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From text to table: the role of food in scarcity narratives

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Introduction

“There are no easy answers to our human dilemma, yet no matter what obstacles lie ahead, food can be our guide. None of us existed before food: it preceded us, anticipates us, sustains us and will outlive us. The relationship that binds us to those we love and to our living world is, in the end, our greatest hope.” (Steel, 316).

Literature holds within its pages a world of possibilities. Through its symbolic layers of meaning, it has the ability to transcend the ordinary and immerse the reader in new environments. It can engender emotions, convey ideas through metaphorical language, navigate the complexities of human experiences, mirror societies or be an indirect way to express critical perspectives. As the expression ‘food for thought’ highlights, food and the literary have a lot in common. In *Literature and Food Studies* (2017), Amy Tigner and Allison Carruth analyze the growing cross-disciplinary field of literature and food studies. They state that “as works of literature interact with food in its various stages—agricultural, culinary, and alimentary— they often traverse the boundaries between the intimate and the social as well as the microscopic and the planetary, a capacity that arguably defines the literary” (Tigner and Carruth, 1). This food-oriented approach to literary works is the focus of this dissertation, and specifically to novels of scarcity. Indeed, food often emerges as a central theme within dystopian works. It can become a tool for control, a symbol of social class, or the reason why humans migrate, for instance. The genre can serve as a means to examine how people adapt, cope and struggle when they face limited resources, and the psychological and emotional impacts this absence of food can have. It can connect the readers to the ethical dilemmas the characters face and offer a speculative exploration of a future humans might face one day. Reading food in novels of scarcity can allow for new interpretations of the value, role and consumption of food.

Food and the relationships humans have to it are shaped by various elements, among which rituals play a significant role. Rituals have always been part of humans’ lives. From birthday celebrations to graduations, from funerals to daily meditations, humans engage in numerous rituals that have an influence on their lives. Throughout history, rituals have provided humans with symbolic meanings of unity, transformation, gratitude, reflection, renewal, or even mourning. They make humans feel connected, supported or reduce their anxiety (Brooks, 82). They are often associated with religious practices, but they are not

solely confined to it. A ritual can be a challenging concept to define due to its several components and its similarities with routines. In his essay *Où est le sens?* (2020) Bohler develops that rituals are a necessary way to reduce anxiety in front of uncertainty, and according to him, the first human rituals were linked to food, as they were a (probably unconscious) response to the uncertainty of finding food in their environment. Today, food is still at the center of many rituals. People gather and celebrate around a feast or share their grief around ceremonies involving food. Eating is universal and necessary for human survival: it nourishes the body, as it gives it energy and all the nutriments it needs to stay healthy and alive. However, food encompasses much more than this sole functional aspect. Food creates emotions, triggers memories and builds connections. It can represent culture, heritages or traditions. Food can assume symbolic meanings of hospitality, open-mindedness, sharing, for example.

In the field of dystopian fiction, three notable authors have written thought-provoking stories that deal with humans, food and rituals in different ways and with very different writing styles. *The Year of the Flood*, written by Margaret Atwood in 2009, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, published in 2006, and Jean Hegland's novel from 1996 *Into the Forest* offer stories of survival in which humans' relationships to food are challenged and profoundly transformed. *The Year of the Flood*, which is the second book of Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, depicts a dystopian and futuristic world filled with technologies and genetically modified food, in which the environment is threatened. Food is often a concern for the characters, and there are numerous scenes in which they worry about it, look for it, plant it, harvest it, or eat it. The depiction of food is hybrid: on the one hand, for part of the characters, food means vegetarianism, and plants are cultivated and harvested respectfully, in the most organic way possible, respecting the seasons and the earth. On the other hand, for the rest of the characters, food is industrial and made of genetically modified meat, sometimes even close to cannibalism, and with the characters unaware of how it is produced. Moreover, food in the novel is central to the God's Gardeners community as a significant part of their identity. Through their rituals, food carries deep values of equity, hospitality, gratitude or exclusion, and implies ethical dilemmas and moral choices in scarcity. Finally, food also influences the way the characters perceive time, and how they relate to it.

McCarthy's *The Road* is a novel that illustrates the journey of an unnamed father and his son through a devastated and burnt landscape. Food in the novel anchors both father

and son to reality as it slips away into oblivion. Without an ecosystem that allows food to grow from the earth, the characters are bound to survive by eating remains of industrial food from the past, or each other. Food is both necessary to their survival and what endangers them, as they are themselves food for cannibals. In this far from mouth-watering environment, McCarthy's novel emphasizes how food engages with the senses. Many food scenes are described by the author with minimalistic words yet creating vivid images for the reader. Moreover, food acts as a Proustian madeleine, creating a reconnection with the old world and its ethics. By refusing to become cannibals, food becomes the link between the characters, their past world, and their humanity. Moments such as when they find a bunker filled with goods from the past give them an everlasting taste of the past. Finally, food and the way McCarthy depicts the characters' struggle to find it, their starvation, and their journey carries a sense of time and waiting. The connection between time perception and food is also apparent through the man and the boy's rituals.

Food is a main topic in Hegland's *Into the Forest* as well. The main characters, Eva and Nell, find their world slowly deprived of electricity and gas, which cuts them off from the rest of the world. The food from their past consumerist world disappears, as they start by eating everything they find in their pantry. Gradually, the sisters have to learn how to survive by first tending a garden, then getting to know the forest around them. Step by step, they create a relationship with the forest as they start to gain knowledge about the edible plants, roots and nuts, and even hunt a wild boar. They develop new rituals as the novel illustrates a return to past Native American diet, and values of respect and gratitude towards food. Yet, it can be questioned whether this lifestyle could realistically suit an entire population sustainably. As the novel unfolds, Hegland starts to write with a richer and more precise vocabulary about the forest and its edible plants and begins to describe them with their names and visual aspects. The novel slowly becomes a botanical anthology of plants found in the forest of northern California. The sisters start to live according to the seasons and the moons, adapting their perception of time to their new diet.

