is to enable a revaluation of our present to help us better see what we cherish and what we could improve about the world we live in.

CHAPTER III – FRUITFUL RETURNS: THE RECONSTRUCTED, RECLAIMED, AND REPURPOSED PAST

> “Things are always changing. This is just one of the big jumps instead of the little step-by-step changes that are easier to take. People have changed the climate of the world. Now they’re waiting for the old days to come back”
>
> — Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (57)

> “After all, time was history, and history was tradition, and tradition was civilization. If you lost the continuity of time, you lost something that might never be recovered”
>
> — George R. Stewart’s *Earth Abides* (123).

Introduction

“Space,” which refers to both the natural environment and the human constructions within these landscapes, is used and inhabited in culturally specific ways. There is, therefore, an intimate relationship between geographical space and the development of social connections and kinship networks. Contemporary research demonstrates a growing awareness of “the significant role played by space not only within the interpretation of literature but within all aspects of our social and cultural experience of the world” (Pordzik 17). Science fiction, in particular, is an inherently space-conscious genre; according to Kitchin and Kneale, science fiction has “traditionally been about space—outer space, the space of distant planets and imagined landscapes” (xi). But because science fiction “depends on impossibility,” the spaces it focuses on “are unknown and even unknowable” (Kitchin and Kneale 7). Indeed, it is precisely this attention to imagined and hypothetical spaces that enables science fiction to entertain alternatives to our present world.

Even so, despite their reliance on geographical estrangement, many science fiction stories remain focused on the real-world present. Narratives of apocalypse and post-apocalypse are no exception. Dystopian fictions of contemporary popular culture tend to imagine alternative realities to our real-world present, where possibilities of better worlds arise from the destruction of our past. As a result, although they often appear distanced from us in terms of space or time, "science fiction geographies can be very close to home" (Bingham 180). Despite the fact that post-apocalyptic fiction is usually not set in outer space or imaginary worlds, these narratives, like others in the science fiction genre, remain spatially oriented. Particularly, in post-apocalyptic fiction where the physical destruction caused by the disaster is limited, "achingly familiar setting[s]," which are "remarkably, even uncannily intact," are often reconstructed, reclaimed, and repurposed by surviving communities that use knowledge of the past to inform the future (Smith 133). Thus, the apocalypse acts as a catalyst, allowing surviving communities to access new possibilities for social connection, engagement with the natural environment, and the development of shared values.

In George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* and Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, the apocalyptic loss of contemporary technology allows for the reclamation, reconstruction, and redefinition of community and a renewed relationship with the natural environment. Without easily accessible and convenient food sources enabled by modern technology, the characters in these novels are forced to engage with their immediate environment for survival, scavenging for food, hunting, and eventually building communities that rely on agricultural techniques that were prevalent before the Industrial Revolution for survival. Moreover, by focussing on the survivors' reversion to conditions and lifestyles reminiscent of a pre-industrial era, these narratives present catastrophe as an ironically benign present, which forces communities to rely on knowledge that they have inherited from the past and engage more directly with the natural environment where they live, thereby enabling a more sustainable relationship with the natural world. History is thus mobilized with each text as a source of knowledge that can be used by post-apocalyptic communities to survive in their current conditions by enabling a renewed relationship with the land and one another, while also allowing characters to decide what traditions they will maintain and which they will reject as they progress into the future.

Earth Abides was published in 1949 by the American historian, professor, and author George R. Stewart. Though Stewart was a prolific writer, *Earth Abides* is his only science fiction novel. Nonetheless, it remains one of Stewart's most successful and best-remembered works. Since its publication the novel has received several high-profile awards and nominations.[6] Despite the novel's popular legacy, *Earth Abides* has not received much scholarly attention. The research that has been done thus far has been focused mainly on the place of Stewart's novel within the apocalyptic tradition (Bellamy; Hiser; Palmer; Ramirez; Wolfe). Other scholars have noted how *Earth Abides* focuses on the environmental aspects of the apocalypse, significantly the persistence of nature after the demise of human civilization (Polefrone; Otto; Wells; Wright). However, scholars have not yet adequately addressed how pre-industrial history serves as inspiration for rebuilding the world into a survivable environment after the apocalypse.

Though it was released forty-four years after *Earth Abides*, *Parable of the Sower* considers many of the same themes but approaches them from a different perspective and historical vantage point. The novel was published in 1993 by the multi-award-winning American science fiction author Octavia E. Butler. The text is set in a near-future version of our world where society has almost entirely collapsed due to climate change, the uneven distribution of wealth, and corporate greed. *Parable of the Sower's* attention to contemporary social and political issues and their potential outcomes has indeed gained the interest of a broad general readership. In addition, *Parable of the Sower* has also garnered extensive scholarly attention that spans a wide range of topics. Since Butler was an African American woman, writing stories focused primarily on Black characters and their experiences, it is unsurprising that much research has been focused on the novel's discussion of Blackness, the history of slavery (Dubey; Fiskio; Joo; Manuel; Mayer; McCorkle), and Butler's contributions to African American literature, antiracism, and decolonial thought (Alexander; Dubey; Dunning; Fiskio; Hinton; Jones; Lavender; Modestino; Moore; Roue and Apol; Sneed; Stanford; Stewart; Thaler; Valkeakari). Moreover, *Parable of the Sower* clearly fits into the genre of speculative fiction, bridging utopian, dystopian, and post-apocalyptic genres (Andréolle; Baccolini; Barba Guerrero; Brown; Chang; Curtis; De Los Santos; Gainer; Miller; Moylan; Norledge; Shor; Stillman; Tweedy; Wolf-Meyer). However, it is particularly representative of the genre of Afrofuturism, which typically imagines futures where the experiences of Black communities are central to the narrative's structure. Hope and utopian thinking are present in Butler's novel, not merely because it speculates on opportunities for more sustainable and equitable ways of living post-catastrophe (Baccolini; Ertung; Hinojosa; Melzer; Miller; Moylan; Peel; Phillips; Warfield), but also because *Parable of the Sower* presents opportunities for racialized communities to be central in the construction of these futures. While the research on *Parable of the Sower* is indeed extensive and varied, to date scholars have not adequately addressed the way the novel self-consciously appropriates pre-industrial historical memory to build sustainable futures for diverse and historically oppressed peoples.

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[6] In 1951, *Earth Abides* won the inaugural International Fantasy Award in the Fiction category (SFE). In addition to this award, the novel was a Prometheus Hall of Fame Nominee before 2000 (LFS) and was included in *Locus Magazine*'s list of the best science fiction of all time in 1987 and 1998 (Locus Mag).

Both George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* and Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* demonstrate that the world of the past, including its history and knowledge, cannot be shed in its entirety, but it can be rebuilt, reworked, and reclaimed to construct a viable home for the future.

Essentially, the apocalypses of these novels create a situation where survivors feel that there is "nowhere to go but back"—back to the traditions and survival practices of the past, implying the *necessity* for a return (Katerberg 7). Survivors must approach the inequities and challenges of their present by using the traditions and the historical knowledge that has been passed down from their ancestors for generations (7). Unlike novels such as *Station Eleven* and *The Dog Stars*, which feature plots and characters whose primary goal is to rebuild the lost world as it was, *Earth Abides* and *Parable of the Sower* advocate for a return to an earlier historical formation, a community-based pre-industrial past. Accordingly, the survivors depicted in Stewart's and Butler's texts do not rebuild the past exactly as it was but instead "recycle it" in hopes of building something better than before (115). All "hope for the future" is thus dependent on "a critical understanding of the past and a utopian appropriation of inherited traditions" (7). *Earth Abides* and *Parable of the Sower*, therefore, demonstrate how the apocalypse forces survivors to rely on their knowledge of the past to build communities, construct viable homesteads for present and future generations, and enter a renewed relationship with their immediate natural environment, enabling the development of a more sustainable future.

Establishing Home and Community in *Earth Abides*

Earth Abides depicts a version of Earth where a quick-spreading viral disease outbreak has decimated the human population. Tripartite in structure, the novel follows the life of Isherwood Williams, better known as Ish, and focuses primarily on three points in time post-pandemic. The novel opens with Ish, a graduate student at Berkeley who is studying the geographical features of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California and is bitten by a rattlesnake while doing fieldwork. As he is recovering in his isolated cabin, Ish comes down with a severe illness similar to measles, which causes him to cycle in and out of consciousness. When Ish becomes well again, he finds that the local population seems to have been afflicted by the same virus that had incapacitated him; however, unlike him, most of the population has succumbed to their illness. Finding no survivors near his cabin, Ish travels toward his home in Berkeley, California. Along the way, he meets a handful of human survivors and a dog. He names the dog Princess and adopts her as his companion. The two set out on a road trip across the country, travelling to New York City and back, scavenging and meeting small, isolated groups of survivors along the way. When Ish arrives back home, he marries a woman named Emma and begins a homestead where they can raise their children. Over the years, the technology of the pre-pandemic world becomes unusable due to the loss of electricity. Ish and Emma are joined by more survivors, further developing their settlement. Even though much of the infrastructure of the pre-pandemic world is gone, Ish remains committed to teaching his children basic academics. His youngest son, Joey, is inquisitive about the past, and Ish believes that his curious nature is vital to developing a successful future where the survivors' descendants will live by using their knowledge of the natural spaces they inhabit and continue to thrive by focusing on the creative and intellectual elements of community-building.

Stewart's novel, like many other science fiction texts, including *The Dog Stars* and *The Marrow Thieves*, is concerned with philosophical questions that "arise in the story only because the story begins with the downfall of humankind and civilization": "[w]hat makes a community, for instance, or what pre-apocalyptic rules should people still follow?" (Jones). In his discussion of *The Walking Dead*, Clint Jones notes that "[t]he sad reality of an apocalyptic event is that many survivors would be alone and facing overwhelming odds for their own survival." Consequently, by its very nature, the apocalypse tends to force survivors to build connections of necessity rather than choice. However, that does not mean the collectives that are eventually formed are not carefully developed. Indeed, despite the limited number of survivors, it is imperative for the well-being of Ish's future community that he connects with people who believe in a similar vision of what a functional, viable, and sustainable post-apocalyptic world looks like and who are willing to work together to bring that dream into fruition. While it is necessary, in a practical sense, for survivors to connect to and collaborate with others, the novel remains fixated on the development of communities with shared values. Connecting with others who maintain a similar vision of a viable future society thus enables the development of concrete steps that can bring that dream into fruition.

From the beginning of the novel, the narrative is deeply engaged with geography and focuses on travel as a means of finding and building connections with other survivors. Shortly after Ish wakes up from his illness, he drives toward Hutsonville, but on his journey he encounters the deceased corpse of a man in the middle of the road (Stewart 11). In a state of shock, he rushes back to his car and again heads to town to inform a coroner or the police of the fatality. However, when Ish begins searching the town, he cannot find anyone. As a result, his personal mission, though initially focused on reporting the dead body he had found beside the road to the appropriate authorities, quickly becomes refocused on searching the town to find anyone at all.

Though small-scale, this search of the town is described extensively, focusing on the act of travelling from place to place to locate the residents of that community. Ish progresses through the municipality, searching the streets, then the business centre, a small restaurant, the hardware store, the bank, and the bakery. While Ish's search accentuates the emptiness of the town, which, though small, would have been filled with people, Stewart's focus on the physical attributes that constitute the space demonstrates the novel's ongoing concern with the relationship between humanity and the natural and constructed environments that surround us. In essence, the novel's focus on these urban constructions showcases the ways that humanity has historically separated itself from the natural world, rather than integrated and lived in community with the land.

Moreover, Ish journeys across the nation in search of other survivors and in hope of once again returning home. The story, like *The Dog Stars*, is thus "involved with geography" and the symbolic "discourse of the map" from the outset, albeit not from an aerial perspective (Marin 42). As Marlene Goldman argues, many texts in the post-apocalyptic genre make use of a "cartography of ruin" that focuses on the shifted geographies that quickly arise in the wake of catastrophic rupture (26). The novel draws attention to the fact that modern human constructions, which have been built in opposition to the natural world, cannot withstand the forces of nature. As such, human constructions quickly erode and are rendered obsolete:

> *The boundaries, like the fences, drew lines that were hard and uncompromising. They, too, were man-made, abstractions dominating reality. Where you crossed by the highway, on a line, the road surface changed. It was smooth in Delaware, but when you went into Maryland, you felt a change in vibration, and all at once the tires hummed differently . . . The boundaries fade even faster than fences. Imaginary lines need no rust to deface them.* (Stewart 210-211)

In many ways, the estranging features typical of science fiction "can be considered through spatial metaphors" that are concerned with the transgression of borders as well as their "construction, reproduction, and contingency" (Kitchin and Kneale 9). After the apocalypse in *Earth Abides*, borders are exposed as being, at least in part, a social construct. As a result, these imagined boundaries lose their meaning and value, while the physical features of the earth continue to shape how people interact with the natural environment. The erosion of these human-constructed boundaries can ultimately lead to a rethinking of the broader ontological categories of nature and culture. The novel thus posits that in order to build sustainably, humans must work in communion with the natural world rather than against it.

As a result, the new community built in *Earth Abides* differs vastly from the communities that existed in the pre-apocalyptic world. Society thus transforms, while also relying on historical knowledge to rekindle its relationship with the geographic conditions of its locality to ensure the community's continued success (Harvey 53). The surviving population initially relies on foraging as its primary source of sustenance—they "gathered green corn from the weed-grown corn patches," picked "ripe berries and fruit" and "now and then" they "found a head or two of lettuce" or "carrots" (Stewart 64). Eventually, plants that had only survived due to contemporary agricultural technologies died off—"*there was no more wheat*," "*the maize vanished*" and the only plants that flourished were those native to the land (Stewart 269). The regrowth of the local vegetation demonstrates a breakdown of contemporary agrarian culture and the return to the ecological makeup that occurs naturally in the Californian climate.

While many non-native plants cannot thrive without the cultural practices of continuous cultivation, that does not mean that agriculture ceases to exist entirely. Instead, *Earth Abides* indicates the potential for a reversion to a more sustainable system of food production. For instance, in the second year after the outbreak, Ish "planted his first garden" and "as he turned over the dark, moist soil with a spade, he felt a deep satisfaction at being in touch again with primeval things" (Stewart 129). Ish is thus demonstrated as having a new-found connection with the Earth as he labours by hand to grow fruits and vegetables for his family. Stewart's novel emphasizes the fact that in the conditions that follow an apocalyptic event, survivors must begin again, starting anew but not without relying on the traditions that they inherited from their ancestral past, which ultimately shape and influence the future. The practices of the survivors and the ways that they use their homestead and interact with the natural environment are thus revised to accommodate the realities of the new world. In particular, the return to sustainable agricultural practices indicates a reworking of the relationships between nature and culture so that they are symbiotic rather than parasitic. By growing plants that have adapted to survive in the regional ecosystem, the community is able to ensure a plentiful harvest to sustain their families while also improving the natural environment's viability.

Ish's futile initial search of the once-inhabited town ultimately results only in a sense of increasing panic and desperation. Once he arrives at the "little poolroom where he had often stopped to buy a newspaper," he finally begins to piece together what had happened (Stewart 13). Upon picking up a copy of the most recent paper

> The headlines told him what was most essential. The United States from coast to coast was overwhelmed by the attack of some new and unknown disease of unparalleled rapidity of spread, and fatality. Estimates for various cities, admittedly little more than guesses, indicated that between 25 percent and 35 percent of the population had already died. (13)

When Ish learns of the deadly outbreak, he "felt himself growing weak with the cumulative piling up of horror and an overwhelming sense of solitude" (15). After all, in those moments, it appeared to Ish that he was alone, or at least nearly alone, in a world that was perhaps rapidly emptying itself of its human inhabitants.

Many of the businesses that would once have been key features of the town and thus significant spaces for forging interpersonal and community relationships are quickly rendered obsolete by the heavily reduced population. As a result, those like Ish, who had not succumbed to the illness that devastated the population, are left with the task of forging new connections and working in conjunction with the land to ensure their continued survival. Moreover, the effect of encountering this civic infrastructure in the absence of a civic population draws attention to the ways that physical spaces have been co-opted to suit the needs of humanity. Without people to occupy and service these establishments, they serve merely as a reminder of the infrastructures of humanity and the ways people have historically considered themselves separate from the natural world.

Eventually, in his continued search of the town, Ish comes across another survivor, Mr. Barlow, who is clearly intoxicated. Ish is disappointed, in part because the "survivor could have been a beautiful girl, or a fine intelligent man," but also because it was unlikely Mr. Barlow "could last much longer" as he appeared "too far gone for any help" (Stewart 29-30). Ish is therefore devastated that "[o]f all the survivors he might have found" in his extensive search of the town, he had only encountered one whom he believes to be a "poor old drunk" who is "good for nothing more in this world, or any other" (29). Ish's initial reaction to Mr. Barlow indicates an underlying pragmatism in his thinking—he is not interested in connection for the sake of connection, but rather with the purpose of building something new. Disaster, from the beginning of the novel, is thus presented as an opportunity to build a community that aligns with his values. Members must be both willing and able to work together and actively perform the labour necessary to enable this vision to thrive.

Additionally, Ish's meeting with Mr. Barlow demonstrates that in the context of *Earth Abides*, as with many narratives of the apocalypse, the massive loss of life greatly limits the choices individuals have regarding social connections and relationships.

> Of those the Great Disaster had spared, many would fall victim to some trouble from which civilization had previously protected them. With unlimited liquor they would drink themselves to death. There had been . . . murder; almost certainly there had been suicide. Some . . . would be pushed over the line into insanity by the shock and the need of readjustment; such ones would probably not survive long. Some would meet with accident; being alone, they would die. Others would die of disease which no one was left to treat. (Stewart 37)

Here, Ish catalogues the potential outcomes survivors may face, noting that the conditions that arose after the pandemic had subsided would ultimately result in the proliferation of violence, both to oneself (alcoholism, suicide, and insanity) and to others (murder). While these dangers existed before the pandemic, Ish is clearly demarcating a divide between past and present, indicating that the pre-apocalyptic world was an inherently safer place than the world in which he is currently living. As such, even after the pandemic that caused the initial devastation had ended, the population would continue to be reduced, further limiting the possible social connections of those who had survived.