Atwood, McCarthy and Hegland imagine very distinct food futures. *The Year of the Flood* depicts a reality to which processed and genetically modified food is central, but where the main characters grow their own food. *The Road* imagines a world in which the ecosystem is destroyed to such an extent that surviving implies drastic ethical choices.

Finally, *Into the Forest* urges the characters to rethink their relationships with the wilderness and its edible plants.

The present research aims to read food in the three scarcity novels and compares how they engage with food in distinct ways. It examines the portrayal of food and rituals related to it in several carefully selected passages of the books, both for the role associated with it for the characters within the story, and for the reader through the words of the authors. This approach will allow for a deeper understanding of the role of food in scarcity narratives. This dissertation uses a comparative framework by contrasting Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*, McCarthy's *The Road* and Hegland's *Into the Forest*. By doing so, it highlights the similarities and differences of those three thought-provoking novels, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the role of food in it.

The analysis of several food scenes in the three novels will be guided by the concept of *Sitopia*. As it will be developed further in the first chapter of this dissertation, *Sitopia* is an essay written by Carolyn Steel, a British architect, lecturer and author known for her work on the relationship between food, cities, and urban design. She published it in 2020 and delves into the fact that our world is centered around food. Her comprehensive approach reads aspects of our world such as culture, relationships or history through the lens of food, while advocating for a revaluation of food in order to fix the current broken relationships humans have with it. The first lines of this dissertation are the last lines of *Sitopia*. They highlight that humans currently face a number of "obstacles", and that food has the power to help us fix them. It also implies that food is linked to everything around humanity, from time passing to the relationships we have with others. Her standpoint is here used as a relevant theoretical framework to read the food scenes analyzed in the corpus as it encompasses the complex interactions between food and humanity.

Some research has been done on aspects of food when it comes to Atwood's novel or McCarthy's. Katarina Labudova's work *Food in Margaret Atwood Speculative Fiction* (2022), and Ovidiu Matiu's study titled "The Functionality of Food in Cormac McCarthy's Desert Imaginary, or Abundance and Scarcity in *Blood Meridian* or *the Evening Redness in the West* (1985) and *The Road* (2006)" (2020), have offered insights into the significance of food in the respective narratives and will be addressed later in this dissertation. Hegland's work has not been the subject of many studies, and none that dealt with the role of food specifically. By offering new interpretations of the role of food in

these three narratives, this dissertation aims at answering a gap in the current existing academic literature.

The first chapter introduces the links between food and human history from the time of the hunter-gatherers to today's industrial society. It develops the concept of Sitopia, which provides the theoretical framework for this dissertation. It then delves into the complex task of defining rituals, and more specifically food rituals, and explores why they are performed. Then, the chapter focuses on the chosen corpus: *The Year of the Flood*, *The Road* and *Into the Forest*. It provides an outline of the role of food in the three novels by analyzing the relationships the characters have to food and rituals, and how those are transcribed through the author's specific writing styles. While Atwood immerses the reader into her novel through the use of the semantic field of food and sensory descriptions, McCarthy writes minimalistic sentences while still creating vivid images in the reader's mind, and Hegland gradually develops a richer and more precise vocabulary as the novel unfolds. The chapter also highlights the specificities of each literary work in terms of food.

The second chapter studies the changes of values and ethics that take place among the characters when food is not abundant anymore. It delves into food choices, their interdependence with cultures, morals, and society based on Steel's *Sitopia* and Foer's *Eating animals* (2009). *Eating animals* is an essay that questions our current industrial meat production, urging the reader to reevaluate his food consumption. It then analyses the characters' ethical choices and values before the catastrophes, examining especially *The Year of the Flood*, as Atwood's novel is the only literary work with a timeline happening in the pre-apocalyptic world. The chapter then moves on to investigating tensions present in the novels which are shaped by the lack of food and how they are expressed by the three authors. It also scrutinizes the role of cannibalism in the three books, and of gratitude towards food in the characters' new lifestyles.

Finally, the third chapter examines how food influences the characters' perception of time in the three scarcity novels, and how it is transcribed by the authors. It analyzes the way the structures of the novels reflect how the characters perceive time due to food rituals and food scarcity. It then explores the influence the past role of food has on the characters' present and future relationships with it. Finally, it delves into the ways food rituals act as a structure in the characters' lives.

This dissertation explores the role of food in *The Year of the Flood*, *The Road* and *Into the Forest*. The pages of these novels serve as portals into worlds of scarcity, revealing not only the challenges faced by their characters in their survival but also the intricate connections that food forms with time, values, and rituals. Delving into these works is an enlightening and enriching experience, allowing me to grasp the profound influence of food on human existence, both in times of abundance and scarcity, and to perceive the possibilities of literature.

Chapter 1: Dystopian Gastronomy: Humans, Food and Rituals in scarcity narratives

“Gradually the forest I walk through is becoming mine, not because I own it, but because I’m coming to know it. I see it differently now. I’m beginning to see its variety—in the shape of leaves, the organization of petals, the million shades of green. I’m starting to understand its logic and sense its mystery. Everywhere I walk, I try to notice what’s around me—a clump of mint, a cluster of fennel, a thicket of manzanita, or a field of amaranth to gather from now or return to later, when the need is there or the season is right.” (Hegland, 176).

This excerpt from Hegland’s dystopian novel *Into the Forest* illustrates how food is everywhere, and humans relate to it in many physical ways. Hegland implies that food is something that is often overlooked but which reveals an entire new world when noticed. It is also something that one might want to possess, while others see themselves as equal to it. The excerpt illustrates the richness and variety of the edible plants that can be found in a forest. It reflects how, even in scarcity, Eva and Nell find beauty around them and reconnect to food. To analyze food representations in Hegland’s, Atwood’s and McCarthy’s novels, this chapter starts by examining the links between food and human history, delving into Carolyn Steel’s book *Sitopia*. It then defines the concepts of rituals and food rituals. Finally, it provides an outline of how food is represented and its role in *The Year of the Flood*, *The Road* and *Into the Forest*, analyzing specific food scenes from each novel.

Humans, food, and their environment

To analyze new interpretations of the role of food in the novels, it is necessary to first retrace the intertwined relations between humans and food. Food is everywhere and is related to every aspect of human lives. It is much more than a simple survival statement: if you do not eat, you will die. In *Exploring the social appetite: a sociology of food and nutrition* (2008) Germov and Williams state that “While hunger is a biological drive and food is essential to survival, there is more to food and eating than the satisfaction of physiological needs” (Germov and Williams, 4). Food is an essential part of how humans celebrate with their loved ones on special occasions, how they console themselves after something sad has occurred, or how they spend some quality time with their grandmother,

cooking every Sunday with her. Food has a social role and is often shared with others. Food is also linked to time and includes traditions that will live on for years to come.

Human history has been related to food since the beginning of time through countless aspects. During the hunter-gatherers' period, the human population increased slowly, and people survived by adapting to the resources that were available to them. They lived in tribes and learned about their environment in order to survive. Natural selection made humans evolve in selective environments where food was accessible (Rotberg and Rabb, 44). Locations where humans could understand their surroundings and find food in abundance were preferred to challenging environments where finding food was a struggle. Then, as Graeber and Wengrow argue in *The Dawn of Everything* (2021), humans slowly started to cultivate food. The authors refute the popular assumption that the agricultural period was a quick transition from wild to domestic food, but rather a slow change that took around 3.000 years to be fully completed (Graeber and Wengrow, 233). Indeed, Graeber and Wengrow explain that farming is hard work that would have to be done at the same time as hunting, gathering other types of food, making tools, or having celebrations, among other things. It thus seems logical that this change did not occur in a short time period. Moreover, the authors highlight that trade was a main reason for Neolithic farming, while humans kept on eating from what they hunted and gathered as it was easier for them. They state that those trades started as “a series of local specializations in crop-raising and animal-herding (...) [which] might well have had more to do with sociability, romance or adventure than material advantage as we'd normally conceive it” (Graeber and Wengrow, 245). Slowly and geographically scattered, communities have evolved around food. Graeber and Wengrow's essay challenges our contemporary modes of production by opening the doors for “the freedom to create new and different forms of social reality” (Graeber and Wengrow, 525).

Humans' relationships with food underwent another major change with the advent of the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century, over the course of just a few decades. In *Why Food Matters* (2021), Freedman states that: “before the industrial revolution, feeding a less crowded but also less technologically advanced planet required a minimum of eighty percent of the total population to engage acquiring food, through hunting, agriculture, fishing, or raising livestock.” (Freedman, 103). A shift thus occurred in people's lifestyle, as fewer agricultural workers were needed and technologies improved. People had more free time as they stopped worrying about growing food. They moved

away from the land towards supermarkets. Changes happened as well for the earth, as a common pre-industrial agriculture practice was to let the soil rest after it had been exhausted through cultivation, but this changed when the capitalistic system saw this rest period as a missed opportunity to make profit (Rotberg and Rabb, 46).

Nowadays, food is still the center of numerous aspects of humans' lives. In his book *Why Food Matters* (2021), Paul Freedman considers food from a historical point of view, but also from a cultural and identity perspective. He states that "eating is a biological imperative, but what we eat depends on preferences dictated by society, not just availability or the environment" (Freedman, 10). Indeed, food habits are not universal but determined by society, as they vary based on a number of criteria such as geography, religious beliefs, class, etc., and are therefore social constructions (Germov and Williams, 4). This is supported by Jonathan Foer in his book *Eating Animals* (2009), in which he questions the implication of eating meat, and advocates against factory farming, far from the current general approach. He devotes pages exploring humans' choices to eat one animal and not another. He concludes that it is mostly because humans are influenced by their surroundings, and that being different would bring shame. Indeed, food reinforces one's identity and one's membership in a specific group in numerous situations. This is the case, for instance, in exile, migration or persecution, when being far from one's culture can make one cherish it even more.

Moreover, food is a signifier when it comes to class and wealth. Whether it is in Antiquity, Modern Times or contemporary history, some foods are associated with luxury, while others with poverty. Spices, French cuisine, or British tea are foods among others that convey a sense of wealth and that led to trade and globalization (Freedman, 64). In *Why Look at Animals?* (2009), John Berger reflects on the consumer society and the implications of food in power dynamics. He highlights that for the peasant "food represents physical work" (Berger, 63) as he realizes and values its production, while the bourgeois does not. Food does not carry the same role for the latter, who will have a tendency to overeat and consider wealth more important than food. The peasant values the physical work needed to grow food and realizes the special occasions feasts are as it is the "consuming of the surplus saved and produced over and above daily needs" (Berger, 67). Today, in western countries, a significant part of the population has adopted a relationship to food close to Berger's vision of the bourgeois. It is related more to processed and industrialized food than to agriculture. Many western citizens live in a time

of abundance, in which supermarkets offer everything they need, at any time of the year and from anywhere in the world. But they also live in a time of excess, where wasting food is normalized, regardless of its true economic and ecological costs. In 2012, agriculture was estimated to be responsible for between 17 and 32% of global carbon emission, and estimations are that it would be up to 35-60% in 2030 (Smith and Gregory, 23). Achieving food security for all in this context of growing population and planet exhaustion while maintaining the same systems of production, distribution and consumption worldwide seems increasingly utopic, even more when taking in to account the inequalities between countries (Vermeulen et al., 196). Questioning our current relationship to food is crucial, and analyzing food representations in novels that imagine drastically different realities can help us in that process.