Though Ish does eventually meet other survivors traversing through the small town, these connections are not ones that he intends to nurture. Though his opportunities for developing interpersonal relationships are limited by the scarcity of the surviving population, it is imperative that the connections he makes and maintains are carefully chosen to maximize both his and humanity's chances for survival. To find more people, and thus increase the likelihood of forming valuable connections, Ish begins travelling westward. In its description of the weeks and months that immediately follow the pandemic outbreak, *Earth Abides* closely follows the format of a twentieth-century travel narrative, where the narrator describes his journey through "a world undergoing rapid change" (Burton 4). Often travel narratives are nostalgic, allowing their narrators "to escape from the consequences of modernity" (Burton 5), but here travel offers the opportunity to disconnect from the conditions of the characters' present and build new communities. For Ish, travel is, therefore, necessary to meet other survivors and allow new relationships, and eventually new communities, to form. The Westward focus, similar to *The Dog Stars*, reframes *Earth Abides* as a frontier narrative that re-stages the conquest of the West through Ish's travels. The apocalypse thus creates opportunities for survivors to a pre-Industrialized mode of living occur because the world is rendered into a "new *place* where history will start fresh," and the Western frontier always "dreams of starting over," but not necessarily from scratch (Katerberg 60).

During his time on the road, Ish occasionally encounters small groupings of survivors, and, typically, these alliances are composed not of "a family group, but merely a chance association," connected only by the fact that they had lived while others had not (Stewart 58). The collectives that form are often those of necessity rather than choice. However, Ish maintains a more scrupulous approach to forming relationships. Throughout his journey, Ish "had seen men and women here and there, and no one had ever held him" (Stewart 103). Eventually, however, after traversing the countryside and examining what remains of the post-pandemic world, Ish meets Emma, which he believes is "no mere casual meeting—or passing moment" because he sees in her "all the future" (Stewart 103). They quickly become romantically involved, and their partnership marks the beginning of a series of newfound connections as Ish and Emma build a homestead on San Lupo Drive.

While the novel is certainly interested in the state of the nation, it is also particularly concerned with smaller-scale geographies at the level of community and even the individual household. After Ish feels that he has travelled far enough, he heads back toward San Lupo Drive, realizing “that at least he was enough like all the other survivors to pick out some particular familiar spot and, though he went away, to return to it again like the homing pigeons” (Stewart 81). Ish thus returns to his parents’ family home, redefining it once again as his own as he builds a homestead with his wife and children. Upon returning, Ish “[t]urned into San Lupo Drive” and in “the streetlights and the headlight glare, everything looked just the same as when he had last left it” (Stewart 81). To Ish, this space serves as a familiar beacon that he can return to, despite the catastrophe, and once again call home. Conceptually, the family home represents “a projection and basis of identity, not only of an individual but also of the family” (Pallasmaa 137 qtd. in Fox 202). Both home and family, Lorna Fox argues, “tend to be culturally idealized” as they are connected to ideas of “personal warmth, comfort, stability and security” (203). The fact that this space is where Ish decides to return to is significant because it is not merely a space that is occupied by him and his family, but it also connects him to the generations, and thus the knowledge, that came before. Space is thus consistently represented as being intimately tied to memory and a reimagining of history, away from the nationalistic, techno-scientific, and sociological, and toward a prioritization of the familial, local, and biological. In other words, Stewart’s novel gives precedence to a small-scale, community-based, pre-industrialized mode of living that is dependent on maintaining a sustainable relationship with the land.

After settling on San Lupo, Emma becomes pregnant and gives birth twice in the first few years, and their newly growing family stays “contentedly close at home” (Stewart). During this time, they occasionally “had visits from wanderers who had seen the smoke on San Lupo Drive and headed for it, sometimes in cars, more often on foot” (Stewart 130). These visitors, Ish noticed, all seemed to be “suffering from shock,” even after years had passed since the outbreak occurred (130). Those "who had made a good adjustment must have already settled down," while these neurotic nomads behave as though "they were bees who had lost the hive" or "sheep without a flock" (130). These metaphors demonstrate the similarities between humans and other animals; we, too, are social creatures that survive and thrive best within a community. These disparate groups of wanderers thus represent those who had not dealt well with the post-pandemic years and often had not found family or community to rely on. Though not all animals are social, the novel clearly indicates that human beings are social animals, and that an unsocial existence is perhaps unhuman and definitely unnatural.

When Ish develops a relationship with Emma and their family begins to grow, it marks a significant turning point in the narrative where the focus turns from ensuring the survival of the individual to building a sustainable community. Shortly after the outbreak, Ish, like many other survivors, spends his time on the road, scavenging to meet his basic needs. On a very basic level, this act of travelling without settling anywhere permanently mirrors the nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle that was more common before the agricultural revolution. As such, choosing to settle and develop a permanent home marks a transition away from this migratory state and a step forward in the history of humanity. Though not necessarily true, it is often believed that hunter-gatherers were less developed and ultimately "different from agriculturists in every way, and they constituted the most primitive and simplest element of society" (de Saulieu and Testart 314). Indeed, it is a common misconception that all "prehistoric non-farming societies . . . lacked polished stone, pottery, cultivated plants and permanent houses" (de Saulieu and Testart 314). The novel serves as an allegory of human social development, and for Stewart, it is thus quite likely that the apocalypse represents a social reset where survivors are forced into vagrancy, and as a result, the forming of communal bonds and the subsequent settlement of Ish and Emma demonstrates historical progress.

As the novel advances, the growth of the San Lupo homestead further reinforces the building of social relations and, ultimately, the development of a community, as a necessary step in the historical progress made by the survivors. Acknowledging that there are very few survivors, the small collective is “confronted with a twofold problem,” similar to that which Clint Jones describes in relation to *The Walking Dead*: firstly, “they have to survive,” which means that they must be “working together,” “building trust,” and “setting goals for what survival actually means,” and secondly, they must “organize themselves into a community of some sort.” Community is a central theme in many apocalyptic narratives. Raymond Williams defines the concept of community in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* as a “difficult” (23), yet “warmly persuasive word” that is commonly used to “describe an existing” or “alternative set of relationships” as a positive descriptor of “social organization” (76).

The constitution of novel communities and community connections serves the purpose of defining a “utopian alternative to the existing—and the impending—social conditions” of the period in which the author is writing (Lanzendörfer 41). Significantly, in these narratives of global catastrophe, the ability of survivors to reimagine their community and offer alternatives to the typical “forms of human communal living” hinges on the “collapse of existing society” (Lanzendörfer 42). Essentially, these additions to Ish’s social network enable a small neighbourhood to begin forming. Community building is, according to Jane Donawerth, “a restorative process; society, value, hope must be constantly rebuilt by individuals out of the rubble of the present” (42). Future progress is thus reliant on the ability of survivors to connect with one another and find ways to “build their goals for improvement into the landscapes” and home spaces “they inhabit” after the old world has ended (Kozakavich 11).

Though in the early years of their relationship Ish and Emma are only visited by the occasional vagrant wanderer, Ezra, a “pleasant” man who “had that inexpressibly great gift of making people feel comfortable,” becomes one of the few exceptions, as he arrived in the first year and then “stayed until after the first rains” when he was “jokingly” told “to find himself a pretty girl and then come back and join them” (Stewart 130-131). Though presented in friendly jest, the underlying message demonstrates the belief that members of the community must be willing to commit themselves to the propagation of the human race through both their labour and their willingness and ability to procreate. Though Ish and Emma believed Ezra would not be seen again, he subsequently returns in the fourth year with two wives and two children: “a woman of about thirty-five” named Molly, a “younger woman” named Jean, a “half-grown girl” they called Evie, and “a little boy” named Ralph (132).

Ish is initially taken aback by the polygamous dynamic, but he quickly concludes that “plurality of wives had been an accepted part of many great civilizations in the past and might well be again in the future” (Stewart 133). Ish’s quick acceptance of Ezra’s polygamous relationship demonstrates the redrawing of community values according to his understanding of nature. Indeed, mating systems in the natural world are constructed to maximize the possibilities for reproductive success, which means that many creatures choose multiple partners. Therefore, after the decimation of humanity it is perhaps unsurprising that some survivors have entered relationships that have the potential to increase the speed of repopulation. Part of building community is defining “acceptable conduct” (Kozakavich 65). In accepting alternative relationship structures that diverge from the American ideal of the nuclear family, which Ish is comfortable and familiar with, he acknowledges the ways that social norms had been different in the past and might well be different again in the future while also indicating the potential for a return. Indeed, Ish believes that it is inevitable that "[h]istory repeats itself . . . but always with variations" (Stewart 189). Throughout the novel, knowledge from the world of the past, which then gets passed between generations, becomes a vital tool in developing the world of the future.

Later, in that same year, Ish and Ezra encounter another couple, "George and Maureen," who were deemed to be "good solid people" whom they found "comfortable to have around" and "more a source of strength than weakness" (Stewart 133). While the options for their social group are limited by the negligible total population, Ish and Emma still make choices about who gets invited into their inner circle, thus curating the beginnings of a new community, both in terms of the initial members and the subsequent children that come out of these partnerships. After the apocalypse, the breakdown of social infrastructure results in a reversion to pre-industrial, even pre-agricultural, lifestyles. Consequently, in order to maximize their community's chances of survival and, ultimately, its development, it is imperative that Ish and Emma deliberate carefully when choosing which social connections they foster.

This newfound community is defined not only by its social relations but also by the physical proximity of its members. From the beginning, the concept of returning home is central to Ish's journey. When the pandemic breaks out, Ish is far from home, working on his graduate thesis in the Black Creek Area and living in a small, isolated cabin where he would go weeks without having "exchanged a word with" or even having seen anyone at all (Stewart 5). Despite having made at least minimal connections with locals in nearby towns, including his nearest neighbours, the Johnsons, who own the next ranch over, Ish is not living somewhere that he considers to be home. This disconnect between his place of residence and the concept of home is perhaps unsurprising since when “fewer and fewer people live out their lives in the place where they are born,” the “question of belonging” becomes increasingly urgent (Jackson 1). Michael Jackson notes that definitions of what constitutes “Home” are fraught with ambiguity, as is the “search for what it means to be at home in the world” (Jackson 4). Concepts of home are “not only material and physical, but also conceptual and nostalgic” (Murrani 174). Home extends beyond the physical space for habitation and is constructed through memory and community connections. While a place to settle is necessary, the space of the home does not have to be a singular, fixed, and unchanging place that serves as a permanent landmark we always return to but rather a place that is often temporarily assigned significance. What is more important are the knowledge, history, and stories that are then passed down between generations. However, the usefulness of this intergenerational knowledge is also heavily reliant on the specific geographical conditions of the homeland in which a community resides.

Accordingly, while *Earth Abides* is interested in the ways that apocalyptic events can influence how people relate to landscape and geography at the level of the nation-state, the development of a space to call home is a paramount concern for the well-being of members of the surviving post-pandemic population. As such, the apocalypse creates a landscape of “opportunity where people can escape civilized society and the constraints of the past, start life afresh, and reinvent themselves” (Katerberg 1). To succeed, survivors must reconnect with their natural instincts, including the need to create community connection and develop place attachments that have been corrupted by contemporary industrialized society

The Reclamation of History in *Earth Abides*

The rebuilding of community in *Earth Abides* is informed, in part, by the continuation of history. And while the recovery of history, as with *Station Eleven* and *The Dog Stars,* is often framed by a sense of degenerate utopian nostalgia for the past, in Stewart's novel this recovery is, as Raffaella Baccolini once claimed, "central and necessary for the development of resistance and the maintenance of hope" (116). As such, Ish believes that its continuation is imperative to the well-being of the community. After settling on San Lupo Drive, Emma suggests that the "matter of time" is something that their collective should be paying attention to in order to progress (122). After the disaster, they "don't really know what month it is," and she suggests that they will want to be sure when their child's "birthday comes, so that [they] can celebrate it" (122). Ish immediately criticizes Emma's focus on "the immediate" impact of tracking time as a means of "being able to spot her child's birthday" rather than "all the future of civilization" (122). However, he later considers the significance of this process, and "[t]he more he thought about it, the more fundamental he considered her idea of keeping track of time. After all, time was history, and history was tradition, and tradition was civilization. If you lost the continuity of time, you lost something that might never be recovered" (123). The novel thus valorizes a progressive model of history, which is tied to the notions of civilization that Ish endorses.

In his Massey Lecture, *Time as History*, George Grant claims that "[t]hose who study history are concerned with the occurrences of passed times" while "those who conceive time as history are turned to what will happen in the future" and are ultimately concerned with realizing humanity's potential (16). The past and present, or more simply "what we have done and what we are doing," enables us to "plan our lives," which determines what can be accomplished in the future (Grant 18). For Ish, the passage of time is remembered through historical knowledge, which is communicated between generations, influencing how those alive in the present engage with the world around them and plan for the future. In the post-pandemic years, Ish reflects on the fact that

> Probably [time] had already been lost unless some of the other survivors had been more careful about the matter than he had been. Take the seven-day week, for instance. Even though you were not religious, you had to admit that the seven-day week with its one day of rest was a fine old tradition of mankind. It had been going on for at least five thousand years clear from Babylonian times, and no one knew how much further. Would he ever be able to figure out again just which day was Sunday? (Stewart 123)

To Ish, losing track of time and by extension history, not as a remembrance of events and things past but as a future oriented process, is dangerous to humanity's progress. As such, in reflecting on the potential losses engendered by not keeping track of time after the catastrophe, Ish decides to take on the challenge of determining with "his general knowledge of how much time had elapsed since the catastrophe" and the "fundamentals of astronomy" what "the proper day of the year" was (Stewart 123). And from there, "he could figure back on last year's calendar and perhaps re-establish the day of the week" (Stewart 123).

However, as with even ancient apocalyptic eschatology, there is a "radical break" between the world of the past and that of the future (Goldman 72). Therefore, the "ability to recognize" and confront the "relationships between past and present eras emerges as one of humanity's most crucial tasks" (Goldman 72). As such, it does not make sense to the survivors to continue to track time as if nothing had changed. Emma suggests that instead of starting the year on January 1st as it had been done before, they mark the New Year "when the sun turns north again" at the Winter solstice (Stewart 124). This shift simplifies the calendar as they did not even have to "bother to have months and things like that unless they wanted to, because from the hill they could see the sun setting around the whole arc," and they "could merely date things by the time the sun set in the middle of the Gate, or the time it reached the big hump on the north, or the time it had begun to reach various points along the slope of the mountain" (Stewart 124). The characters in the book, as with the survivors in *Station Eleven*, therefore, acknowledge the importance of temporal continuity while also demonstrating an awareness of the drastic break between the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic worlds. However, in *Earth Abides*, tracking time goes beyond acknowledging the divide between past and present. For Ish and his family, determining the time is impacted by the immediate geographical space in which they are residing, which indicates both a more community-focused view of time and a strengthened relationship with the natural world.

Thus, the years begin again as "Year One," marking the catastrophe's disruption of the past and present and the addition of a new era in humanity's recorded history. The novel mirrors this disruption in its format as well. The structure of Stewart's text is tripartite. Part one is called "World Without End," and focuses on the first year following the initial devastation of the outbreak, followed by an inter-chapter called "Quick Years," which spans twenty years in merely eighteen pages. Part two is called "The Year 22," at which point the community is flourishing, and the young have easily adapted to the deindustrialized world. This section is also followed by another inter-chapter called "Quick Years," which is marked "without time interval" (Stewart 304). The third and final section is called "The Last American," and it focuses on an elderly Ish who realizes that the world of the past is nearly completely gone and the future of humanity rests primarily in the hands of his community's descendants. The pre-apocalyptic past is marked as being distinct from but still connected to the present.

The years take on both numbers that mark how much time has passed since the catastrophe and names that mark important aspects of the year for the collective. For instance, Year One is the Year of the Baby, Year Two is the Year of Ezra, Year Three is the Year of the

Fires, Year Four is the Year of the Coming, Year Five is the Year of the Bulls, and Year Six is the Bad Year. By marking the years in such a way, the novel re-emphasizes the way that narratives of history are synonymous with community experiences. Official history thus converges with personal and community narratives. As such, *Earth Abides* seems to valorize the intimate knowledge a community holds about their environment and ways of being in the world, which is maintained and then passed down through generations to ensure their descendants' continued survival and development.

The differences in how people experience the passage of time can be described as "variations in subjective duration," which can be influenced by the current situation, past experiences, community, or culture, as my discussion of *Moon of the Crusted Snow* and *The Marrow Thieves* in the next chapter indicates (Wentworth 1). The apocalypse causes a rupture in how the community experiences time passing, which is mirrored for the readers through the pacing, especially in terms of the length of the sections. In other words, the effect of the pandemic on the characters' perceptions of time and history is reflected in the format of the text. While time is a "universal feature of narrative," as Mark Curie notes in *About Time*, it is "the topic of only a few" (2). After the outbreak, time seems to move at a relatively normal pace. Readers progressing through the novel in a typical way are moving from beginning to end, and wherever they find themselves within the text is considered to be the narrative present. As such, those engaging with the first section of the novel move at the same pace as the characters. The changes caused by the apocalypse render the world unfamiliar to the characters, which means that they are slowing down and paying more attention to their conditions to ensure their continued survival. However, after the characters move away from nomadism, settle down on San Lupo Drive, and develop a permanent homestead, they gain an increased level of normalcy, and the text transitions into the quick years. Subsequently, the narrative time speeds up, providing only brief summaries of what was considered significant each year. The narrative present becomes “the object of future memory,” which means that the limited knowledge provided to readers is merely what becomes the official history of the community (Currie 5). After this period, time again slows. The Quick Years, framed by the biological life of Ish, represents a period of rupture that clearly demarcates the impact that the pandemic had on survivors, thus representing the vast rift between past and present, placed in a framework of historical continuity.

Historical memory is “necessary to an understanding of oneself and of the past, but also of the present and the future” (Baccolini 118). Indeed, storytelling connects Ish’s people to their own history and sense of identity, and hope for the future relies on “a vital, critical process of memory and knowledge” (Baccolini 122). Moreover, the ways people remember and engage with the world around them are often “conceived spatially” (Jackson 157). That is to say, the knowledge that individuals and communities need to survive is greatly impacted by the environment in which they reside and how they choose to live within that space, whether or not the community is nomadic or permanently settled. When travelling, stories mark “a break in the journey,” a moment where groups can rest and reflect on their experiences thus far (Jackson 157). Each version of the same story may be told differently depending on the place it is told from because “[e]ach place and each telling yields a different view” (Jackson 157). Even when settled, the story may change according to the “weather, seasons, and landscapes” (Jackson 157). Storywork is an essential teaching tool that enables the transfer of history and knowledge between generations; however, it is deeply influenced not just by the historical moment in which a story is told, but also by the location it is told in. The novel thus valorizes a connection to place and the remote past as a means of surviving in their post-apocalyptic present.