***Sitopia* and utopian food**

The fact that food shapes the world is central to Carolyn Steel's book *Sitopia* (2020). *Sitopia* comes from the Greek *sitos* (food), and *topos* (place), to describe a world evolving around food. She characterizes food as "by far the most powerful medium available to us for thinking and acting together to change the world for the better." (Steel, 2). *Sitopia* is a rereading of world history from a food-centered perspective, added to Steel's utopian vision of a world in which food is valued again. Her book is divided into seven chapters, each one analyzing one aspect of the world through the lens of food. It covers a wide range of topics such as industrial meat production, eating disorders, the economy or biodiversity. Steel insists on the current unawareness of humans about how food is produced and consumed. She expands on Maslow's pyramid of Hierarchy of Needs and explains that once the physiological needs are guaranteed (food, water, warmth, shelter, etc.), humans do not necessarily question food anymore and take it for granted. However, her essay urges one to interrogate humans' current relationships to food, which is necessary in the current context of ecological crisis and disconnection from it.

Steel sheds light on the intrinsic links between food and humanity, and connects it with a feeling of familiarity, of belonging somewhere. Her essay examines how food shapes identities and can strengthen the bounds between members of a community and

loved ones, including through home-cooked and shared meals. This holds true whether it is about cooking together or cleaning up afterwards, it creates a sense of familiarity, linking food and home. Steel states that “One thing that home *can’t* be, however, is somewhere we can’t eat. Home must be able to sustain life.” (Steel, 86). She even goes back to the time of hunter-gatherers, when finding food was their “everyday sociability and ritual” (Steel, 94). She insists on the central concern of sharing food equally in a community and with the non-human world. She adds that food remains a pleasure in itself for a lot of people. There is a utopian aspect within food as a sensory experience: in its taste, its texture, its smell or its visual aspect. However, she states that “in order to enjoy life to the full, we need our wants to be postponed, rather than instantly gratified: to experience pleasure at its peak, we must work towards it and look forward to it.” (Steel, 68). This instant gratification rather than a postponed pleasure is what humans now favor in our current consumerist culture and is part of the problematic relationships we have with food.

After developing its relationship to capitalism, neoliberalism, and populism, Steel insists on humans’ need to re-value food and its true cost to create a utopia, in which food would be equally shared among all living species. She advocates for a world where people value food again, from its production to its consumption. By retracing the history of the Brooklyn Grange, one of the first large-scale projects of growing food on rooftops, she expands on the need to reconnect with nature within urban spaces. However, projects as such need to be treated with caution. Even the creator is now “more down to earth (...) than he once was about rooftop farming’s potential to feed cities.” (Steel, 181). Steel writes about communities centered around gardens, and the impact of political decisions when it comes to territorial organization, supporting Ostrom’s theory of the commons. The commons are cultural and natural resources which are accessible to all, such as water, air or the land. However, in the current capitalist world, those commons have often been privatized. Ostrom has identified eight principles to manage the commons, some “rules for how to share” (Steel, 232), as she has proved that it is beneficial for all to make those commons public again. Steel also expands on humans’ need to reclaim the commons as a solution to reconnect the urban, nature and food. Moreover, she develops her hope for expanding permaculture as a future way to feed societies and reminds the reader that “the source of all flourishing is wilderness” (Steel, 255), which is currently a great forgotten source of food.

Sitopia also deals with the relations between time and food as “the fact that so many timings were linked to food is no accident, since most people spent their time engaged with it” (Steel, 296). Steel highlights that people in the West used to take the time to cook, but then came capitalism and its need for profitability. Steel also argues that humans need to remember that time “isn’t linear, therefore; it’s concentric.” (Steel, 307). Life is not just a race beginning when one is born, and ending when they die, but that repetitions are involved in life. The seasons, the months and the days are repeated. Humans learn from their elders, and then teach the younger ones in turn. But Steel states that humans need to slow down in the current fast-paced world and reconnect with the present. In order to do that, “rituals is what we need” (Steel, 314). Using the definition of Mircea Eliade in his book *The Sacred And The Profane* (1959), Steel states that rituals are “human life experienced between two orders of time. (...) [it] is an act that carries all other previous actions within itself” (Steel, 314-315). The following subsection delves into the definitions and components of rituals.

The ideal Sitopian world that Steel describes is one in which food is valued. This would mean that the time it takes to cultivate it is recognized or that the fact that it is a shared moment in a community is cherished. It would also mean that the knowledge related to food would be appreciated, for instance the knowledge around wild plants: where to find them, how to cook them, what medicinal benefits they have, everyday uses they could have, how to store them, and so on. Steel states on page 315 that “This is the true meaning of *Sitopia*: using food to understand what it means to be human and how to coexist with our fellow humans and non-humans through time”. She also develops two possible options for feeding humanity in the future: the industrial option or the organic option. The first one sees a future in which humans have even more power over nature, filled with genetically modified plants and animals, and scientific knowledge. The second imagines a future quite opposite to it, a future in which humans understand nature and work with it rather than try to control it. Failing to choose between those two options is, according to Steel, “our key problem” (Steel, 255).

Steel’s concept of *Sitopia* is a relevant theoretical framework for this research project, as it tackles the role of food in humans’ lives, through a range of different aspects. *Sitopia* is a standpoint that delves into the complex role of food in societies. The Sitopian concept is what will be read in food scenes from the corpus.

Food rituals

As stated previously, rituals are intrinsically related to food and its role in human life. In “Literature as Ritual. The Ritual Stakes in Contemporary Literature” (2012), Watthee-Delmotte analyzes how literature itself can be a form of ritual. In her work, she cites a definition of rituals by Claude Rivière, inspired by Jean Cazeneuve’s as it “has the advantage of offering a synthesis that can be applied to both sacred and profane rites:

“Rites are always to be regarded as a sum total of individual or collective actions that tend to be based on certain rules, involve the human body (through words, gestures or postures), are more or less repetitive, have for their performers and usually also their witnesses a strong symbolic meaning based on their (not necessarily conscious) identification with values related to social choices they deem important, and of which the expected effect does not depend on a purely empirical logic defined exclusively in terms of cause and effect.” (Watthee-Delmotte, 227).

This definition creates a distinction between rituals and habits through the symbolic meaning conveyed in rituals. Key points can be highlighted from it such as the involvement of the human body, the repetition of it, the consciousness (or not) of the symbolic meaning and the effects it creates. Therefore, rituals can range from being performed several times a day to less frequently. They can encompass a religious or spiritual dimension, or not (Rivière, 11). They can be found in actions, language or even literature. Rituals can also be found in food.

In their paper titled “Consumption rituals relating to food and drink: A review and research agenda” (2018), Ratcliffe, Baxter and Martin offer a clear introduction to food rituals specifically. They explain that they are “behaviours [that] occur across time periods, cultures and sectors of society” (Ratcliffe et al., 86), which can be mundane, at a small-scale and personal, such as preparing coffee in the morning, or can have “a more elevated meaning or associations” (Ibid.) and be collective actions, such as annual festive meals, for instance. They highlight that rituals are traditionally studied from a religious, mythologic or sacred perspective. Their definition encompasses important aspects found in Claude Rivière’s as well such as the involvement of the human body, of repetitions, and a symbolic meaning that has an impact on people. They argue that there are multiple definitions of rituals in academic literature, depending on the components the authors

consider as more relevant. However, the most common definition is: “a fixed sequence of actions that convey symbolic, rather than functional, meaning, and are formal and repetitive in nature” (Ratcliffe et al., 87). The central element of the definition is the symbolic meaning of the ritual, rather than for habits or routine that are more focused on the functional aspect of food. Other academics, as pointed out by Ratcliffe et al., highlight, for instance, the profane aspect of rituals (as in non-religious), the importance of the context, the order of food consumption during the meal, or the ‘casual opacity of rituals’ (Ratcliffe et al., 87). This means that “they do not appear to have functional necessity or significance” (Ibid.), such as blowing a candle on a birthday cake for instance. Rook (1985) argues that rituals are made of four components: an object, a script describing when and how actions take place, specific roles for the participants, and an audience in front of whom the ritual is performed (Ratcliffe et al., 88-89).

The anthropologist Claude Fischler (1988) wrote that “man feeds not only on proteins, fats, carbohydrates, but also on symbols, myths, fantasies” (Fischler qtd. in Ratcliffe et al., 86), and this is what makes rituals important on a daily basis. In accordance with Steel’s *Sitopia*, Ratcliffe et al. list a series of rituals directly related to food that encompass a range of values and symbols, to illustrate their definition. Those are, for instance, the preparation of a Christmas or Thanksgiving meal, of a birthday cake, of business meetings conducted over lunch rather than at an office table, of having an afterwork drink with colleagues, of the Japanese tea ceremony or of the Turkish coffee culture and tradition, declared by the UNESCO as a ‘intangible cultural heritage’. In other words, all moments that move away from the sole functional purpose attached to food and drink (Ratcliffe et al., 86). Those carry more than the functional meaning of ingesting food; they are attached to deeper symbolic meanings and carry values. For instance, celebrating Christmas, depending on each individual and their beliefs, can be a symbol of rebirth and new beginnings, of love, of reconciliation, of hope, of generosity, or of faith. Thanksgiving can be centered around expressing gratitude and showing appreciation, as well as reflecting on the year past and the year to come. It can carry symbolic values of peace, of sharing or of cultural heritage. A birthday cake can be a celebration of life, of achievement, of growth and progress, or a way to cope with age. All those rituals can also have deeper meanings of mourning or grief, they can symbolize a connection to a divine or sacred entity, they can be a means to heal, purify or restore.

It is necessary to highlight that the previous definitions illustrate their assertions with examples of rituals that could sometimes be categorized as routine. Distinguishing between the two can often be challenging, as they are both centered around repetitive acts. The deeper symbolic meaning carried by those actions cannot always be very clear, which can blur the lines between rituals and routine. It is sometimes difficult to discern between a routine that might appear as holding a deeper significance, and rituals that might seem habitual. Rook's four components (an object, a script, specific roles for the participants and an audience) can help identify between the two, but it is still necessary to approach the examples mentioned with caution.

If rituals related to food and drinks do not have only a functional value, why are they performed by humans? Although they often have no useful purpose, Ratcliffe et al. identify three different outcomes that explain why humans perform rituals: cognitive changes, social changes, and affective changes. The cognitive change is what brings the new meaning of the food or of the consumer. Cognition (thoughts, knowledge and understanding) alters their symbolic identity, for instance, from a normal cake to a celebratory cake and changes the identity of the recipient of the cake to someone who needs to be celebrated or allowing them to cope with age. Ritualized consumption can also lead to a change in mindfulness. The consumer can reach full awareness when it comes to the action of eating (taste for instance), or the thoughts while doing it (e.g., food production and what it involves) but even away from eating: by sitting in a certain environment, by putting food in a specific way in the plate, or by preparing food a certain way. The outcome of the actions provides food with new meaning, consciously or not, and it is one of the reasons humans perform food rituals.

The second reason identified by Ratcliffe et al. is the social change that occurs during or after the ritual. Consumption rituals have been proved to symbolically strengthen social group identity and consolidate group cohesion. For instance, eating Vegemite for breakfast, a typical food spread from Australia, can be a way for one to reinforce their Australian identity (Ratcliffe et al., 89). Indeed, specific foods or meals are a symbolic way of affirming a social or cultural identity with an imagined group of people. One might have never met each individual of the group, but he shares a common culture, history, nationality, etc. through food. This social aspect is also seen in the consumption of homemade food and the strengthening of family identity, of coffee breaks at work, or of having beer with friends on Friday nights. However, those examples given

by the authors might be considered to be routines. Ratcliffe et al. add that those consumption rituals can also be of importance when it comes to the transmission and learning of rules and social norms. This includes social inclusion, but exclusion and segregation as well (e.g. who is not invited to celebratory meals), and can also reinforce divisions in relation to gender roles.