Consequently, books also serve as a vital conduit through which a knowledge of history that is vital to the future is maintained. Early in Ish and Emma's relationship, when she has become pregnant for the first time, Ish endeavours to learn more about obstetrics, so he visits the local university library where he believes "the wisdom by which civilization had been built, and could be rebuilt" was stored away (Stewart 121). Significantly, Ish's description of building and rebuilding also demonstrates a belief in a circular historical structure where humanity progresses through a series of developmental stages and is forced to revert to an earlier point in its history. However, much unlike the limited access to history described in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, *Riddley Walker*, or *Oryx and Crake*, Ish is easily able to acquire knowledge from the past that he believes will preserve the future of humanity, so long as there are still "people who could read" and "who knew how to use the books" (Stewart 122). Access to historical knowledge through the preservative function of the library thus ensures that the past offers surviving communities choices about how they intend to live in the world.

Goldman argues that in apocalyptic fiction, "the discourses of art, science, and religion are discursive maps containing allegorical fragments that . . . gesture toward the past" (54). Indeed, early in the post-pandemic period, Ish expresses deep concern about the preservation of knowledge and the potential loss of art, including "[m]usic, literature, and culture," both in terms of classics as well as mass culture such as "mystery stories and those funny [African American] jazz bands that always made [Emma's] ears hurt" (Stewart 122). However, in the decades after the pandemic, the community grows as new generations are born, and Ish develops a new fear as he becomes "worried that The Tribe had not developed artistically but was still living under the shadow of the past, listening to old records on the windup phonographs and looking at old picture books" (Stewart 142).

Stewart's use of the word "tribe" is evocative of the concept of the "Doctrine of Development" wherein it was long believed that "human societies move along a linear course of evolution," progressing from so-called "primitive, savage, and barbarian cultures," such as tribes, and eventually resulting in "feudal and capitalist stages" (Deb 21). Progress has historically been linked to "a series of connected economic stages described as hunting-gathering, pastoral, agricultural and commercial or industrial" (Deb 17). As a result, Ish seems to be rejecting aspects of modernity, while still wanting to engage in the process of social development. Though they had moved beyond the nomadic stages that Ish and many other survivors experienced shortly after the apocalypse, settled, and eventually began tending to livestock and growing edible plants, the San Lupo community is not represented as having progressed into the later stages of human development. In remaining fixated on the past, Ish believes the community has stagnated in a manner that is contrary to his idealized view of historical progress. The novel, though at times conflicted on the balance between a return to the conditions of the pre-industrial past and ensuring the community does not stagnate due to this historical fixation, ultimately presents the romantic hope that we can restart from the collapse of our prior modernity to build social bonds based on something other than capitalism. Ultimately, the community's goal is to find an unalienated social condition that prioritizes sustainable connections to one another and the natural world.

As a student, "Ish had studied enough anthropology to know that any healthy people should have creative outlets," so the community's tendency toward engaging with art from the past rather than creating new art represents stagnation in their development (Stewart 142). In year 11, the growing “fad for woodcarving” amongst the younger generations eases Ish’s concerns as it represents “a breaking with the past and a turning to the future” (142-143). And yet, there is nothing novel about woodcarving; in fact, the art form has been practiced across cultures and geographic divides for millennia, demonstrating the convergent evolution of artistic practices. Therefore, the re-development of woodworking signifies the ways that the future continues to diverge from the past while also being intimately linked to and informed by it. As such, the San Lupo community uses the past as a source of knowledge that informs how it engages with the world. History, for many of the residents, is reduced to instructions on surviving in a pre-industrial world. In allegorizing the “Doctrine of Development,” the novel naturalizes a certain idea of social progression. As a result, the evolution of Ish’s community over the course of generations is represented as a natural progression, rather than one that is forced through attempts to recreate the past exactly as it was before the pandemic.

Consequently, members of the newly built community “live by scavenging the past” for knowledge about how to survive, enabling renewed relationships to form between people and place (Katerberg 142). The narrative is thus primarily concerned “about what kind of human community will be built on the ashes of the preinfection world” (Vint 176). Fundamentally, the reversion to skillsets from humanity’s distant past demonstrates the “return to the primitive” that is required for a community to leave behind the burdens of their recent history (Katerberg 23). Progress thus begins anew as the community takes active steps to reject the individual isolation and disconnection from the natural world that are emblematic of their pre-apocalyptic modernity. The ideal community of survivors can thus be understood as a group of people who are, as Robert V. Hine says, “attempting to establish a new social pattern based upon a vision of the ideal society” and who intend to “embody that vision in experimental form” (qtd. in Kozakavich

9). As a result, Williams presents a utopian desire to start anew and advocates for a reconsideration of small-scale community living that prioritizes sustainable relationships with the natural world.

Establishing Home and Community in *Parable of the Sower*

Both *Earth Abides* and *Parable of the Sower* focus on catastrophe as a means of beginning again, forming novel social relations, and, as a community, using the accumulated knowledges of the pre-apocalyptic past to survive. *Parable of the Sower* is written from the perspective of a young woman named Lauren who lives in a gated community near Los Angeles. This home, despite the increased protection provided by the wall, is not safe. The sanctity and security of Lauren's home at the beginning of the novel are thus always precarious, perpetually threatened by the day when "those desperate, crazy people outside decide to come in" (Butler 55). In fact, due to increasingly riotous behaviour from the world outside, some of the much bigger and much stronger "walled communities" across the state have already been destroyed (Butler 55). Unlike many apocalyptic texts, *Parable of the Sower* opens in a world that has not been decimated in its entirety but is instead in an ongoing process of annihilation—meaning that home, at least for Lauren, has not yet been destroyed. As a result, Butler's novel "works with daily fears and apprehensions" about the future while also dealing with large-scale disasters that have already occurred (Moylan 141).

After a series of small security breaches, which function as warnings of impending disaster, Lauren's home is destroyed, and her family is murdered by arsonists protesting wealth inequality. Inside the walls of her community, "the ground was littered with ash-covered corpses, some burned or half blown apart by automatic weapons fire" and "dried or nearly dried blood had pooled in the street" (Butler 159). Lauren's home is rendered uninhabitable. And while she had always "been desperate to leave," she had expected the home of her past "to still be there" indefinitely—"changed, but surviving"— but this is not the case (Butler 185). By focusing on the ruins of Lauren's community, Butler creates a rift between the world of the past and that of the future, demonstrating the fact that "home is gone," at least in the form it once took, and is ultimately irrecoverable (Butler 180). As a result, any surviving members from the attack "have been forced to start over" and find a new place to build a community (Katerberg 5).

Throughout the first half of the novel, Lauren's "11-household community" faces multiple "intrusions into house or garden" in just a matter of months. As a result "the families," and "individual family members," disintegrate like "a rope, breaking, a single strand at a time" (Butler 117). The apocalyptic disasters that eventually lead Lauren and her companions onto the highway in search of a better life are ultimately what "informs and inspires community building" (Kozakavich 11). In Butler's novel, catastrophe forces many survivors onto the road, temporarily compelling them into what are essentially nomadic lifestyles, which emphasizes the reversion to modes of survival that were more common during earlier periods. In one entry for Earthseed, which is the written belief system Lauren develops, she claims that

> Civilization is to groups what intelligence is to individuals. It is a means of combining the intelligence of many to achieve ongoing group adaptation.
>
> Civilization, like intelligence, may serve well, serve adequately, or fail to serve its adaptive function. When civilization fails to serve, it must disintegrate unless it is acted upon by unifying internal or external forces. (Butler 101)

Like Ish, Lauren seems deeply concerned with the idea of civilization and evinces the belief that modernity has failed humanity. So, instead of trying to fix the problems that plagued her society, it is imperative to replace the structures that enabled the inequities and strife in the first place and instead create new forms of social relationships. Indeed, tinkering with a flawed civilization is inadequate when deeper structural change is required. As such, in Butler's novel small-scale communities, whose members actively seek different ways of being in and engaging with the world as compared to the recent past, are valorized and thus represented as a more viable alternative to contemporary ideas of civilization. Instead of focusing on the wellbeing and development of humanity as a whole, spanning multiple regions, nations, or even continents, *Parable of the Sower* advocates for small, localized groups working with each other and the natural environment toward a shared goal of sustainability and social cohesion.

Similar to *Earth Abides*, *Parable of the Sower* follows the format of a travel narrative for a large portion of its duration. In following the protagonists as they voyage across the nation, both texts are better able to examine "decline and the violence of which advanced civilizations are capable," as the characters' engagement with the environment exposes the fact that their present is, in fact, impermanent and can thus be changed (Burton 5). While this is true of many travel narratives of the twentieth century, the apocalyptic context of *Earth Abides* and *Parable of the Sower* makes this emphasis especially poignant as the texts are directly engaged with geographies marked by devastation and ruin.

Intent on journeying North, Lauren partners with a couple, Harry and Zahra. Though initially this affiliation is created by the mere happenstance that they are all survivors of the catastrophe that befell their community, they quickly become a "pack, the three of" them, with the intention that "if [they're] a good pack, and [they] work together, [they] have a chance" to survive and thrive (Butler 182). Together, the three survivors "might be able to help each other" (Butler 171). As with *Earth Abides*, the relationships and social networks that the characters develop are limited by the circumstances in which they reside; however, their connections remain carefully curated. Lauren's goals are essentially the creation of a communal society, which Johnathan G. Andelson defines as a "full-featured or institutionally complete ongoing social form in which the bonds connecting the members to one another and to the group as a whole are, whatever else they may be based on, based on feelings of fellowship" rather than geographical or familial connections (qtd. Kozakavich 11). By contrast, many desperate people, who have also turned to travelling the highway, are dangerous and not to be trusted: "[n]o matter how pitiful they look, they can steal [people] naked," even the "[l]ittle kids, skinny and big-eyed will make off with all [people's] money, water, and food" (Butler 181). However, the circumstances are "not so bad if people stick together" (Butler 181). As such, it is imperative that Lauren, Harry, and Zahra maintain and build their connections to one another as a means to ensure their continued safety.

The actions the three take in their early days on the road thus serve two functions: survival and the initial stages of community-building. For instance, shortly after their complex is destroyed, Lauren, Harry, and Zahra buy "salt, a small tube of honey, and the cheapest of dried foods—oats, fruit, nuts, bean flour, lentils, plus a little beef" as well as "more water," "water purification tablets," "sun blocker," "stuff for insect bites," "ointment . . . for muscle aches," "toilet paper, tampons, . . . lip balm," "cheap multi-purpose sleepsacks," "a new notebook, two more pens, and an extensive supply of ammunition for the .45" (Butler 174). Though these are just initial rations for the road, ensuring that people have the basic materials they need for survival is essential to creating a viable community. The items signify the daily needs of the three, as well as the personal markers of individual identity. Moreover, on one of the first nights Lauren, Harry, and Zahra spend on the road, they "cleared some ground, dug into the hillside, and made a small fire in the hollow" where they "cooked some of [their] acorn meal with nuts and fruit" and shared a meal together (Butler 180). Stacy Kozakavich argues that in the development of intentional communities, members often prepare and consume meals together. These communal meals are significant to building social connections and validating the ideology of the group.

In *Tourists with Typewriters*, Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan note that the genre of travel writing is "still primarily white" and "male" (qtd. in Burton 8). Notably, Lauren's collective is considerably more diverse, demonstrating a focus on racial, gender, and generational solidarity. Indeed, the "social institutions" of the recent pre-apocalyptic past and the apocalyptic present "were never intended to serve Black, Indigenous, queer, or other marginalized peoples" (Povinelli 112-113). As they continue on their journey, the group slowly grows, consciously choosing to connect primarily with racialized communities. They are initially joined by a family made up of "a black man" named Travis, "a Hispanic-looking woman" named Gloria Natividad, and a six-month-old baby named Domingo "who managed to look a little like both of them" (Butler 203). As a mixed-race couple, they "catch hell" out on the road, but Harry and Zahra feel connected to them because they are also "working on starting a family like that" (Butler 203). The family thus "looked more like potential allies than potential dangers" (Butler 204). These shared experiences of being racialized and engaging in a relationship with a person from a different racial background create the potential for connections between their collectives. Having the family join their collective and, by extension, the beginning of an Earthseed community, Lauren is inspired to "watch people not only to spot those who might be dangerous to [them], but to find those few like Travis and Natividad who would join [them] and be welcome" (Butler 223). The conscious choice to group with those whose experiences mirror their own demonstrates the intention to build communities based on solidarity and acknowledgment of shared experiences of oppression. Alone, the individuals or small family groups are at higher risk of being robbed, injured, or killed, in part because of their smaller numbers, but also because of their marginalized identities. As such, they all have a higher level of investment in maintaining the well-being of the collective because it helps to guarantee their safety, and even when the racial and cultural backgrounds are not the same, the shared experiences of oppression create a sense of unity and fellowship.

Later, the group meets “a handsome old” African-American man named Bankole who, like them, “had the sense not to go scavenging in the little community” where a home had ignited during an earthquake (Butler 229). Shortly after, he joins them in rescuing two young women named Allie and Jill, who have taken shelter in an abandoned building and become trapped during the earthquake. Though Lauren is clear that they “don’t owe” the group “anything” for having rescued them, she informs the women that they “risked [themselves]” on their behalf, and so if they “travel with” their group “and there’s trouble” they must “stand by” and “stand with” the collective, thus defining the most basic expectations of those who join them (Butler 238). The next pair who join the collective is a “thief-beggar-whore” named Emery and her nine-year-old child Tori, both of whom were “used to being beaten, kicked,” and “knocked around” and had been found starving (Butler 285). Tori then locates “two more companions”: “Grayson Mora” and his eight-year-old “daughter Doe,” whom she “became friends with” while “walking along” and “going the same way” (Butler 290). The group also picks up Justin, a three-year-old boy whose mother is killed in an attack and adopts him into the growing Earthseed community. The shared experiences of oppression provide these travellers “with a basis from which they can identify with one another, develop trust and loyalty, and collectively attempt to remedy what may be wrong” with the world around them (Louette 8).

While the lived experiences and backgrounds of these characters are not the same, they are each vulnerable to attack due to their race, gender, or age. As a result, each member has reason to join, protect, and serve the needs of the collective because it helps to guarantee their own safety. Although communities benefit from people who bring a variety of skills, on the road the sheer strength in numbers is almost equally as valuable. For the most part, though the children raise the risk of attack, adding more members increases the group's safety as they travel— "[t]hree is the smallest comfortable number," but it is ideal to have at least "three" more "ready for trouble" in order to "stop opportunists" who "prey on old people, lone women, or women with young kids, handicapped people" and small groups (Butler 202). As a newly forming community, they begin with the collective agreement that they "don't kill unless someone threatens" them, "don't eat human flesh," "fight together against enemies," "help out" if one group member is "in need," and "don't steal from one another, ever" (Butler 301). As with most communities, members have to conform to what is considered acceptable within their institution, and these principles serve as the beginning of a set of "explicit ideals and policies" that govern their conduct—a social contract, of sorts (Kozakavich 60).

In dystopian fiction, it is typical for new communities to "draw on political, social, or religious ideals for inspiration" (Katerberg 7). Thus, it is significant that Lauren is writing *Earthseed: The Books of the Living* in her journal throughout their journey. The novel follows an epistolary format, with Lauren chronicling her experiences as though she were writing a diary. The plot is thus tracked through Lauren's entries, which impacts the reader's perception of narrative time because the events will have already occurred and been recorded in the novel, which means that we are never in the narrative present. The tale of the characters' journey on the road and development of a homestead is thus presented through the protagonist's perspective, which essentially constitutes their recent history and relays how their community came to be to future generations. As with *Earth Abides*, official history thus begins to converge with personal and community narratives.

Moreover, each chapter begins with an Earthseed verse, which means that Lauren's journal is essentially the earliest copy of a religious and historical document. These epigraphs, which summarize the essence of the Earthseed belief system, encourage followers to embrace the uncertainty of a changing world and take control of their futures amid the chaos of their current social, environmental, and political conditions. Framing the journal entries with these epigraphs allows readers to see the development of Lauren's belief system, while also being interpreted within this spiritual process as they progress through the text. The religious nature of the community's journey is especially significant because "religion, by definition, tends to be organized as a memory-oriented institutional, normative and behavioural social phenomenon" (Agadjanian 29). Lauren's writing is thus representative of an organized religion in its earliest form. These practices, over time, often become embedded in the secular traditions of a community and thus become a key element in its history. These entries, used in conjunction with other historical knowledge about pre-industrial living, serve as an inherited knowledge-base for the community to rely on as they develop their homestead. The apocalypse, therefore, enables and encourages a resetting of history in which survivors are forced to rely on past knowledge to redevelop novel communities.

Begun as a means of "looking for God," Earthseed is the culmination of Lauren's extensive analysis of her own thoughts, in partnership with "everything [she] could read, hear, see, all the history [she] could learn" (Butler 217). Early in the novel, in 2024, Lauren notes that approximately "three years ago, [her] father's God stopped being [her] God," and his "church stopped being [her] church" (7). The Christian God, in his eternity and omniscience, is presented in direct opposition to the shifting dynamics of their present world. By maintaining the same religious systems, people are also urged to maintain other systems that are no longer functional, resulting in social stagnation at the expense of society's most vulnerable populations. As such, her "God has another name" (7), and, in fact, the belief system she produces does not seem to worship anything that could be considered a God because it is, in Lauren's view, "not a person or an intelligence or even a thing" (217). Change, which is essentially just "an idea" or "a truth," is the underlying force behind Earthseed (217). From Lauren's perspective, change is the only thing that is constant; "everything changes in some way—size, position, composition, frequency, velocity, thinking . . . every living thing, every bit of matter, all the energy in the universe" (Butler 218). This concept of change, which Lauren's belief system hinges on, speaks to the broader question of what may constitute 'progress' in a post-apocalyptic future. If we recognize that change is inevitable, the destruction of the past can be considered a step toward developing something new. Moreover, this belief system encourages people to accept the conditions of the present and inspires populations to develop something new or rework the old to build a future that meets the needs of the current community.