The third reason why rituals are performed even without a functional meaning is because of the affective change it leads to. Indeed, the rituals of consuming food and drink can generate changes in one's mood. They can reduce anxiety or negative affect after threats, distress or loss; they can be a reward, create excitement, or be associated in a positive or negative manner with childhood memory. This outcome is also highlighted by Steel in *Sitopia*: "We've all got food stories, memories, habits and preferences, meals that we love or hate, yet one thing that most of us share (...) is the pleasure of eating itself" (24). She insists several times on the savory pleasure of the act of eating and the happiness it brings to humans. However, Ratcliff et al. highlight that more research needs to be conducted in that area in order to precisely analyze "whether changes in affective states are linked to the consumption of food per se, or ritualized consumption of that food" (Ratcliffe et al., 90). Indeed, affective changes can be caused by the food itself, like a Proustian madeleine, without it necessarily being a ritual that involves a repetition or having a deeper symbolic dimension.

In his essay "Reinventing ritual" (1992), Ronald Grimes questions and develops some other relevant components of rituals. He argues that rituals are traditional, but that it must not be denied or forgotten that they are also (re)invented and in the process of being created. He criticizes the claim of some scholars that "it has always been done this way", as if rituals had appeared out of nowhere (Grimes, 23). He also questions the necessarily collective aspect of rituals and argues for the possibility of an individual one, such as reflecting on one's own day in the evening. This has been explored as well in Radcliffe et al.'s article. Moreover, Grimes criticizes the assumption that rituals are made in an "unself-conscious, pre-critical state of mind" (Grimes, 28). He argues that rituals are not incompatible with criticism, and that awareness and reflection on rituals do not "automatically imply the death of them" (Grimes, 33). Finally, Grimes offers to move away from the assumed intrinsic link between the ritual itself and the effect it creates. The author explains that the meaning is related to elements outside of the ritual, such as its social function (Grimes, 35). He argues that the symbolic of rituals is part of a system

made out of several components, echoing what Radcliffe, Baxter and Martin develop in their essay.

For this dissertation I decided to use a mixture of definitions, basing myself mainly on that of Rivière and the key points he identified, but adding some aspects highlighted by Ratcliffe et al., as their focus was made on food rituals, such as for instance the different outcomes of food rituals, in order to have the most exhaustive definition possible. Indeed, food rituals are thus repetitive actions which are often centered around meals and are characterized by the symbolic meaning they carry. They can create a range of emotions such as joy or grief, bring unity and cohesion, signify forgiveness, peace, or hope, be expressions of gratitude, faith or achievement, and so much more. It is because of all those outcomes that rituals are still performed, even if they do not have a functional meaning. It is also important to note that differentiating rituals and routine can sometimes be challenging, as the symbolic meaning of the action is not always clear. Reading food in novels of scarcity includes analyzing food rituals and their role.

Food in literatures of scarcity

In *Why Food Matters* (2021), Freedman states that “Food’s importance is obvious in times of scarcity.” (19) and in “Writing a menu: the politics of food choice” (2010) Jean Webb argues that: “In times of starvation or deprivation the gentlest of people have been observed to salivate over the prospect of eating a rat, or to sift weevils out of flour and then cheerfully— gratefully—prepare a coarse biscuit from the results.” (4). It is a luxury to have the food security to be able to choose among distinct types of food, and even to be able to refuse some food that is disliked or not wanted.

Imagining a world deprived of food, in which morals and values are challenged, is the center of numerous survival and dystopian novels. Whether it is because of political regimes, climate catastrophes, diseases, or other factors, the ways in which the world is destroyed vary, but the result is similar: the characters evolve in an environment without food security. In his article “The Functionality of Food in Cormac McCarthy’s Desert Imaginary, or Abundance and Scarcity in *Blood Meridian* or *the Evening Redness in the West* (1985) and *The Road* (2006)” (2020), Matiu develops that those dystopian fictions almost always revolve, to some extent, around two components: “the desert the characters

are wandering through and the food they are eating to stay alive” (Matiu, 44). Moreover, in this context, all life forms are polarized into two categories: “life threatening or life supporting agents” (Ibid.). Food is also polarized into either nourishing, or toxic. Matiu concludes that:

“In dystopian fictional worlds, living or eating together loses the social function, becoming less of a means of social interaction and more of a means of *in-situ* conservation, within a self-sufficient eco-system. In such an eco-system, food would be ideally reduced to a meal replacement product, while real social interaction would be reduced to a minimum” (44).

The author explains that in times of starvation such as the ones central to dystopian novels, food maintains its functional aspect and loses its symbolic one. People eat solely to nourish their body and survive and do not have any other relationship with food. Matiu highlights that characters do not, for instance, eat with others to strengthen their relationships, celebrate something with a feast or a meal, eat mindfully, or any other symbolic meaning. With the little food that remains, the social cohesion disappears.

Nonetheless, it can be argued that Matiu’s explanations only apply to certain types of dystopian fiction: often the ones in which nature is devastated. Janet Fiskio calls this perspective “the lifeboat”, which she describes as “the specter of individuals struggling for survival in a neo-Malthusian world of diminishing resources” (16). This narrative sees human nature as dominated by self-interest and based on the exclusion of others (Fiskio, 18), therefore supporting Matiu polarity of “them” (life threatening agents) and “us” (life supporting agents). However, other types of survival fiction manage to create, at least temporarily, some local utopian communities centered on food within a dystopian world. This is a perspective that Fiskio names “the collective” (Fiskio, 22). As opposed to “the lifeboat” narrative, the collective sees humans as inherently altruistic and caring for others. She suggests that “what people need to face catastrophe is a sense of purpose and community.” (Fiskio, 22). This narrative of collectivity illustrated in survival novels implies a reconnection among humans, and often between humans and nature. In collective narratives, food maintains a social function among other symbolic meanings.