Upon learning about Earthseed, Travis criticizes the belief system and claims that her "God doesn't care about [her] at all," but Lauren believes that this lack of divine concern gives people "[a]ll the more reason to care about [themselves] and others," and to "create Earthseed communities and shape God together" (Butler 221). As she is considering the potential of adding more members to their collective, Lauren begins contemplating the logistics of growing Earthseed into a fully-fledged community, noting that

> We'll have to be very careful how we allow our needs to shape us. But we must have arable land, a dependable water supply, and enough freedom from attack to establish ourselves and grow.
>
> It might be possible to find such an isolated place along the coast, and make a deal with inhabitants. If there were a few more of us, and if we were better armed, we might provide security in exchange for living room. We might also provide education plus reading and writing services to adult illiterates. There might be a market for that sort of thing. So many people, children and adults, are illiterate these days . . . We might be able to do it. (Butler 224)

This passage serves as a catalogue of the features that she believes a community should have. The primary focus is related on the elements that are absolutely required for survival, like the ability to grow food, have access to water, and provide safety from attack. Once settled, it is imperative that communal ways of living are prioritized, including a high degree of "resource sharing and economic interdependence" (Kozakavich 12). As such, the final vision of Lauren's project is "settle up north and found a community" (Butler 237) where people can "grow [their] own food, grow [themselves] and [their] neighbours into something brand new": "into Earthseed" (Butler 224). This proposed change represents a reversion to pre-industrial ways of living as a means of meeting the needs of their collective in the current political climate. While the features Lauren lists clearly indicate what elements are required for the community's future success, the mood of the passage remains tentative as many of these features are contingent on the community's ability to find a safe space to settle. In the dangerous conditions of their present, no future is guaranteed.

Both *Earth Abides* and *Parable of the Sower* foreground labour as essential to the formation of community. Indeed, in Butler's novel, to be "good members of an Earthseed Community," those involved must "learn to shape God with forethought, care, and work" to "educate and benefit their community, their families, and themselves," as well as "contribute to the fulfillment of the Destiny," which is defined as developing a "unifying, purposeful life here on Earth" and ensuring a "real heaven . . . that will be theirs to shape," which like *Earth Abides* is representative of a progressive view of history (Butler 261). Notably, Paul Ricoeur argues that the belief system "of any community is the bearer of something which exceeds its own frontiers; it is the bearer of other possible worlds" (qtd. in Katerberg 222). Together, the community is essentially "attempting," as Robert V. Hines says, "to establish a new social pattern based upon a vision of the ideal society," and they have "withdrawn themselves from the community at large to embody that vision in experimental form" (qtd. in Kozakavich 9). Finding a home is, therefore, a crucial task to raise the potential likelihood of the Earthseed community's future success.

Moreover, this intention to settle somewhere permanently also represents further social development, just as it did in *Earth Abides*. The novel demonstrates the way the world of their recent past is destroyed, especially when Lauren, Harry, and Zahra's old community is razed, and their families and friends are killed. In Butler's novel, most settlements lack access to the amenities the population needs to survive and thrive. Moreover, these neighbourhoods are often vandalized and eventually destroyed, which means the population is at high risk of displacement or even death. Consequently, Lauren's intention to search for a new place to live is spurred in part by the living conditions plaguing her community at the beginning of the novel; however, the need to leave is accelerated when the compound is destroyed, and most of its population is killed in the process. Though horrific, the destruction is perhaps unsurprising, as across "L.A. some walled communities bigger and stronger than" Lauren's had been demolished until there was "[n]othing left but ruins, rats, and squatters" (Butler 55).

Before her home was destroyed, Lauren lived in a "tiny, walled fish-bowl community" with her stepmother, siblings, and her father, who worked as a preacher (Butler 12). Across the United States, especially in the South, large portions of the population "can't afford water, food, or shelter," so Lauren and her family, though not well off, are rich by comparison to "squatters and the street poor—and to people who've managed to hold onto their homes, but not pay their utility bills" (Butler 17-18). As a result, Lauren's home, even long before it was destroyed and her family killed, was quickly losing viability. The destruction only accelerated what was inevitable. As such, the protagonists, like many others they meet on the road, have essentially been forced into a nomadic state, representing a reversion to an earlier stage of human development. This regression, however, is not intended to be permanent. Due to forced scarcity, the search for a new place to call home begins long before the formation of their collective, meaning that their migrancy is socially produced.

After weeks of "weary, frightened, and nerve-wracking walking" (Butler 271), the Earthseed community arrives at "Bankole's land in the coastal hills of Humboldt County" on Sunday, September 26th, 2027 (Butler 313). Bankole's "three hundred acres" was bought "years ago as an investment" with the intention of building "a big housing development up there" and "selling" the "land to the developers" (Butler 273). However, when the "project fell through," Bankole would either have to "sell" the land "at a cost" or "keep it" (Butler 273). As such, the land remained in his family's name, and because "it's not convenient to any real road, and it's well away from the big highways," it has remained relatively inaccessible to would-be squatters and is thus "a great place to hide" (Butler 273).

As a result, it is perhaps unsurprising that when they reach the land Bankole's sister used to own in Northern California, Lauren suggests that they should stay because "nothing [they] find farther north will be any better or any safer," which makes it as ideal a spot as any to "build a community" (Butler 319). The landscape is an important element of this social development because the "culturally constructed landscapes of intentional communities were often consciously designed with the belief that a properly shaped environment could mold its inhabitants according to shared social or spiritual goals," essentially building ideology into the physical world of a community (Kozakavich 84). The land, therefore, allows the Earthseed community to develop according to their ideals, promoting sustainable development focused on positive connections with community members and the natural environment.

The Reclamation of History in *Parable of the Sower*

Throughout *Parable of the Sower,* "the continuity between past and present and the vast wealth of knowledge afforded by the past are threatened" by the apocalyptic conditions in which the population is living (Goldman 57). Maintaining a connection with the knowledge of the past is thus presented as imperative to the future success of the novel community. As a result, the apocalypse forces survivors to rely on their knowledge of the past as a means not only to survive, but also to create a more viable future. As Kozakavich states, both "[w]ithin and around intentional communities, the organization of space and the built environment helped to separate members from mainstream society and facilitate internal cohesiveness" (64). And so, while Earthseed is primarily focused on the inevitable nature of change and the constant shifting of the universe, Lauren's project is also deeply informed by practices from the past. The community, "rather than flee or forget the past, or passively accept its legacies as predetermined," focuses on confronting "the problems of their day by drawing on the traditions that they have inherited" (Katerberg 7). Earthseed's "hope for the future" thus "depends on a critical understanding of the past and a utopian appropriation of inherited traditions" (Katerberg 7).

As with *Earth Abides*, books represent a source of knowledge that allows the community to draw on the practices of the past to survive in the present. Lauren prepares clean drinking water for her companions by "salvag[ing] a flat piece of wood from [a] building," going "a few yards closer to the ocean" and digging "until [she] found dampness" (Butler 205). She had learned this method in a "couple books [she] read" that indicated that the ocean "water is supposed to seep up through the sand with most of the salt filtered out" (Butler 205). The water that comes out is "a little brackish, but not bad—drinkable," and it could "be boiled," "have a water purification tablet added to it," or "be strained through sand to get rid of more of the salt" (Butler 206). Without regular access to functional plumbing and water filters, archaic methods such as this are things that the community "ought to know" as they "might save [their] lives someday" (Butler 206). In this context, the past becomes a necessary source of knowledge that will enable their self-sufficiency and, ultimately, their survival.

Since Bankole's land is "good for farming" and though the "area is getting dryer" as the weather becomes "warmer" due to climate change, "the ground water" has remained "dependable so far"; the development of this new homeland also constitutes a renewed relationship with the natural world (Butler 273). While the "solar-powered electric pump near the house did not" work, the "well with an old-fashioned hand pump" did, which meant that the community had access to "a dependable water source" (Butler 318). People in the region tend to engage in "farming," "logging, and just plain isolated living" (Butler 313). The lifestyles, though appearing similar to those of a pre-industrial past, have held up better than more contemporary ways of being in the world.

When they arrived, it was apparent that while a few fields had been cultivated, most of the land is unused. On the homestead, there are already the remains of a partially ruined garden filled with carrots and potatoes that can be salvaged, as well as fields of mature fruit and nut trees. The collective can harvest from the trees that have grown over the last few decades and use their seeds to plant more. Moreover, Lauren intends to use the seeds she had been carrying and collecting from leaving home to plant a garden. Lauren is equipped with "summer stuff," like "corn, peppers, sunflowers, eggplant, melons, beans," and "squash," "winter things," like "peas, carrots, cabbage, broccoli, winter squash, onions, asparagus, herbs," and "several kinds of greens," as well as "tree seeds," like "oak, citrus, peach, pear, nectarine, almond, walnut," and "a few others" (Butler 321-322). These seeds serve as a means to cultivate the earth to provide their community with sustenance and thus build something new that they can call their own.

Not wanting to leave this opportunity behind, Earthseed decides to settle and use their knowledge of the past in order to learn to work the land and ultimately create a viable community for themselves and their descendants. As with *Earth Abides*, the maintenance of the land is "more like gardening than farming," especially when compared to industrial farming practices since it would "have to be done" manually (Butler 321). The population, once settled, focuses primarily on growing their own produce—"composting, watering, weeding, picking worms or slugs or whatever off the crops and killing them one by one," essentially cultivating the earth entirely by hand (Butler 321). And ultimately, through the destruction and eventual relocation and reconstruction of home, the knowledge of the past is reworked to enable the Earthseed community to survive using pre-industrial methods of working the land, which allows the community to rethink how they want to live. Rather than being a template that communities attempt to recreate exactly as it was, history presents post-apocalyptic communities with options for their future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, these narratives about the end of the world promote awareness of the ways geographical and social "conditions are subject to continuous transformation through human action" (Harvey 108). While "[m]ost futuristic narratives and settings reveal that people cannot easily imagine radically new societies evolving progressively out of their own existing one, let alone successfully addressing deep-seated social problems," Stewart and Butler present alternatives where functional communities informed by the pre-industrial past arise out of post-apocalyptic conditions (Katerberg 5). These apocalyptic visions enable an outcome where readers bear witness to the protagonist's survival and the constitution of new communities where society is classless, and humanity lives in harmony with the natural world. There is a disappearance of originals, but characters are encouraged to "restore, rearrange, reassemble, revamp, renovate, revise, recover, [and] redesign" the space of their home and community (Jameson 75). As William H. Katerberg argues, "the retrieval of home and reclamation of place will not restore the past as it was so much as bring something new to it, redeeming what went wrong and continuing an ongoing story into the future" (133). From its origins in ancient religious scripture, much apocalyptic fiction has been focused on a "transformative catastrophe and a subsequent revelation of ultimate truth" (4). Both books present the utopian desire to develop a suitable alternative to society's historical negation of community. As such, *Earth Abides* and *Parable of the Sower* demonstrate that by drawing on pre-industrial knowledge and traditions to reconstruct and reclaim both home and community, the survivors are better able to survive and thrive in post-catastrophe conditions. Therefore, small-scale post-apocalyptic societies have the potential to examine the strengths and weaknesses of their past and, from there, develop better, more sustainable ways of living, where people acknowledge the value of earthly communities and kinship networks.

CHAPTER IV[1] – BEGINNING AT THE END: DECOLONIZING THE FUTURE[2]

"As one society collapses, another is reborn."
—Waubgeshig Rice, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018)

"We've survived this before. We will survive this again" (33).
—Cheri Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves* (2017)

Indigenous Climate Change Fiction: *Moon of the Crusted Snow* and *The Marrow Thieves*

The impact of human-caused climate change is already being felt globally, with devastating wildfires, melting polar ice caps, rising sea levels, mass species extinction, and abnormal weather events, making world annihilation seem more likely than ever before. Given this situation, it is perhaps unsurprising that post-apocalyptic fiction has grown in popularity, with the publication of climate fiction or "cli-fi," as it is popularly known, steadily rising since the turn of the millennium (Whiteley et al. 28). With all of humanity facing this bleak reality, David M. Higgins points toward a distressing trend in which recent science fiction texts

> seem immobilized by a sense of nihilistic futility; even those cynically aware of this sense of futility are often unable to do anything other than simply comment upon it with shrugged shoulders. (69)

As a result, many, though not all, of these contemporary post-apocalyptic novels, like Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, and Russell Hoban's

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[1] An earlier version of this chapter was previously published in *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* in 2020.

[2] I want to acknowledge that this research was conducted at the University of Ottawa, which is situated on unceded Algonquin, Anishinabek territory. The Algonquin people are the traditional guardians of the land, and I want to recognize their longstanding relationship with the territory on which I am writing. As a settler scholar, I honour the fact that the Indigenous peoples of North America have what Helen Hoy terms "epistemic privilege," which means that they have "superior knowledge of their own situation" (8). This chapter will draw primarily on the research of Indigenous scholars to establish a theoretical background, and each will be first introduced by noting their particular nation as a means of recognizing the ongoing relationship between Indigenous peoples, both historically and today, and the region they hail from as well, as the one they currently call home.

Riddley Walker, are ultimately cynical about a politics of change or liberation—often describing a future defined by grim determinism that results in the reinforcement of pre-set structures of oppression as the cycle begins again.

In his 2018 article, “Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene,” Kyle P. Whyte, a Potawatomi scholar, argues that “Indigenous peoples do not always share the same science fiction imaginaries of dystopian or apocalyptic futures when they confront the possibility of climate crisis” because the “hardships many [non-Indigenous] people dread most of the climate crisis are ones that Indigenous peoples have endured already due to different forms of colonialism” (226). In an interview with CBC Books, Anishinaabe author and journalist, Waubgeshig Rice states that the world of his novel is one he is familiar with—it is a “a community that’s dealing with the impact of being displaced and the effects of colonialism,” making this fictional world representative of “a dystopia that’s already here” (Patrick). While some post-apocalyptic narratives depict the end of our current system purely as a disruption of capitalist progress, Rice’s 2018 novel, *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, and Métis author Cherie Dimaline’s 2017 novel, *The Marrow Thieves*, reverse the polarity of those discussions by framing the apocalypse as a politically mobilizing and agency-creating event.

Both novels are highly successful and have wide readerships. In part, the popularity of these books can be associated with the fact that we are living in an era where the teaching of Indigenous history has become pervasive across Canada. But I would also argue that the books’ popularity is due to their successful adoption of the dystopian genre. The genre enables the novels to merge allegory and realism in ways that are less common in so-called literary fiction. Moreover, the formulaic nature of genre fiction makes the texts palatable to a broad audience —

the authors meet the expectations of the audience, while also tapping into Indigenous histories, themes, and concepts that have long been excluded from popular speculative fiction.

Both novels are linear in form, progressing through events chronologically with a clear beginning, middle, and end, while simultaneously focusing on non-linear and distinctly Indigenous modes of perceiving time within the contexts of the narrative. And significantly, Paul Huebener posits that "imaginative literary texts can play an important role in presenting opportunities for rethinking normative temporal structures, and while these works may not necessarily translate into a direct reshaping of modernity, they can indeed contribute to the social awareness of contending temporalities and their conceptual power should not be overlooked" (50). Consequently, by writing in the tradition of the apocalyptic novel, which has remained a popular category of genre fiction in the Western world for decades now, Rice and Dimaline make Indigenous ideas and stories accessible to readers from a variety of backgrounds.

In Rice's novel, settler-Canadian communities struggle to survive unprecedented weather conditions because of their reliance on modern technology. Indigenous communities, despite very often having a similar dependence on contemporary technology and modern conveniences, are represented as being better suited to survive and prosper in a changing world because they have already experienced many apocalyptic events since the colonization of the Americas began. This shared history of disaster has made them more adaptable.

Similarly, in Dimaline's novel, the world has been nearly destroyed by global warming and with this unprecedented damage, illness and despair spread, which result in most people losing the ability to dream. As a result, Indigenous people, who have retained the ability to dream, are hunted and killed for their bone marrow, which seems to be the key to recovering what everyone else has lost. By finding community and not only preserving, but rebuilding, the knowledge of their languages, stories, and traditions, the protagonists ultimately discover the secret to defeating the marrow thieves and ensuring the ongoing survival of their people. Both *Moon of the Crusted Snow* and *The Marrow Thieves* demonstrate that Indigenous peoples and Indigenous communities are already better equipped to survive both despite and because of their histories of colonization. As such, both novels create scenarios in which the traditional knowledge and stories of Indigenous peoples become a tool for *survivance*, a term used by Anishinaabe cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor to describe an active and thriving sense of presence, thus allowing these fictional First-Nations communities to take full advantage of the utopian possibility of beginning again.

Vizenor argues that while "theories of survivance are elusive, obscure, and imprecise by definition," the "nature of survivance" is a distinctive "sense of presence over absence" that permeates throughout a large number of Indigenous "stories, natural reason, remembrance, traditions, and customs" (1). Survivance is thus "organized around decolonizing methodologies and Indigenous self-determination" (Murphy 178). While contemporary speculative fiction, like *Star Wars*, *The Matrix*, and *The Hunger Games*, regularly posits white people as the "ultimate victims" and therefore "ultimate heroes" of their own narrative, texts centered on survivance "often deconstruct victimization and eschew imperial masochism," actively rejecting the victimization of Indigenous populations, both in fiction and in real-life, by suggesting that "they [have] never been defeated" (Higgins 53). Consequently, both novels follow in the convention of "living the Indigenous future" that Lindsay Nixon, an anishinaabe-ne-hiyaw writer and scholar, describes as "the outcome of the intentions, resistance, and survivance of [their] ancestors."

And because many Indigenous peoples and communities have been able to maintain their culture and rebuild elements that were lost due to colonization, we are thus already bearing witness to narratives of Indigenous survivance. In recent decades, there has been a growing body of speculative fiction in which Indigenous authors use the traditions of their own peoples "as guiding principles in imagining possible futures for [themselves] and [their] communities" (L. Nixon). In the context of the demolition and collapse of non-Indigenous society, destruction creates a space for their communities to return to the customs of their ancestors. Similar to many non-Indigenous apocalypse narratives, including George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* and Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, these stories function as a fictional form of wish-fulfillment, where catastrophe creates a space where the world can be rebuilt to meet the desires and needs of the surviving community. Significantly though, Indigenous narratives differ because the apocalypse is not seen as a rupture from the present moment, but rather a continuation of both colonial and settler violence, as well as Indigenous resistance to these oppressive forces, which enables the catastrophe within the novels to act as a catalyst for decolonization.

Indigenous Temporalities

Although Indigenous communities have made great strides toward healing from the trauma of colonization and rekindling their traditional ways of knowing and being within the world, these systems of oppression, erasure, and displacement remain active even now. Consequently, there continues to be a "weakening or loss of confidence in the previous worldview of the culture" (Gross 35). To move forward, Indigenous ways of living should be incorporated into broader society, thus informing contemporary approaches to the economy, governance, education, and ways of being in, as well as understanding, the world at large (Gross 46). One key area of difference between settler and Indigenous worldviews is their respective models of temporality. Huebener claims in his book *Timing Canada* that "[n]ormative structures of time such as clock time, the Gregorian calendar system, and the linear notion of progress" create “an important degree of social coherence” while also forming and bolstering “patterns of social power” (24). Huebener notes that there are “four coexisting chronotopes” in Canadian culture, including “Nation-Based Post-Colonial Time,” which begins when the colonies severed their ties from the colonizing nations, “Diasporic Displacement Time,” which is intimately linked to the cultural trauma of being displaced from one’s homeland, “Indigenous Concentric Time,” which is “shaped like the concentric circles of a tree trunk,” and the most dominant “Isochronic or Imperial time, which underpins the Canadian invader-settler narrative” (29). Although Canadian society is “just as much multitemporal as it is multicultural” (Huebener 24), capitalism and globalization conceive “an image of the world that is *isochronic*, a world in which everything happens at the same time” (Szeman qtd. in Huebener 26). And in settler states this isochronic model of temporality favors a conception of time that tends to be linear, which means that the past, present, and future all occur along one straight line and each event moves chronologically into the next. This linear model of time, which is intimately connected to capitalist conceptions of progress, posits that history occurs in a sequential order with past events ultimately leading to a shared and cohesive present in which we all partake. Though pervasive, this temporal orientation is in fact opposed to many Indigenous ways of “being-in-time” (Rifkin 1).

Significantly, the “imposition of one dominant form of time onto a diverse population fails to recognize the existence of other models of time, and bestows the vision of linearity with tremendous power in shaping value judgements both large and small” (Huebener 32). In fact, in his book, *Beyond Settler Time*, Mark Rifkin claims that this conception of linear time actively contributes to the myth that Indigenous people in North America are “backward and disappearing,” while the rest of the continent is progressing forward (1). Compared to those of the descendants of settlers, Indigenous communities are often seen as static, which ignores the ways that these populations have changed over time, especially in relation to the "effects of settler colonialism" on their traditional "lifeways, choices, and modes of collective self-expression and organization" (Rifkin 6). As Terry Goldie claims in *Fear and Temptation*, Indigenous peoples are consistently viewed as "both historical and ahistorical" because settler narratives present them as merely part of "the development of the country," rather than as active members of the present (48). Essentially, when settler culture represents Indigenous peoples as being remnants of the past, they are effectively erased from the present and relegated to recent history. In other words, in popular discourse Indigenous people are often placed outside of time (Gordon 60). And even when the ongoing existence of Indigenous peoples in the present is acknowledged, it is often done in a way that depicts their presence as being inherently anachronistic. The Indigenous population in North America is seen as a remnant of "the past in the present, as an incongruous artifact who offends the process of natural time" (Goldie 167). The pervasive belief that Indigenous peoples are remnants of the past denies their agency because they are not seen as "agents of contemporary society and the modern world" (Gordon 73). But even when Indigenous peoples are acknowledged as existing and thriving in the present, this recognition does not correct the ongoing violence of settler colonialism and the impacts of the imposition of non-Indigenous temporalities on these communities.

The belief that the "experiences, trajectories, and orientations" of both Indigenous and settler communities occurred within a singular, yet shared history asserts both Indigenous "survival and significance" (Rifkin 8). However, the imposition of this shared temporality also tends to appropriate Indigenous experiences into a settler understanding of time and a "conception of the present whose contours emerge from the ongoing assault on Indigenous sovereignties" (8). As a result, instead of considering time to be the "abstract, homogenous measure of universal movement along a singular axis," I propose that we must consider it in the plural—as temporalities, rather than one singular temporality (2). Considering the possibility that there may be multiple temporalities existing simultaneously allows "varied temporal formations" to emerge with their own patterns and rhythms (2). While settler colonialism in the United States and Canada produced one dominant temporal formation, so too did the many traditions of the Indigenous peoples who resided, and continue to reside, in these nations well before European contact. The imposition of colonial time is in fact a "denial of Indigenous *temporal sovereignty*," which ultimately results in a disconnect from traditional ways of being and "becoming" (2). Temporal orientation impacts the "inclinations, itineraries, and networks" for both individuals and communities, which means that the "experiences, sensations, and possibilities for action" are also affected (2). As a result, the ways in which people interpret and inhabit time structures the way that "the past moves toward the present and future" (Rifkin 2). In other words, conceptions of time impact not only how it is perceived, but also how it functions because this temporal understanding effects people's ways of being within time and influences their actions and engagement with the past and future.

Incorporating Indigenous peoples into one singular present may allow for "temporal recognition," and it also allows modernity and thus contemporary ways of being in the world to become merged with the "processes and legacies of settler coercion" (Rifkin 13). As a result, colonization becomes the "background that orients this unity between" Indigenous and settler cultures (Rifkin 13). By framing the present as a temporal location that Indigenous people can choose to enter by engaging in behaviors that settler culture considers modern, Indigenous people and communities are denied access to their traditions, practices, and beliefs (Rifkin 15).

On the contrary, Lewis R. Gordon notes that Indigenous people today are "connected to ancestral forms of knowledge and cultural formation," while simultaneously being part of the "transformation of those norms in the ongoing human production of culture" (60).

Significantly, there is no singular and cohesive Indigenous temporality. Instead, the "variability" of Indigenous "responses to conquest, choices made when faced with its imperatives and social practices and visions when living under it can be understood as *temporal multiplicity*" (Rifkin 16). Acknowledging the various ways of conceptualizing and experiencing time enables the continued prioritization of "collective forms of becoming and ways of being-in-time that arise out of Indigenous histories, territorialities, and ordinary experiences of peoplehood" (Rifkin 16). The plurality of time does not mean that there are "a successive series of presents, each becoming past in turn"; instead, the "present bears within itself an impetus born from [what has] been" and the various trajectories that come out of it are then "directed toward particular" visions of the future (Rifkin 16-17). New experiences are thus contextualized through "already active sets of tendencies, memories, and histories" that extend "beyond the present and into the future" (Rifkin 28). Indigenous ways of being-in-time allow communities to anticipate the future and act "in ways that reach toward it (consciously or not)," and these behaviors structure "the texture, contours, and dynamism" of their "engagement from the present, such that there is no now that can be treated in isolation from a momentum toward what will be" (Rifkin 28). Indigenous temporalities unite past, present, and future.

Significantly, though, in many Indigenous belief systems there is no clear beginning or end; rather, there is a sense of circularity or concentricity. Wendat scholar Georges Sioui states that

> The Circle is at the centre of our [Indigenous] thinking . . . We believe that the day, the lunar, the year, even human life itself, are circular phenomena, and that there are cycles of many years, representing the circular reality. We also believe that all circular phenomena have four parts, or movements: spring, summer, fall and winter; morning, noon hour, evening and nighttime; infancy, youth, maturity and old age. Also, most things in nature are round, or rounded: the sun, the earth, the moon; the rocks, after prolonged action of the elements; plants, trees, fruits, seeds, vegetables, the bodies of humans and animals, the nests of birds, their eggs—in brief, almost everything is round. (qtd. in Huebener 178).

By drawing attention to roundness in nature, like the seasons, seeds, and even celestial bodies, Sioui’s conception of time presents circularity as being a more natural state of being. In this circular view of time, there is no identifiable beginning, middle, and end because “the entire story is already being enacted” (Huebener 182).

In the case of apocalyptic events, like those associated with colonization, this conception of temporality enables populations to understand the connections between past, present, and future, which provides Indigenous communities with the tools for dealing with similar situations in the present. By identifying “common sets of concrete situations” communities can better consider “potentials for response and agency” by focusing on what can be learned from “memories and stories” of similar experiences (Rifkin 29). Significantly though, colonization is catastrophic and apocalyptic, in part because it imposes linear, historical time on Indigenous populations and ruptures communities’ connections to their traditional knowledge and time sense. As such, while this sense of temporality enables survivance, it must be recuperated, reconstructed, and relearned in the first place. Novels, like those by Rice and Dimaline, thus serve as important didactic tools for readers, who are often exposed to Indigenous chronologies through their engagement with the texts.

In both *Moon of the Crusted Snow* and *The Marrow Thieves*, future action tends to be informed by the histories that were “transmitted within and across generations,” which means that the temporal experience of individuals is shaped by their relationship to the “collective dynamics and histories” of their community (Rifkin 29). While trauma often causes individuals to experience gaps in their memory and a difficulty with putting past, present, and future into any kind of productive relationship because of the fragmentation of experience, Mirianne Hirsch argues that

> the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they ‘remember’ only as the narratives and images with which they grew up. . . are so powerful, so monumental, [that they] constitute memories in their own right. (qtd. in Hand 208)

There is thus ideological and political value in traumatic memory (LaCapra 393). In fact, Dominik LaCapra claims that “a crisis or catastrophe that disorients and may devastate the collectivity or the individual may uncannily become the basis of an origin or renewed origin myth” that operates in “written histories and in collective (or individual memory)” (394). As a result, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* and *The Marrow Thieves* purport the idea that despite their collective trauma Indigenous nations are better able to use their collective history as a means of drawing on the practices and knowledge of their ancestors to survive and thrive in the present and future. This secondary apocalyptic event thus enables a cyclical revival of their traditional temporal positioning and ways of being in the world thus positing the possibility of a decolonial future.

Colonization and Trauma in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*

Apocalypse narratives, in particular, tend to "posit the possibility of an optimistic future" because the "Native apocalypse," as Grace L. Dillon, an Anishinaabe scholar, has termed it in, "has already taken place" (8). In other words, from the perspective of many Indigenous peoples, the apocalyptic rupture present within the texts is just part of a history of ongoing catastrophe. The "tradition of the oppressed," as Walter Benjamin argues, "teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule" (para. VIII). And the continued survival of Indigenous peoples and communities in these conditions emphasizes not only the possibility for them to survive and thrive, but also to push toward a decolonized future. Notwithstanding numerous attempts to eradicate Indigenous culture that came with colonization, the "basic core" of many nations' belief systems and traditions has "survived unaltered despite massive changes in their ways of life" (Washburn and Trigger 106). After "the catastrophic decline in numbers in the period of early European contact," the Indigenous population has only grown since the turn of the century (Washburn and Trigger 112). And yet, the harms done to these nations cannot be overstated. Theodore Fontaine, a member of the Sagkeeng First Nation in Manitoba and a residential school survivor, argues that the effects experienced by survivors of the residential school system and other colonial policies (and their descendants) "are a complex tangle of political, social, cultural, economic, mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual harms" (vii). Despite the last school in Canada closing in 1996, the "[c]ompounding burdens" continue to "take an ever-increasing toll on the health, well-being, and very survival of Indigenous" populations (Fontaine vii).

Lawrence Gross, an Anishinaabe scholar, claims that after an apocalypse occurs, all the surviving members (regardless of race) undergo a prolonged period of intense trauma. For instance, in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, the community had been “forced to settle in this unfamiliar land, distant from their traditional home near the Great Lakes” (Rice 53). As their traditional ways of life were “forbidden, outlawed by the government and shunned by the church,” “their culture withered” under the compounding pressures of colonization (Rice 53). During this time, “the culture suffers personal dysfunctions, the weakening or collapse of social institutions, and a potential crisis in worldview” (Gross 34). Moreover, these impacts tend to last “at least 100 to 150 years” before the culture can recover, which means that the trauma is intergenerational (Gross 34). While there are significant impacts on individuals, it is important to note that the effects of an apocalyptic event like the colonial genocide experienced by Indigenous populations in the Americas greatly impacted communities on the whole. Since the impacts of colonialism are so pervasive, recovery for affected communities is difficult and lengthy. Individuals who were directly affected by organizations of erasure, like residential schools, where the intention was to eradicate Indigenous culture, often experience long-lasting effects “so profound that the stress can ruin people for the rest of their lives” and the resulting “despair and dysfunction” gets “picked up and carried on by subsequent generations” (Gross 35).

But memory, even “traumatic memory” as Dominick LaCapra puts it, “has a crucial role in the formation of individual and collective identities” (391). Glen Coulthard, who is a member of Yellowknives Dene First Nation and a political science scholar, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, who is a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer and artist, argue that it is important for Indigenous peoples to be “confronting the difficulties and tensions that marked these past struggles in order to illuminate the ways in which they *continue to shape [the] present*” (250). Indeed, Indigenous peoples living across North America face ongoing systemic “erasure” of their “land and jurisdiction,” which thus demonstrates the legacy of “four centuries of dispossession” and the continuation of colonial violence that occurs even now (Coulthard and Simpson 249-250). Along with “antiblackness and heteropatriarchy,” “Indigenous dispossession and erasure” continues to “inform the structure of capitalist accumulation and state power” that governs those who reside within these nations (Coulthard and Simpson 250). As such, contemporary Indigenous populations are faced with the arduous task of “rebuilding their worlds after having gone through an apocalypse” and are thus responsible for “constructing the social institutions and cultural expression” for their future generations (Gross 40). Gross acknowledges that while healing from the pain of colonization will be difficult, it also comes with unique opportunities; after all, “[i]t is not very often in human history that a people have a chance to build a new world” (40). And to recover from the post-apocalyptic stress syndrome that afflicts Indigenous communities, there must be a focus on “psychological recovery,” the establishment of “social institutions that incorporate the values” of the nation at hand, and the founding of a new worldview that “remains true to the traditional worldview,” while remaining cognizant of the “current realities” (Gross 45). Rice echoes this sentiment in his novel when community elder, Aileen, responding to the claims that the loss of power and phone signals seems like the end of the world, says,

> Our world isn’t ending. It already ended. It ended when the Zhaagnaash came into our original home down south on that bay and took it from us. That was our world. When the Zhaagnaash cut all the trees and fished all the fish and forced us out of there, that’s when our world ended. They made us come all the way up here. This is not our homeland! But we had to adapt and luckily we already knew how to hunt and live on the land. We learned to live here . . . But then they followed us up here and started taking our children from us! That’s when our world ended again. And it wasn’t the last time . . . But we

> always survived. We're still here. And we'll still be here, even if the power and radios don't come back on and we never see any white people ever again. (149-150)

Here, Aileen demonstrates that even though many Indigenous communities are recovering from "post-apocalypse stress syndrome," they have survived and will continue to survive and thrive despite ongoing encounters with colonial forces (qtd. in G. L. Dillon 9). Reflecting on past traumas while projecting the endurance of this northern Anishinaabe community into the future, Rice actively subverts "the death imaginary ascribed to Indigenous bodies within settler colonial discourse," which essentially "purports that Indigenous peoples must always be disappearing in order to legitimize settler occupation and the Canadian state" (L. Nixon).

While settler Canadians are just beginning to contemplate the extent of the violence and harms that have been done, "for many Indigenous people [it] is a given: Canada committed genocide" (Lafontaine). There continues to be a reluctance toward using the term "genocide" to describe the effects of colonization, but it is important not to minimize the historical and contemporary impacts that settlers have had on Indigenous populations. While many associate genocides with only the most violent and lethal atrocities, the international legal statute set forth by the United Nations makes it clear that the actions do not necessarily have to be murderous, but they must be committed with the "intent to destroy." In 1920 the Canadian deputy superintendent of the department of Indian affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, said that it was imperative that the nation "get rid of the Indian problem" (qtd. in Benvenuto et al. 2). Similarly, Richard Henry Pratt, who was the American superintendent of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, claimed that the intention was to "kill the Indian . . . and save the man" (qtd. in Benvenuto et al. 3). Fannie Lafontaine, the lead drafter of the *National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Supplementary Report* "Legal Analysis on Genocide," argues that “[e]nding the Canadian genocide of Indigenous peoples is a legal obligation” that “requires an active and honest process of decolonization,” but we are unfortunately not there yet.

Indeed, the colonial genocide that took place in Canada and the United States forced Indigenous communities to bear witness to “the end of their respective worlds” and these effects can still be felt to this day (Gross 33). Approximately ninety percent of the Indigenous population residing in the Americas were killed by warfare and the introduction of European diseases (Spry 56). Moreover, slavery, land theft, and mass murder were rife across the continent, and cultures “that had existed for centuries were broken apart, their memories fragmented and scattered like their peoples” (Spry 56). And much of this apocalypse has occurred in the form of what Rob Nixon refers to as “slow violence,” which is to say that the atrocities often happened “gradually and out of sight” (2). The colonization of the Americas is “a violence of delayed destruction” that has been “dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all,” especially from the perspective of settler society (R. Nixon 2).

Gross claims that the experience these nations “suffered and which they continue to endure to this day” was, of course, an apocalypse, but it was one that Indigenous peoples survived, though not unscathed (33). Gross is not the only one to use this terminology; in fact, describing Indigenous populations as being already post-apocalyptic has become almost commonplace (Spry 55). In a 2019 interview with Nick Serpe from *Dissent*, the historian and journalist, Nick Estes, of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe claimed that “Indigenous people are post-apocalyptic” and many communities across the Americas “have undergone several apocalypses.” Significantly though, these are all part of a slow apocalypse that has been drawn out over centuries and generations. Adam Spry, who is a White Earth Anishinaabe scholar, claims that the concept of apocalypse is particularly useful because “it lends a useful sense of enormity to” the Indigenous colonial experience (56).

Unsurprisingly, because the impacts of these apocalypses “linger on and that history of apocalypse continues to be the current-day reality for many” Indigenous people living across the Americas, these communities tend to be afflicted with what Gross has termed “postapocalypse [sic] stress syndrome,” which describes the “resulting personal trauma, social dysfunction, and crisis in worldview” that came out of colonization (33). The imposition of colonial rule on the Americas made it so that pre-contact ways of being in the world “can never be reconstituted as [they] once existed”—“[t]he end of their worlds is final,” which means that no pre-1942 way of being in the world can be reconstituted as it once existed (Gross 34). While this impossibility is perhaps unsurprising because it is unlikely that any pre-1492 way of being in the world could be recreated exactly as it was, it is significant to note that for Indigenous populations the loss of their world was catastrophic. The inability to recreate pre-colonial conditions is often considered to be merely the way history works for settler communities, but it is devastating for Indigenous communities where settler colonialism represents a negative change in their ways of life—it is simultaneously a suppression, interruption, and corruption of Indigenous development.