In many ways, *The Year of the Flood*, *The Road* and *Into the Forest* are dystopian novels that could be qualified as lifeboat narratives. All the characters evolve in worlds deprived of food and in which solidarity has largely disappeared. However, in Atwood’s

novel, the attitude of the God's Gardeners can be qualified as a collective narrative, as characters manage to recreate a local utopian community built around a new garden. In the midst of the catastrophe, survivors of the Gardeners gather together and plant a new garden, a sustainable source of food, in an almost biblical figure. The garden helps them reconnect with one another and with the earth. The same could be said of Eva and Nell in *Into the Forest*. The sisters' new food choices, connected to the forest and its abundance of edible plants and their decision to live in the stump makes them create a local utopian community centered around food. Those elements can qualify Hegland's novel as a narrative of collectivity. However, Eva and Nell are only two people, which cannot be characterized as a collective, but the novel cannot be qualified either as a lifeboat narrative, since the sisters maintain a social function around food. The same ambivalence can be said of the life of the man and the boy in McCarthy's violent world. Their small community is far from being able to be qualified as utopian, as they struggle every day to survive, which is illustrated in a lifeboat narrative. However, similarly to Eva and Nell, food maintains a social aspect for the two of them, which they sometimes even share with strangers. This altruism is an aspect that is present in a collective narrative. All three novels do not fit neatly into Fiskio's binary theory.

The Year of the Flood, *The Road* and *Into the Forest* each have their own specificities and uniqueness regarding the role of food and food rituals. The following section provides an outline of the role of food in the three scarcity novels, with a literary analysis of some food scenes.

***The Year of the Flood*, the anticipation of starvation**

Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* is a dystopian novel in which food has a multifaceted role. It is necessary for the characters' survival, while also carrying their spiritual beliefs, values, social connections, or knowledge. Published in 2009, the story retells the same events as the ones in *Oryx and Crake* (2003) (the first book of the trilogy), but from the point of view of Toby and Ren. The two women are members of the God's Gardeners, an eco-religious community active in the Pleeblands, an underprivileged, crowded and dangerous neighborhood. They grow their own food on rooftops, consider themselves equal to any other species, leading them to become vegetarian and reject

technology and consumerism. In the first speech Adam One addresses the Gardeners, titled “Creation Day”, he states: “Think of that the next time you are tempted by meat-eating or material wealth! Even God may not always know what you are going to do next!” (15). In it, he subtly restates some basic rules and guidelines of the community. In one sentence, he reminds the members that they are vegetarians (tempted by meat-eating), reject consumerism (or material wealth), and are religious (God). By writing it in the first pages, Atwood also informs the reader of the food choices of the community.

The Gardeners live in the expectation of the ‘Waterless Flood’, which is the prediction of a disaster leading to the end of human civilization as they know it. Therefore, they memorize knowledge about plants, animals, seasons, and survival skills in order to be “their own Arks” and “float above the Waterless Flood” (56). Atwood creates a biblical parallel with Noah’s Ark, implying that the knowledge of food can be the tool to save humanity from a catastrophe. The Gardeners would be their own rescuers with the knowledge they have accumulated. Steel argues for the same idea and states that “we need a plan B, based on developing and rediscovering ways of working with the natural world” (Steel, 248), in order to survive the climate catastrophe humans have created.

As a result, when a virus does kill almost all humans, many members of the Gardeners survive the pandemic. Although some of them had previously stored some industrial food while expecting the Waterless Flood, food scarcity quickly becomes a central theme of the narrative. Indeed, numerous decisions the characters make are driven by their lack of access to a sustainable source of food, such as whether to migrate somewhere else or make an ethical choice which is against their core beliefs. The ecosystem in Atwood’s novel is still viable, as it is possible to grow food. However, a garden takes time and needs to be protected from invaders, both human and non-human, such as the Pigoons, a genetically modified species of pigs. It is fragile and can easily be destroyed.

Toby initially grows a garden, but it is destroyed by Pigoons: “The earth is furrowed and trampled: anything they haven’t eaten they’ve bulldozed. If she were a cryer, she’d cry.” (383). The destruction of the garden has such an impact on Toby’s life that she considers crying, while being portrayed by Atwood throughout the entire novel as a resilient, determined and sometimes even emotionless character. The garden was the food she survived on, and she realizes the time it takes to build one. She thus knows that she will not be able to grow food again soon enough without starving, and that she will

have to find other ways to nourish herself, somewhere else. Food becomes one of the prime movers of the story, the reason why characters leave their safe place when they can no longer have access to it. As it will be developed in the next chapter, ethics and previous food choices are also being questioned. For instance, the vow not to kill and/or eat a fellow living creature becomes harder to maintain in starvation.

Moreover, the Gardeners live in harmony with the animals, plants, vegetables, and other natural elements throughout the year as well as throughout the day, sharing routines and rituals. For instance, they always start the day by doing the same actions, such as taking care of the bees or tending the garden. Atwood writes: “Pilar used to bring the news to the bees every morning” (216). It can be considered to be a ritual rather than a routine, as bringing the news to bees does not have a real use, since the bees do not understand what is said. Instead, the ritual is a repeated way to maintain a social and respectful connection between humans and bees, to ensure access to honey. Each day the Gardeners celebrate a living creature or a Saint who somehow had an influence on nature or their philosophy, such as the explorer Ernest Shackleton, the scientist who discovered genetics Gregor Mendel or Mahatma Gandhi. While they help the characters keep track of time and edible plants, as it will be discussed in the last chapter of this dissertation, learning about the Saints also has a ritualistic aspect: it anchors the Gardeners in their shared beliefs through speeches and songs, bonding them together, with the earth, and in the moment. They also meditate individually or collectively. However, it is sometimes done more out of habit or because they are asked to do so. For instance, Ren says: “When any of the Adams or the Eves tells you to do a Meditation, you don’t say no.” (489). Ren clearly implies that in the community, some rituals have lost their symbolic meaning and have become more routines or obligations. Through food, the Gardeners share a relationship with everything around them: from animals to other members of the community, the earth and God.