Storywork, Orality, and Narrative Memory in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*

In Rice’s novel, when the already isolated northern reserve becomes almost completely cut off from the outside world in the midst of an early and unpredictable winter—perhaps the result of a changing climate—it seems as though the apocalypse has befallen the community. Survival, the novel argues, is dependent on oral storytelling and narrative memory, which is developed through “an interconnection between space, memory, and ancestor”—“the building of stories upon each other” (McLeod 170). Traditional Indigenous knowledge systems are “based upon the oral tradition," which is linked to what Diveena S. Marcus, a scholar descended from the Tamalko Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo original peoples in California, terms a "significant territorial 'homeland' region" (440). Oral storytelling is the conduit through which intergenerational knowledge is passed, allowing narrative to map a people's collective "relationship to a specific area" and provide wisdom from "voice and memory within a landscape" (McLeod 171). Place is particularly significant to the text's community, in part because the isolation of Northern Ontario allows the catastrophe to unfold at a much slower pace than it would in an urban center, and also because the novel's Anishinaabe community is one that had been displaced by the forces of colonialism.

Neal McLeod, a scholar of Cree and Swedish descent, identifies the removal of Indigenous groups from their land as a form of "*spatial diaspora*" (172). Using McLeod's theory, I argue that when the Anishinaabe community in Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* were displaced and forced to occupy an unnamed reserve in Northern Ontario far from their traditional homelands, they became part of a spatial diaspora. In his 2001 article, "Coming Home through Stories," which was republished in 2016 in the *Introduction to Indigenous Literary Criticism*, McLeod argues that "the effects of spatial diaspora are devastating upon Indigenous people," because they create a "condition of alienation" that "exists both in [their] hearts . . . and in [their] physical alienation from the land" (174). The enduring relationship of Indigenous peoples to their homelands is fractured by colonial policies (Rifkin 31). Moreover, the "forced displacement" described in Rice's novel became the root of an intergenerational trauma that resulted in "young people . . . committing suicide at horrifying rates" and entire decades where "despairing men had gotten drunk and beaten their partners and children, feeding a cycle of abuse that continued when those kids grew up" (Rice 44). Essentially, by removing the novel's community from their traditional lands, colonialism forced its people to live a “disjointed life,” in which “the discourse and the physical reality surrounding this discourse” of exile “are imposed upon the people thrown into diaspora” (McLeod 174). Indigenous populations were thus removed from their customs, traditional knowledge systems, and timekeeping. As such, this experience of land loss impacted the “temporal dynamics” of the collective, causing these shared “histories of displacement and dispossession” to inform Indigenous experiences and understandings of self in the present (Rifkin 31).

Additionally, the colonial presence attempted to “destroy the collective consciousness” of Indigenous communities, both in the novel and in real-life, by alienating them from their stories and removing their peoples from “the voices and echoes of their ancestors” in what McLeod refers to as “*ideological diaspora*” (172). The culture of the community in *Moon of the Crusted Snow* “withered under the pressure of the incomers’” language and religion as the population was made to “endure forced and often violent assimilation” at the hands of the colonizers (Rice 53). Rice’s fictional Anishinaabe community was thus “forced into a diaspora in two overlapping senses: spatial and ideological” by an ongoing “colonial presence,” essentially placing their people in a “state of exile” in the Canadian nation-state (McLeod 172). But significantly, Rice’s novel follows a tradition of Indigenous storytelling in which the apocalypse “shows the ruptures, the scars, and the trauma in its effort to provide healing” (G. L. Dillon 9). Despite violent attempts to remove the Anishinaabe people and their way of life from existence, this erasure was ultimately unsuccessful because “people like Aileen, her parents, and a few others had kept the old ways alive in secret” by whispering “the stories and the language in each other’s ears” (Rice 53). Séan Hand argues that secrets can be characterized as a form of “self-determination” because they resist “silence and obliteration, by testifying to violence” and abuse, “by honouring and naming the dead" and maintaining cultural practices (214). In other words, within the context of the novel, the safeguarding of Anishinaabe histories is reliant on spoken memories. Under the pressures of colonization, secrets and whispers are thus essential to the survival of Indigenous ways of being within the world. So, in Rice's novel, while Indigenous populations were forced into a state of diaspora, the preservation work performed by community elders ensured that some semblance of an "*ideological home*" was maintained (McLeod 172). And it is exactly this ability to "dwell in the landscape of the familiar, collective memories, as opposed to being in exile," that enables the fictional community to survive what seems to be an unending winter (McLeod 172).

Significantly, the characters in the novel experience a distinctly Indigenous temporality. While *Moon of the Crusted Snow* is formatted chronologically, it is also sectioned in a circular manner (as described by Sioui above) according to the seasons. The novel opens in autumn, with Evan Whitesky hunting bull moose to prepare for the winter months. As a child, Evan's "father had first taught him to identify and follow moose tracks in the deep bush around their reserve when he was five," which enabled him "nearly twenty years later" to track "his own kill to support his young family" (Rice 5). Most years, stocking game for winter allowed Evan's family to avoid relying on "food from the South," which was "expensive and never as good, or as satisfying, as the meat he could bring in himself" (Rice 3). By contrast, in the year the novel is set, this winter preparation is key to the success of Evan's family and the community at large because as soon as the news of the community-wide power outage spreads, people buy out the contents of the local grocery store, leaving only "dry dog food, vinegar, hot sauce, baked beans, . . . salt, baking soda" (Rice 62). And while there is "supposed to be another truck coming in next week," the subsequent storm makes the roads impassable and completely cuts the community off from the world outside (Rice 62). Fortunately, those in the community, who "had grown up in families that believed in teaching their kids how to live on the land and they knew how to hunt, fish, and trap," were able to draw on their traditions to perform "the basics of winter survival" (Rice 78). Accordingly, because of the intergenerational knowledge that had been passed on to Evan by his father, he was better able to sustain his family in comparison to those within the community who had become reliant on shipments from the South.

That said, even though some members of the community do not "spend all summer fishing and all fall hunting to feed [their] family in the winter," the community maintains an emergency supply cache that is distributed amongst the population according to "each home's need" (Rice 113). This sharing demonstrates the capacity that Rice believes small communities have to support one another in times of crisis. On a smaller scale, Evan also functions as a provider for the community at large. Having already caught "three moose, ten geese, more than thirty fish (trout, pickerel, pike), and four rabbits," Evan has "more than enough for his family of four, but he [plans] to give a lot of the meat away" (Rice 6). Sharing is "the community way," and as such he shares "with his parents, his siblings and their families, and his in-laws" and saves "some for others who might run out before winter's end and not be able to afford the expensive ground beef and chicken thighs that were trucked or flown in from the south" (Rice 6). Adherence to traditional social structures thus promotes a system in which the community provides for one another, essentially taking care of those who do not have enough to thrive on their own. And when catastrophe strikes, it is sharing that enables the survival of the population, which is significantly different than the hoarding mentality demonstrated in other novels from the post-apocalyptic genre. For example, in novels like Peter Heller's *The Dog Stars*, the characters live in isolation from one another, and amassing personal resources is essential to their survival.

Community elder Aileen also serves an essential role on the reserve as a repository of traditional knowledge. While Evan shares food and resources within the community, Aileen shares information that becomes key to the survival of the population in a world that has quickly become cut off from the provisions they were once reliant on.

> Often, Aileen shared a teaching or an old story with the young men when they came to visit. Once in a while, someone would bring a group of children or teens to hear some old Nanabush stories or her memories of the old days. There had been no electricity in this community when she was a child and parents sometimes brought the young ones to her to remind them that life was possible without the comforts of modern technology. Now it was critical that they learn how the old ones lived on the land. (Rice 148-149)

In addition to telling stories, Aileen also takes on the responsibility of teaching Evan's partner, Nicole, "about the old medicine ways" in case their community does not "get any new supplies in from the hospital down south" (Rice 147). Years before, Aileen used to "take her and all the young girls" out into the bush to teach them about the medicines that can be made from the naturally occurring vegetation of the region (Rice 147). Now Nicole was "at home, trying to prepare herself for the skills they would need if the power was gone for good while struggling to keep the children occupied" (Rice 147). *Moon of the Crusted Snow* and *The Marrow Thieves*, like many apocalyptic stories including George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* and Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower,* function as a form of wish-fulfilment where catastrophe allows for the world to be rebuilt in a way that meets the desires and needs of the surviving community. In particular, in both Rice and Dimaline's novels, apocalyptic weather creates a space in which it becomes necessary to rekindle the community's longstanding traditions to ensure survival, which in turn enables the apocalypse to be used as a decolonizing force within the structures of these texts.

In Canada, colonialism placed "severe pressures on [Indigenous] culture," but was ultimately unsuccessful because people still "found ways to preserve their identity and their place in the world" (McLeod 181). In particular, "stories and languages led some people back to their identities," essentially allowing them to "find true dignity and integrity in the world" by encouraging a revival of traditional ways of life (McLeod 181). McLeod argues that "stories act as the vehicles of cultural transmission by linking one generation to the next," which enables "the possibility of cultural transmission and of 'coming home' in an ideological sense" (182). Considering the diasporic condition of the novel's Anishinaabe peoples, the ability to find a home within the context of narrative represents the significance of the continuation of stories to Indigenous survivance more broadly. Storywork ultimately reflects the temporal sovereignty that connects Indigenous peoples to their past, present, and future. So, in the wake of yet another apocalypse, storywork is thus essential to the preservation of the community.

For example, the story of Nanabush and the geese, which Evan's father, Dan, tells to two of his grandchildren, Maiingan and Nanghon, demonstrates the way that narrative is used to ensure that knowledge is passed from one generation to the next. In this tale, which is told in English and Ojibway, "Nanabush was getting really hungry" because "he knew winter was coming and that he had to get ready" but was behind in his seasonal preparation because he had been "too busy swimming and eating the berries that come late in the summer" (Rice 170). Nanabush instead played an "evil trick" on thirty geese that were celebrating their upcoming winter migration and killed them while they were dancing (Rice 172). Upon getting home, Nanabush began to cook one of the geese and decided to take a nap, and to "make sure he woke up in time before the goose got burnt, he asked his diiyosh—his bum—to wake him up" (Rice 173). But he did not wake up in time and all his geese that he had caught for winter had burned until there was nothing left. From this story the children learned two lessons: "Don't be greedy" and "always be ready for winter," which interestingly serve as a harmonization of Indigenous survivance and the common trope of apocalyptic survivalism (Rice 174).

In terms of form, the insertion of traditional Anishinaabe stories into the text is also significant. This transcription constitutes a form of orature, which can be understood as written text that is marked by the conventions of verbal discourse, especially regarding songs, folk tales, myths, and legends that would have traditionally been transmitted orally. Orality, traditional storytelling, and spoken history are essential to many Indigenous cultures because they are "crucial in the reconstruction of the past" (LaCapra 284). More importantly, Indigenous experience and testimony is vital to the maintenance of their nations' ways of being within the world, because there are often "no written documents or at least few if any such documents left by the less powerful and the oppressed," so oral forms enable to continuation of their people's histories, traditions, and stories (LaCapra 284). Here, the narrative is interrupted by frequent questions addressed to the children, which emphasizes the conversational and participatory nature of oral storytelling. The grandfather also code switches between English and Ojibway, which is typical behavior for many multilingual speakers. The form of this passage in Rice's novel thus mirrors the standard patterns and tendencies of oral speech. Armand Garnet Ruffo, a member of the Chapleau Fox Lake Cree First Nation, notes that "[p]rior to [European] contact, orature was the primary way in which Native peoples guarded and passed on information about their world and their existence in it" (xxv). By embedding oral stories into what is, for the most part, a traditional Western novel, Rice is simultaneously preserving Indigenous oral culture and making it accessible for readers from a variety of backgrounds.

Typically, orature can be divided into either secular or sacred stories. Those which are sacred, such as the Nanabush tale Rice included in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, present a "world-view in which humankind, the spirit world, and the natural world are integrated into a relationship based on kinship" (Ruffo xxv). Because Nanabush had behaved in a way that was greedy and disrespectful to the geese and their kinship, he was punished. While these lessons are always important, the process of hunting many weeks before the snow falls gains new significance as extreme weather events further isolate their community, cutting them off from any outside food sources that might sustain their population through the colder months. While colonialism caused a "radical separation with the past" that triggered a "disjunction in the daily experience of the people," McLeod states that "every time a story is told, every time one word of an Indigenous language is spoken, [nations] are resisting the destruction of [their] collective memory"— essentially declaring the ongoing existence of Indigenous peoples (181-182). The newest apocalypse which takes place in the novel's temporal present, thus provides Indigenous peoples with an opportunity for reconnection. Moreover, the catastrophe facing Rice's fictional community creates the conditions in which traditional knowledge becomes not merely an expression of and a tool for survival in a radically shifting world. Consequently, Rice's novel is following in one of the dominant traditions of apocalyptic fiction where catastrophe becomes an opportunity to reimagine community in alternative and presumably better ways. The main difference between Rice's novel and stories produced by settler authors is that the future here prioritizes Indigenous ways of knowing and being within the world, which thus allows the apocalypse to function as a decolonizing event.

Despite the work being done to sustain the suddenly isolated community, the population remains threatened by colonial forces. These dangers are embodied in the figure of Justin Scott, a white stranger who seeks refuge up North when the city collapses into chaos, and who acts as an allegorical figure for settler society overall. Rice draws on the figure of the windigo, a "malevolent" monster with an "insatiable appetite for human flesh," to depict Scott's dangerous presence in the community (Smallman 18). Windigo stories traditionally "speak to the nature of being human and the dangers of greed" (Smallman 30). I do not propose that the windigo is a post-colonial figure because to do so would risk assuming "that the starting point for discussion is the advent of Europeans in North America"; nevertheless, it is clear that Rice intended to represent one of the only white characters in the novel as the windigo (King 185). Rice is thus drawing on a common trope in contemporary Indigenous art, present in popular works such as D.D. Moses' play, *Brébeuf's Ghost* (2000), Armand Garnet Ruffo's film, *A Windigo Tale* (2010), and Winona LaDuke and Deborah Cowen's article "Beyond Wiindigo Infrastructure" (2020), where white colonialism is figured as a windigo to demonstrate the cannibalistic nature of the colonial presence. In a dream, Evan sees that the corpses being kept in the garage until spring thaw seem to have "decomposed into nothing" (Rice 187). Behind him,

> A feral odor, like a rotting heap of moose innards, wafted briskly into the garage. A tall, gaunt silhouette stood in the doorway, outlined by the scarlet blizzard behind it. The smell made him gag. The creature hunched forward. The hair on its broad shoulders and long arms blurred the lines of its figure. Its legs appeared disfigured, almost backward. But its large, round head scared him the most. It breathed out another savage rumble.
>
> Evan slowly raised the flashlight, illuminating the figure's pale, heaving emaciated torso under sparse brown body hair. He brought the beam up to its face. It was

> disfigured yet oddly familiar. Scott. His cheeks and lips were pulled tight against his skull. He breathed heavily through his mouth, with long incisors jutting upward and downward from rows of brown teeth. His eyes were blacked out. If it weren't for the large, bald scalp and the long, pointy nose, this monster would have been largely unrecognizable.
>
> The beast Scott lunged forward. (Rice 187)

This scene uses vivid imagery to demonstrate Scott's inherently monstrous and abject nature. Julia Kristeva in her text *Powers of Horror* indicates that the abject "does not respect borders, positions, [or] rules" and thus exists in "[t]he in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). Scott here is described not as a human, but rather a "creature"; a chimera-like figure that is configured on the borders between man and beast (Rice 187). Though he is identifiable because of his bald scalp and nose, he produces a sense of "uncanniness" that exemplifies the fact that he is a "real threat" (Kristeva 4). The uncanny, Sigmund Freud argues, "belongs to all that is terrible—to all that arouses dread and creeping horror"—that which is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar (1). The majority of Scott's features are described as being animalistic—his body is full of thick hair that blurs his silhouette, his legs are "disfigured, almost backward" (Rice 187). Scott is thus familiar in form but still unrecognizable due to these beastly traits that mutilate his human figure. As Kristeva indicates, that which is abject often confronts us with "those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal,*" where the beastly nature of the individual symbolically represents "sex and murder" (13). And here, in Evan's dream, the windigo, in its abject nature, represents both the ongoing threat of violence, murder, and cannibalism that Scott poses to the community, but also the threat that colonialism has posed, and continues to pose, to the survival of Indigenous communities across North America.

Rice uses dreams as a tool throughout *Moon of the Crusted Snow* to provide characters with knowledge and insight into their current situations—essentially demonstrating an Indigenous "model of reality" that can be located in the narrative structure of dreams (Goldman 104). As ominous as it is, Evan's dream is rooted in reality. When bringing Aileen's body to the garage, Evan realizes that the number of corpses has changed from twenty-one to twenty and Scott is the one who has stolen the body to eat—essentially cannibalizing the community's deceased relatives. And because Scott is allegorical of colonialism, it is significant that his main symbolic action is cannibalism, because it demonstrates the predatory and consumptive nature of settler culture, which has long attempted to absorb, replace, and eradicate Indigenous populations. Cannibalism, which is taboo in nearly all cultures, typically suppresses cultural and racial difference by stressing the humanity of the corpse, but in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, the emphasis is on Indigenous people in particular. Because Scott serves as a stand-in for settler-colonialism at large, the text is essentially arguing that these constructs are cannibalizing Indigenous peoples and cultures and pushes back against their consumption.

Scott is eventually shot in the head, which "burst[s] open above his left eye in a spray of blood, bone, and brain" (Rice 203). With this gory ending, the windigo is removed from the community, demonstrating the capacity for Rice's fictional population to escape the ongoing pressures of colonialism, which seeks to devour difference and "maintain cultural hegemony," (not dissimilar from many zombie narratives that have been produced over the last few decades) (McLeod 182). By killing Scott, the narrative functions as a form of wish-fulfilment, imagining a future where colonial oppression and violence can be defeated, and thereby enabling Indigenous peoples and those who are respectful of their communities and customs, like the other settler refugees on the reserve, to live harmoniously.

Decolonial Futures in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*

In many ways, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* follows in the mainstream science fiction tradition and functions in fairly generic ways, so the apocalypse, which Murphy describes as "a dystopian impulse defined by destruction and catastrophe and a utopian impulse that fuels the rebirth of new hope or a new world rising from the ashes"; and yet, Rice's novel fills that structure and set of expectations with different content that prioritizes Indigenous ways of being and knowing (180). Martina Mittag argues that "conventional utopia and apocalypse are complicit in their desire for a better world," meaning that these genres are linked by an optimism that a better world is possible (264). Interestingly, though, utopia, which is one of the characteristic genres of Western modernity, relies on the fundamental modern belief in progress and the capacity of reason to ameliorate undesirable social conditions. By contrast, in the plot of *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, time is characterized in a circular way, which means that, ironically, utopia is being used in a manner that is opposed to Western ideas of progress and is instead imagined as a return to pre-modern or non-modern ways of being. Because narratives of the apocalypse always have the potential to exemplify a sense of hope for the future, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* demonstrates the ways in which the annihilation of one society can ultimately lead to the renascence of another (Murphy 180).

Fictional apocalyptic events "by their very character are understood to destroy functional government, food distribution, organized medical care, and the infrastructure" that allows contemporary society to operate, thus providing an opportunity for the "imaginative" and inherently utopian possibility of beginning again (Curtis 2). In *Moon of the Crusted* Snow, the closest urban centers fall into chaos, while at the same time the reserve maintains some level of normalcy throughout the crisis. Since the people in Gibson, which is identified as the nearest city to the reserve, are not completely self-sufficient, the rush for resources results in pandemonium:

> Then out of the blue someone threw a big rock through one of the [grocery store] windows. It smashed and glass went everywhere. One guy ran up through the crowd and just heaved a garbage can right through the big window . . .
>
> The crowd rushed into the grocery store, elbowing and shoving others out of the way. It looked like some people were getting cut on the glass because there was blood everywhere all of a sudden. Some of them were getting into fights and punching each other. (Rice 82)

This scenario, which occurs within the first couple days of the outage, demonstrates the pattern of events that might happen if a city loses power and communication services for extended periods of time. Without access to resources, the entire urban community falls apart. Rice's novel thus suggests that it is likely that other urban centers facing similar circumstances have fallen into a similar state of chaos. As Spry indicates, the future of Indigenous populations is "also defined by apocalypse—not for them but for their Euro-American tormentors" (56).

In *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, there is indeed a devastating impact on the settler communities (as demonstrated by the chaos in Gibson), but that does not mean that all members of the community are doomed to perish or suffer. The refugees seeking safety on the reserve demonstrate that those of settler descent who respect the Anishinaabe ways of life and are willing to learn about their culture and practices will gain valuable knowledge that enables their survival. The text therefore presents Indigenous ways of knowing as superior in these sorts of fictional apocalyptic survival scenarios, which means that populations that return to, or adopt, the traditional methods of living within the North American landscape, are better able to survive than those who do not.

The conditions imposed on the Anishinaabe community result in an opportunity to thrive as well as survive. The apocalypse, for Indigenous peoples, is not to be understood as “the end of history,” but rather its “resumption,” which emphasizes the circular notion of time that seems to be favoured within Rice’s novel (Spry 57). In the blurb publishing on the front book flap, Rice writes: “as one society collapses, another is reborn.” In the narrative, he is essentially proposing the “idea that a politics based on [I]ndigenous values represents a functional alternative to the perceived instability of” the politics and “social norms” typical of settler societies (Spry 59). And while the collapsing society may refer to settler-occupied urban centers like Gibson, I believe it also refers to the collapse of colonial influence on the Anishinaabe peoples, which allows for a rekindling of their traditional ways of life. In *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, apocalyptic events thus express the potential to reverse the alienating effects of spatial and ideological diaspora. The apocalyptic event thus serves as a trigger for the re-birth of prior forms of knowledge and community, rather than the commonly understood utopian ideal of a rationally planned society beginning from year zero. For these Anishinaabe community members, “[t]he story ends where it begins,” because time does not function as “series of rising actions” that “progress toward a climax,” but instead take “the form of a continuous or circular process such as the weaving of a basket” (Huebener 183).

> Their ancestors were displaced from their original homeland in the South and the white people who forced them here had never intended for them to survive. The collapse of the white man’s modern systems further withered the Anishinaabeg here. But they refused to

> wither completely, and a core of dedicated people had worked tirelessly to create their own settlement away from this town. (Rice 212)

While the storm's disruption initially acts as a hindrance to the well-being of the community at large, the isolation eventually allows for a broad reversion to some of the pre-colonial traditions that had sustained their people for centuries, despite ongoing histories of social change, competition, and war.

The act of coming home through stories is therefore manifested throughout *Moon of the Crusted Snow*. Narrative ensures that traditional knowledge is passed between generations, creating a toolbox for surviving in a world without modern conveniences, where the only way to thrive is by living off the land. But this homecoming is not only expressed in a figurative sense. After Scott is killed, they cannot

> be certain there wouldn't be more visitors. None had come since the arrival of those from the South in those first scary months. But if civilized life remained in the cities and towns around them, the mass migration was likely underway. No one wanted to deal with any more of them. Not now. (Rice 212)

And to avoid dealing with this potential influx of outsiders, Evan and his family decide to attempt a reclamation of their ancestral lands by using the apocalyptic winter as an opportunity to again occupy the space that European settlers had stolen from their people—"they stepped onto the trail, one by one, to begin this new life nestled deep in the heart of Anishinaabe territory" (Rice 213). This process of coming home is "an exercise in cartography, it is trying to locate the place of understanding and culture" (McLeod 183). And while McLeod argues that coming home "is not so much returning to some idealized location," in Rice's novel the population is provided with an opportunity to reclaim the lands that had originally belonged to them (183). Rice's novel thus represents a coming home through stories on a number of levels, both by demonstrating the power of storytelling as a means of maintaining a people, while also being a book that contains traditional stories within its pages, which are then transmitted to a broad audience.

Colonization and Trauma in *The Marrow Thieves*

In Cheri Dimaline's Young Adult novel, *The Marrow Thieves*, the world has been ravaged by the effects of climate change and people have lost the ability to dream, which has in turn caused rising rates of mental illness. The only people who seem to have maintained the ability to dream is the Indigenous population, whose dreams are woven into the marrow of their bones. Consequently, Indigenous people become targets in the ongoing attempt to find a cure for this ongoing dreamlessness. But the process of collecting the marrow and the dreams from these mostly unwilling donors usually results in death. Significantly, the institutions in the novel's present, where bone marrow is harvested from Indigenous captives for settlers to consume, were not set up "brand new"; instead, they "were based on the old residential school system" that colonizers "used to try to break [Indigenous] people to begin with, way back" (Dimaline 5). The novel thus follows a small group of Indigenous protagonists from various communities in their attempts to evade the marrow thieves and reunite and take refuge with their loved ones.

Much like the Northern Anishinaabe community in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, the characters in Dimaline's novel have also been repeatedly displaced from their communities over the course of centuries because of the ongoing impacts of colonization. They are physically alienated from their homelands, and so, can also be understood to be part of what Scott McLeod calls a spatial diaspora (174). The mom of one of the novel's protagonists, French, for instance, tells her children that "there were generations in [their] family where all [they] did was move.

First by choice, then every time the black cars came from town and burned out [their] homes along the roadside" (11). In the dystopian conditions of the novel's present the cars are back again, "[o]nly now, they're white vans," and Indigenous people are forced to run to survive, so the characters are prevented from developing any longstanding connections to the place in which they reside because their homes tend to only be temporary (11).

Significantly, it is not only the Indigenous population who have been forced from their homes. In fact, the damage done by climate change has caused "the whole world itself" to "get sick" (Dimaline 29). There had been "[t]oo much taking for too damn long" and the Earth "finally broke" and "she went out like a wild horse, bucking off as much as she could before lying down" (85). Anthropogenic climate change caused the North to melt, which "meant the water levels rose and the weather changed" (87). In many places the weather became violent: "building tsunamis, spinning tornados, crumbling earthquakes, and the shapes of countries were changed forever, whole coasts breaking off like crust" (87). When the heavy "rains started and the lands shifted so that some cities fell right into the oceans," people were forced to migrate in order to survive (29).

In *The Marrow Thieves*, the apocalypse mirrors almost all of the most disastrous consequences of colonization—people are displaced, "[d]iseases spread like crazy," and with this "sickness and movement and death, people got sad" (Dimaline 29). But because Indigenous peoples had already experienced these sorts of apocalyptic realities since the arrival of Europeans on their continent, Dimaline (like Rice) depicts them as being better equipped than settler communities to deal with these hardships.

In the novel, "[o]ne of the ways the sadness came out" in settler populations "was when they slept" because they lost the ability to dream (Dimaline 29). Those afflicted "visited their head doctors—psychiatrists—and they took pills to help them sleep when they stopped having the will to lie down at night" (Dimaline 29). By contrast, Indigenous populations maintained their ability to dream. Miig, one of the surviving elders, claims that dreams are "caught in the webs woven" into people's bones, living in their marrow (Dimaline 18). Indigenous people are said to be born with these dreams already existing inside their bodies; their "DNA weaves them into the marrow like spinners," which suggests that there is perhaps a biological difference between races that makes Indigenous populations better able to dream in the context of this narrative (Dimaline 19). But rather than understand this in racial terms, I prefer to read this corporeal capacity as an expression of the population's historical experiences with colonization, which makes them better equipped to deal with the effects of climate change. The "rupturing effects of settler colonial violence (like removal, allotment, and termination)" are made "into part of the affective repertoire through which indigeneity persists as such," regardless of apocalyptic forces like "non-native occupation" and the devastating impacts of anthropogenic climate change (Rifkin 46*).*In particular, the pursuit of Indigenous people's marrow in Dimaline's novel can be read as a continuation of this colonial violence, which is ultimately perpetrated on the bodies of colonial subjects. Though the structure of the novel itself maintains a Western linearity, *The Marrow Thieves* thus demonstrates a distinctly Indigenous temporality where these experiences become perpetually embedded in the ways individuals and communities experience the present. Consequently, this unique way of being in time, which is constantly informed by both the past and future, provides the characters with a toolbox for dealing with their post-apocalyptic present.

While discussions of temporality often "seem to presume a lineage-based model dependent on a heteronormative vision of family," these intergenerational connections can occur across families, communities, and nations (Rifkin 36). In *The Marrow Thieves*, Indigenous survivors who are on the run to ensure their survival come together to form what Dimaline calls a “patchwork family” (151). At the beginning of the novel, there are seven members of their group, “five boys and two girls, not including the Elders” and “not one of [them] were related by blood” and many of them came from different nations (Dimaline 20). For instance, some members are Métis, some identify with their ancestral lands on the East Coast or in White River, some are Cree, some are Anishinaabe, and some come from mixed heritages. Despite their differences, their shared experiences with colonization, both past and present, as well as the will to survive connect them so strongly to their families, their communities, and one another that they would do “anything” and “everything” to save each other if need be (Dimaline 55). After all, this makeshift community is all they have.

In this collective, they “took turns splitting into groups, Hunting and Homestead, switching off every three months” (Dimaline 34). In these groups, the elders Miig and Minerva, imparted their wisdom to the youth—teaching them everything from shelter-building, cooking, foraging, tracking, hunting, and weapon-making. These skills, which Miig compares to a sort-of “apocalyptic Boy Scouts,” ensure the younger generations are provided with the skills to survive in a world where many modern conveniences are no longer accessible (Dimaline 36). By “working separately but together,” the makeshift family can ensure their continued survival while on the run, thus demonstrating the significance of community to ensure the continued existence of the Indigenous population (Dimaline 45). And community extends beyond the group of protagonists on which most of the novel focuses. There is also a council of many nations working to take down the schools that are collecting Indigenous people—they have members who are “Cree from the old prairies territory,” “Anishinaabe from south in America,” “Salish,” and “Haudenosaunee and Migmaw” (Dimaline 169).

Dissimilar from *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, Dimaline's novel is not focused on one particular Indigenous community in a singular location, but rather demonstrates what might be considered a form of inter-Indigenous solidarity. Across the United States and Canada, the way that "groups experience harm will vary"—it can be "physical or structural, historical or ongoing, and experienced by either the individual (directly) or their ancestors (indirectly)" (Starzyk et al. 622). Visible minority groups, in particular, are "more likely to have accessible feelings of collective victimhood, because so much of large scale and day-to-day victimization has centered around ethnic status" (Starzyk et al. 622). As such, individuals who have been victimized by the majority are "more likely to express political solidarity" toward other groups who have shared experiences of discrimination and suffering, as we also saw in *Parable of the Sower* (Starzyk et al. 626). Moreover, this form of "[c]ollectivization is central to resurgent action" because "it moves from individual ideas and actions through families, to the level of community, and so on" (von der Porten et al. 62). Resurgence is thus focused on "Indigenous nationhood in political movements" as well as on the "complex interrelationships between place-based relationships and community-centred practices that reignite everyday acts of renewal and restoration" (von der Porten et al. 62). As such, it is imperative that social movements focused on the rights of Indigenous populations across North America assert the combined goals and experiences of their varied populations, while also recognizing their diversity.

Significantly, the term "Indigenous peoples" refers not to one cohesive group of people, but rather a collective identity that brings together "many unique subgroups with a common experience of oppression" (Neufeld and Schmitt 599). In Canada, there are at least 634 unique First Nations communities that represent "more than 50 distinct cultural groups and 50 unique" languages, as well as the "unique cultures of Métis and Inuit peoples," which are all encompassed in the “extremely diverse minority group” collected under the Indigenous umbrella (Neufeld and Schmitt 601). These “superordinate” collective identities, as Scott Neufeld and Michael Schmitt term them, can serve as “an important resource for marginalized groups in part because they can facilitate the social support necessary to endure oppression,” but also because they can “be a political resource as shared identity is a necessary precursor to collective resistance” (599). The “perceived cultural commonalities” as well as collective trauma of colonization thus creates a space for Indigenous populations living across North America to connect despite their varied experiences (Neufeld and Schmitt 603). By connecting disparate communities who have experienced similar plights, these “coalitions of diverse subgroups” of Indigenous peoples “can increase the collective power of a movement for social change” (Neufeld and Schmitt 599). For these disparate Indigenous groups, “collective identification forms the basis of mutual support and solidarity” while also serving as “a precursor to engaging in collective action” (Neufeld and Schmitt 612). In other words, bringing together diverse social groups with similar experiences of oppression enables populations to support one another in the ongoing struggle for equality.

Superordinate identities can aid “disadvantaged minority groups unite against their oppression by dominant outgroups” (Neufeld and Schmitt 614). When working together, increased solidarity between minority groups can “provide a stronger platform for collective resistance to oppression” (Neufeld and Schmitt 614). Dimaline’s novel thus demonstrates that by working as a collective, Indigenous peoples from across the continent are better equipped to combat the oppressive colonial powers that threaten their communities. As a political fable, the novel is thus advocating for, and demonstrating the power of, solidarity between Indigenous peoples across the Americas, who have a shared history of European invasion and ongoing colonial policies.

Storywork, Orality, and Narrative Memory in *The Marrow Thieves*

Despite the varied identities of the protagonists, *The Marrow Thieves*, like *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, depicts story as one of the tools that enable Indigenous peoples to return, rebuild, relearn, and regroup (Dimaline 24). Story is represented as something that must be remembered, and so it is the storyteller's job to "set the memory in perpetuity" as a means of ensuring that it is possible for the survivors to "make the kinds of changes necessary to really survive" (Dimaline 25). Gross argues that story is one of the most important aspects of Indigenous ways of knowing and being because "[m]yths provide the foundation stories for a given culture by giving structure and meaning to the cosmos" (249). As such, it is imperative that the "sacred stories of a given people remain viable," so that the "religion and culture can also remain functional" (Gross 250). These stories have the power to "direct people's actions" because the "meaning and interpretation of myths can in turn affect the way in which people act," which is why "control of sacred stories is such a crucial element in cultural sovereignty" (Gross 250).

The Marrow Thieves posits that despite the ongoing legacies of dispossession and land loss, "[t]he stories still exist, and testify that [Indigenous] connections to the land live on" while also reaffirming the longstanding relationships between communities and their homelands (Miranda qtd. in Rifkin 35-36). As with *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, McLeod's concept of coming home through stories is also expressed in the novel. Stories offer "a means of understanding how collective histories can be immanent within everyday interaction and perception," thus "generating kinds of continuity and connections across time that do not necessarily require immediate contiguity of experience (either geographic or generational)"

(Rifkin 40). Indigenous storywork "engenders forms of connection that are not necessarily about an unbroken chain of possession or inhabitance" (Rifkin 44). In other words, "receiving stories from people other than one's heteronuclear forebears" can still connect Indigenous peoples across time and space and allow the experiences of older generations to "become part of younger generation's ways of being in the world" (Rifkin 44). As knowledge is transferred between generations, Indigenous people in the present "feel surrounded on both ends—like [they have] a future and a past all bundled up" together (Dimaline 32). The use of orality and traditional storytelling thus serves as conduits through which alternative ways of thinking about time and history are disseminated to the characters in the novels as well as to readers.

In *The Marrow Thieves* language also plays a key role in the ongoing fight for real-world survival. Through colonial policies, like the Canadian residential school system, Indigenous peoples across North America were forced into a state of ideological diaspora because the government and churches tried to separate them from "the voices and echoes of their ancestors" by forcing them to speak the language of the oppressor and punishing and shaming them for speaking their mother tongue (McLeod 172). In *Dancing on our Turtle's Back* Simpson argues that, for Indigenous peoples, "building diverse, nation-culture-based resurgences means significantly reinvesting in [their] own ways of being: regenerating [their] intellectual traditions; articulating our legal systems; language learning; ceremonial and spiritual pursuits" and "creating and using [their] artistic and performance based traditions" like music and song (8). As such, despite the attempts to sever Indigenous people from their history, many worked to preserve their traditions and languages. For instance, when Minerva is captured by the marrow thieves, she

> hummed and drummed out an old song on her flannel thighs throughout it all. But when the wires were fastened to her own neural connectors, that's when she called on her blood memory, her teachings, her ancestors. That's when she brought the whole thing down.
>
> She sang. She sang with volume and pitch and a heartbreaking wail that echoed through her relatives' bones, rattling them in the ground under the school itself. Wave after wave, changing her heartbeat to drum, morphing her singular voice into many, pulling every dream from ger marrow and into her song. And there were words in the language that the conductor couldn't process, words the Cardinals couldn't bear, words the wires couldn't transfer.
>
> As it turns out, every dream Minerva had ever dreamed was in that language. It was her gift, her secret, her plan. She'd collected the dreams like bright beads on a string of nights that wound around her each day, every day until this one. (Dimaline 172-173)

The form of this scene mirrors its meaning. The use of rhyme and repetition creates a sense of song for the reader, forcing them to act as a secondary witness to Minerva's rhythmic act of defiance. By using songs, which were sung in her own language, Cree, Minerva is able to access the power of her dreams. With this power, she causes the wires to spark, the probes to malfunction, the computers to glitch and fail, and ultimately burns School #47E to the ground.

Here Dimaline is drawing attention to Minerva's innate connection to the history of her people. Memory is encoded within her blood and bones, which implies that Indigenous populations will still have access to the knowledge of their ancestors regardless of the attempts at erasure that came with colonization. The knowledge is not individual but rather accesses the combined history of her bloodline. The bodies buried beneath the school serve only to amplify the volume of her song, reemphasizing the link between Indigenous people, past and present, living and dead. It is significant that the actions that Minerva uses to fight back against her captors, including singing, drumming, and the language spoken by her people, were long banned by colonial policies, but significantly that knowledge was not lost and can in fact be drawn upon to combat the oppressive infrastructures that mark the present of *The Marrow Thieves.* History, for the characters in Dimaline's novel, is thus construed as circular in the sense that no singular "moment" in time ever "fades into the past"; each "point along the outside lies at an equal distance from the point of orientation at the center" (Huebener 182). By conceiving of time "as a cyclical vision," the narrative emphasizes "endless recurrence," which enables Minerva to access the knowledge of her people despite ongoing attempts to sever Indigenous communities from their heritage (Huebener 183).

Language reclamation thus represents hope for the defeat of the oppressive colonial system and for the resurgence of Indigenous ways of being. When a language goes extinct, "a different way of conceiving the appropriate relationship between humanity and the remainder of the universe is lost as well" because language embodies the values of the communities in which it is spoken (Moser 3). Knowing the power that language has against the oppressive colonial system inspires the survivors to begin "piecing together the few words and images each of [them] carried" (Dimaline 214). The survivors at the camp where the council is located "wrote what they could, drew pictures, and made the camp recite what was known for sure" as a means of "passing on the teachings right away while they were still learning themselves" (Dimaline 214). Learning and educating Indigenous peoples about the languages spoken by their ancestors is, in fact, an act of resistance and survivance.

Decolonial Futures in *The Marrow Thieves*

This method of being in the world emphasizes the “relationality of the local landscape” and in her book *As We Have Always Done*, Simpson says that it “sounds idyllic, because compared to now it was idyllic,”— “the education system, the economic system, and the political system” were all “designed to promote more life” for “all living things,” which means that a return to many of these precolonial conditions is something to aspire to in a postcolonial future (3). The labour that needs to be done in order to push toward a post-colonial future is thus, as Simpson argues, “internal” and must continue the work of Indigenous peoples’ “Ancestors” who have been constantly “working to ensure” the ongoing existence of future generations “as [they] have always done” (6). The transformations and alternatives that Indigenous peoples are “compelled to make” and “are profoundly systemic” and the result will be an idealized present that “embodies and operationalizes the very best of [their] nation” because that is “what [they] have always done” (6). Their Ancestors “struggled, sacrificed, and fought” for their own existence and for that of their descendants, so Simpson believes that it is the responsibility of contemporary Indigenous populations to do so for “future generations” as well (6).

The characters in Dimaline’s novel “were born into a centuries-old legacy of resistance, persistence, and profound love that ties [their] struggle to other Indigenous peoples in the Americas and throughout the world” (Simpson, *As We Have Always Done* 6). Indeed, the end of the novel reemphasizes these connections and shared goals when French says “that as long as there are dreamers left, there will never be want for a dream” and he “understood” what the survivors “would do for each other, just what [they] would do for the ebb and pull of the dream, the bigger dream that held [them] all”: “[a]nything” and “[e]verything” (Dimaline 231). Having already experienced many apocalyptic events under colonial rule, the Indigenous peoples in *The*

Marrow Thieves are better equipped to survive yet another apocalypse, but this survival, as in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, is also accompanied by the mass death of settler society. The makeshift community draws on their stories, language, and traditions to ensure that they survive yet again, just as they survived many times before, and work toward a decolonized future where their communities and ways of life can thrive, saving not only their people, but also those who respect the knowledge of the Indigenous populations who have lived in the Americas for centuries.

Conclusion: Apocalyptic Presents and Post-Colonial Futures

While traditional science fiction narratives often promise "progressive advancement toward a utopian future enabled by technoscientific expansion," without noting "the imperial and colonial dimensions of such expansion," Rice and Dimaline's novels demonstrate that Indigenous science fictions can allow for a rekindling of traditional knowledge that is not marred by a Western-colonial concept of progress (Higgins 61). The apocalypse, then, becomes a decolonizing event because it enables "a process of self-recovery and survivance that involves radical," albeit unavoidable "withdrawal from [settler-colonial] paradigms of life practice" (Higgins 80). Significantly, though, the conception of a decolonial future in these novels is not "the return of a romantic, precontact past," and instead it is one that mostly writes settlers out of the equation with the exception of those who adhere to the values of the communities they have entered, while allowing Indigenous communities to rekindle their traditions without forgetting the experiences of colonization (Spry 63).

Moon of the Crusted Snow and *The Marrow Thieves* can therefore be understood as "critical dystopia[s]" which allow "readers and protagonists to hope," thus "maintaining the utopian impulse *within* the work" (Baccolini 520). Instead of depicting apocalyptic events purely as a disruption of capitalist progress, these authors reverse the polarity of those discussions by framing the apocalypse as a politically mobilizing and agency-creating event that allows Indigenous peoples to build on traditional knowledge about how to survive using the resources available and succeed in a new world. Throughout both novels, Indigenous communities maintain an active and thriving sense of presence despite the ongoing and simultaneous apocalypses of colonization and climate change. Indigenous temporalities, which enable the survivors simultaneously to consider the past, present, and future, become a driving force in the rekindling of traditional ways of being in the world and allow the values of their communities to guide their actions toward a decolonized and sovereign future. Therefore, *Moon of the Crusted Snow* and *The Marrow Thieves* can be considered narratives of survivance, demonstrating that through stories, language, traditions, and customs the Indigenous peoples living across North America will continue to survive and thrive, even if yet another apocalyptic event comes their way. While the end is characterized by the utopian possibility of starting again, Rice and Dimaline suggest that Indigenous populations already have what they need to endure and prosper in a changing world marked by the threat of anthropogenic climate change.

CONCLUSION: REMEMBERING THE FUTURE

"*Because survival is insufficient*." (58)
— Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*

As the threats facing humanity change and increase in volume, so too do the fictional end of the world scenarios that we consume, allowing us to reflect on the potential outcomes of our present conditions. Most recently, the apocalyptic imaginary has turned toward advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, demonstrating a growing anxiety toward the destructive capabilities of our own creations. In fact, in 2023, as the World Health Organization declared that COVID-19 was no longer a global pandemic, generative AI tools intended for widespread use by industry, government, and the general public flooded the market. Over a decade prior, American science fiction and fantasy author, N.K. Jemisin published her Afrofuturistic short story "Valedictorian" in the 2012 anthology *After: Nineteen Stories of Apocalypse and Dystopia*[1]. The narrative takes place in a small, walled community, focusing primarily on Zinhle, the top academic performer of her graduating year. The Firewall had been put in place at the beginning of a war that started centuries earlier. Adults in Zinhle's community claimed that it had been "built to keep the enemy at bay," but as opposing forces "encroached and the defenders' numbers dwindled" their population and territory shrunk substantially. In the narrative present, despite the perpetuation of the false claim that their community had won the war, the enemy has only grown more powerful, while their own technological progress has stagnated, rendering the Firewall "merely symbolic."

Each year "a tribute of children" from the graduating class "are sent beyond the Wall" (Jemisin). This "cull" includes the lowest ten percent of performers, "plus one"—the "best and brightest," the valedictorian of that graduating year. To avoid the cull, students strive not for greatness, but for mediocrity. Consequently, a childhood spent aiming for average "does not a brilliant adult make," which means the entire population stagnates. Despite the risk, Zinhle "earns top marks in all her classes," wins prestigious awards, and continues to compete against herself, ensuring that every "paper she writes is more brilliant than the last" and that each test is finished "faster than she did the last one."

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[1] "Valedictorian" was republished online by *Lightspeed Magazine* in 2014.

After she "earns the highest possible score on the post-graduation placement exam," Zinhle is asked to meet with Lemuel, a representative from "beyond the Firewall" (Jemisin). Despite being similar in appearance, Lemuel's "inhumanity is immediately obvious" in his "predatory" stillness, lack of facial expressions, and deliberate movements. Zinhle immediately clocks him as a machine, or robot of some kind, but Lemuel clarifies that only "part" of him could be historically classified as "artificial intelligence" and the other part of him had been "born in New York." The population outside the Firewall are descended from those "who adapted, when the world changed," who had chosen to merge with technology and "become something new," while Zinhle's ancestors are those who could have adapted, but instead "decided it was better to kill, or die, or be imprisoned forever, than change." Despite having lost the war, the dwindling human population continues to misrepresent their history and reject those who do not conform, thus suppressing evolution and social change in favour of stagnancy.

Inside their prison, the human community remains unable to progress. Meanwhile, the artificial intelligence beyond the wall continues to develop, forming a transhuman AI elite that controls the human population, both by preventing the lowest performers from reproducing and by preventing the highest performers from aiding humanity in resisting their persecution. The annual cull thus ensures conformity. The community's lowest performers become bodies for those beyond the wall, providing temporary housing for the expansive artificial intelligence network. Lemuel, for instance, clarifies that the body he currently inhabits “is not the first” and “it won’t be the last,” demonstrating the ongoing need for a percentage of the human population to be sent beyond the wall on an annual basis (Jemisin). The top performers, especially those like Zinhle who “not only master the system but do so in defiance of the consequences” are removed because they represent a danger to the AI community. Those who “cannot help uniqueness despite a system that pushes them to conform, be mediocre,” and “never stand out” have the potential to help the human population develop methods and technologies that would make resistance possible. Despite their potential, the community rejects them, preferring to remain stagnant, rather than progress into the future. Until the population becomes more accepting of difference and willing to progress, the AI will continue to imprison the community and manage their population growth. Once they accept difference and “start to fight” for those who do not conform, Lemuel states that this shift in perspective and behaviour will demonstrate that the community is ready to be released from the AI’s control, so they can “catch up to the rest of the human race,” meaning that their supposedly self-imposed sentence comes with the opportunity for parole.

In the centuries that the Firewall has been active, the AI has continued to grow “steadily stronger,” while those residing within the wall have “hardly developed at all” (Jemisin). Instead of using their past as a learning opportunity, the community chooses to misrepresent history, pretending that they won the war and negotiated a treaty. Since “history is central and necessary for the development of resistance and the maintenance of hope, even when it is a dystopian history that is remembered,” the falsification of historical records serves only to maintain the conditions of the past in their present (Baccolini 116). Without access to "history, its knowledge, and memory," humanity is prevented from accessing a "potential instrument of resistance" (116).

The idea that human technologies will eventually surpass our intelligence and take over is not new. In fact, as early as 1950, Alan Turing claimed that the "consequences of machines thinking would be too dreadful," so we must "hope and believe that they cannot do so" (444). The concept of the "singularity" posits that "AI, together with computers, genetics, nanotechnology, and robotics, will develop to a point when machine intelligence will be more powerful than all human intelligence combined" (Coeckelbergh 13). If machines surpass our own intelligence, we are not only at risk of losing our authority over technology but also of obsolescence, and perhaps even extinction. Since the turn of the century, AI has increasingly become part of our emerging twenty-first century apocalyptic imagination. From movies, like the *Terminator* series (1984-2019), *The Matrix* series (1999-2021), *I am Mother* (2019), *The Mitchells vs. the Machines* (2021), *Wallace & Gromit: Vengance Most Fowl* (2024), to television series like *Westworld* (2016-2022) and *The Last Bus* (2022), as well as episodes from *Love, Death & Robots* (2019-present) and *Black Mirror* (2011-present), and even video games like *Detroit: Become Human* (2016) and *Horizon Zero Dawn* (2016), robots and AI have increasingly embedded themselves in our collective consciousness.

Jemisin's "Valedictorian" takes "advantage of the freedom and distance from reality inherent in speculative fiction to scrutinize our nightmares and warn about the future" (Urbanski 8). As AI technologies advance, the likelihood of machines "breaking out of their carefully-designed programming and doing something *independently* that we did not intend," becomes more likely (42). The narrative thus reflects and meditates on these ongoing risks of technological advancement; however, like other texts from the apocalyptic genre, the story also allegorizes the consequences of limiting a population's access to history. While the government knows the truth "because it was founded by those who fought and ultimately lost the war, and their descendants still run it," they perpetuate a false narrative of the community's past to ensure ongoing complacency (Jemisin). Without an accurate vision of their collective past, the community maintains its current conditions, which means that the present becomes an obstacle to future progress. As we face the existential threats imposed on us by the advancements of our own technologies, we are reminded that it is imperative to remain flexible, and to maintain an active and evolving relationship with the past in order to progress into the future.

Ours is indeed an age of uncertainty. Throughout all of history, humans have expressed a pervasive tendency to believe that our current moment is a "unique and crucial turning point" that is critical to our ongoing existence (Lynskey 5). However, it is undeniable that the twentieth and twenty-first century have been marked by a rise in apocalyptic thinking. Since the turn of the century, this growing sense of dread has only accelerated. And while humanity has a longstanding tendency of believing that the end is imminent, our risk of extinction continues to increase. According to the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, we are living in the most dangerous moment throughout all human history, meaning that today we are closer to the end of the world than ever before. The threats, including global conflict, nuclear weapons, climate change, and artificial intelligence, are only compounding, edging us toward eventual, and perhaps inevitable, global disaster. As we teeter on the precipice, it becomes harder to deny the fact that the world we are currently living in is pre-apocalyptic.

Responding to these risks, the creation, publication, and consumption of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction has only proliferated over the last century. The corpus is massive and continuously expanding, serving as an indicator of the existential anxiety being experienced worldwide. While the nine texts I have discussed cannot be considered representative of an entire genre, examining these narratives exposes a pervasive obsession with a historicized present. These stories tend to reframe the real-world present as a fictional pre-apocalyptic past, meaning that these imagined post-apocalyptic futures are the potential outcome of our current trajectory. Readers, unlike the characters, maintain access to the world of both the fictional past—our present—and the fictional present— a vision of our future, simultaneously. These stories demonstrate that there is ideological and political value embedded in memory, even if it is fictional. In particular, "traumatic memory" has a crucial role in the formation of individual and collective identities (LaCapra 393). Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions thus allow readers to live through the trauma of one's own "death and more, the death of cities, the destruction of humanity itself," and from there we can better determine what kind of future we want to live in (Sontag).

While interpretations of history are always impacted by conditions of the present, so too are our imagined futures. Although these narratives tend to posit that history must always cycle toward inevitable destruction and rebirth, fiction also reminds us that other futures are possible. If stories like Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crak*e, Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz,* Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, Emily St John Mandel's *Station Eleven*, and Peter Heller's *The Dog Stars*, emphasize the significance of maintaining a living, non-mythologized memory to prevent history from repeating itself, then post-apocalyptic fiction reminds us of the importance of both the utopian and the dystopian imagination in helping us identify and mitigate the risks inherent in our present. These sorts of texts provide readers with the tools to perform the "critical and reflective thought" necessary to help us "understand our condition and understand the potentiality for the future imminent in our present" (Harvey 37). In imagining the loss of our own world, post-apocalyptic fiction enables us to reflect on the conditions of our present. As a result, by considering the dangers embedded in our current moment, we are imbued with the potential to change the trajectory of history, essentially slowing or even stopping our course toward complete annihilation.

However, reconsidering the conditions of our current world is not just about removing risk, but also requires a revaluation of the elements of our past and present that we would like to see maintained in the future. George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides*, Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, and Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* emphasize the importance of relying on the knowledge of our past to build more sustainable futures, which means that it is imperative to scrutinize the practices we maintain. Narratives of apocalypse are thus didactic in the sense that they teach readers about the potentiality of their current moment in history. Engaging with future memory makes the risks embedded in our present more visible as these stories bring to life the potential results of this trajectory. However, this act of fictional reflection also serves to remind readers of the elements of our past and present that we value most, inspiring more sustainable, community-oriented ways of living. Indeed, "conventional utopia and apocalypse are complicit in their desire for a better world" (Mittag 264).

Physician and medical historian Jacalyn Duffin argues that "nature is endlessly inventive"—"[n]ew infectious agents will always arise, and our ability to confront them will be based on the best wisdom derived from our experiences with great scourges of the near and distant past" (3). Beyond the spread of disease, our ability to deal with the ever-changing threats of modernity, whether it be global warming, weapons of mass destruction, natural disasters, or the rise of AI technologies, is greatly influenced by the knowledge our species has gained from previous disasters. History offers us opportunities to learn from our past, but narratives about the end of the world allow us to look backwards to the conditions of our present, which creates opportunities to gain lessons from moments that have not yet and may never happen in our future. In engaging with these popular narratives, readers are asked to confront the potential outcomes of the conditions of our present, which allows us to consider the risks and benefits embedded in the social and political circumstances in which we are currently living and imagine possible solutions.

In reframing the real-world present as the pre-apocalyptic past, readers are forced to go through the imaginative process of remembering and reflecting on their current conditions. Raffaella Baccolini argues that "history, its knowledge, and memory are . . . dangerous elements that can give the dystopian citizen a potential instrument of resistance" (115). Reflecting on post-apocalyptic fiction as histories of the future, I believe that we must consider the fact that "it is from that very past," a past that is ultimately meant to represent our present, that these fictionalized futures originated (Baccolini 116). History "is central and necessary for the development of resistance and the maintenance of hope," because it demonstrates that our future remains malleable and that other futures that do not see the mass extinction of the human race may still be possible (116). The temporal structures of popular post-apocalyptic fiction, which defamiliarize our present through an imagined future memory, allow us to critically examine our current trajectory toward possible mass-destruction and then consider viable solutions that mitigate these risks in the present and allow us to build better futures. After all, "it has been almost midnight for such a long time" (Gauvin xiii).

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