As the novel progresses, Toby and Ren’s main concern for their survival is food. Every decision they make is somewhat related to it. However, the two women have a different approach to it. Toby decides to survive on the food she has stored away in anticipation of the Waterless Flood, as well as by tending a garden. She tries to keep living the way she did with the Gardeners. Just as the community did, she values the food that grows in her garden, respects it, understands her interdependence with the natural world. She also values food for its healing properties or uses it as a weapon to poison people:

“There were three kinds of mushrooms, said Pilar —Never Poisonous, Employ with Caution and Advice, and Beware.” (120). Throughout the novel, Toby uses mushrooms to nourish her body, enter a spiritual trance, or poison her rapist Blanco. She also remembers the Saints that were celebrated every day but transforms some of the rituals that were performed with the community. She does not sing or pray or celebrate with feasts, and she intends to meditate once but struggles to do so. However, she still realizes that food can carry deep meanings, even if, in survival, she mainly connects to it for its functional aspect of nourishing her body. Ren, for her part, chooses to rely on remains of the consumerist world. Since she left the Gardeners already before the Flood, she does not have any connection with food anymore and considers food only as a survival means. However, in accordance with Steel’s description of Maslow’s pyramid, once Toby and Ren find the community of the MaddAddams and have access to sustainable food resources, they start valuing food again and reconnecting to it. They start sharing food with strangers and meditating again, for instance. Away from the peacefulness of the Gardeners or the MaddAddams, the outside world is associated with verbal and physical violence. It is a world of poverty, starvation and rape, a world in which people kill rare and protected animals and eat genetically modified meat that sometimes resembles a form of cannibalism.

Further from the narrative, the textual structure is also filled with food. Just as in *Oryx and Crake*, the first chapter is titled “Mango”, in *The Year of the Flood* the novel starts with a poem from the Gardeners’ hymnbook about the destruction of the Garden that gave them fruits. Food is the very first element Atwood sheds light on in her dystopian novel. Her book is divided into several sections, all starting with a speech given by Adam One and a hymn celebrating edible plants and non-human living creatures. This aspect of the novel is analyzed further in the next chapter, under the subsection “gratitude”.

Compared to the other two authors, Atwood has the specificity of using the semantic field of food to describe different situations which at first glance have no direct link with food. She uses it for instance to describe landscapes and characters. Already in the second paragraph of her first chapter, Atwood describes the air as smelling like “caramel” (3) and still early in the novel she compares the sun to an egg: “What breaks in daybreak? Is it the night? Is it the sun, cracked in two by the horizon like an egg, spilling out light?” (17). She directly immerses the readers in her world of food by

creating a sensory experience for them. She also describes characters as “a small potato” (30), “a cake” (75), “the hardest nut to crack” (100), as being “old walnut-faced” (100) or a “studmuffin” (479). In a narrative in which food is crucial and rare, Atwood creates a vivid contrast between her story and the text by including food in the latter. Bringing food at the center of the text also encourages the reader to reconsider its own relationship to food. As Steel states in *Sitopia*, food as a “capacity to span worlds and ideas” (Steel, 2). In addition to descriptions of landscapes and physical appearances, Atwood also uses the semantic field of food in the text to describe emotions. For instance, jealousy is said to “eat away” the characters’ spiritual life and is compared to “a plant covered with poison berries” (363). Moreover, meat is also associated with verbal violence. The children at the Gardeners use it as an insult, qualifying people of “meat-breath”, or “pig-eaters”. Since the God’s Gardeners consider eating fellow living creatures a sin, it is a strong insult to qualify someone as a “meat-eater”. It can also be assumed that it is a way for Atwood to make the reader question his own habits. By using a description of who are most of the readers, people who eat meat, as a way to verbally attack others, she might make them question their own diet.

The semantic field of food is also very often used to refer to sex. The girls at the luxury sex club “Scales and Tails” are often associated with words that lead to think that they are leftovers, something one consumes then throws away when they’re done finished with it. Atwood writes for instance that the manager at the club does not like “waste” (9) when talking about the girls, as if they were a meal that needed to be eaten as a whole, without leaving anything of it. The bouncers of the club also get “the leavings. Supposing there was anything left” (43). Ren explains that the bouncers cannot have the “top girls”, but only what remains when everyone took a piece of what they wanted. Moreover, as the girls at Scales and Tails cover in shiny green suits for their acts, Ren describes herself as a “fish” (156). She also compares having sex with the cold and emotionless Crake with “shagging a salad server” (270) or that he was a “cold fish” (366) during the intercourse. Several scenes also describe sex as something one consumes like a meal: through Ren’s point of view Atwood writes about a girl that “was rumoured to be going through all the boys at school, one by one but fast, like eating soyntus” (268), or about being included “in a big basket of girls, as if [they] were peaches or turnips” (269). By choosing to write about sex with words belonging to the semantic field of food, Atwood creates again a sensory experience for the readers, immersing them into her world. Moreover, it also

devaluates and desacralizes sexuality by reducing it to an act of consumption as trivial as eating, while also reducing the worth of the people involved. Even more, the food Atwood compares sex to, such as a “cold fish”, “soynuts” or “turnips”, is not necessarily considered to be appetizing by most readers.

Furthermore, meat is specifically used to describe sexual violence. It is the symbol of the “Exfernal world”, where people do not respect the non-human living creature the way the Gardeners do and kill one endangered species after the other. Toby’s rapist Blanco screams at her that he will “slice off [her] tits” (51) as if she was a ham, or later he threatens to kill her by saying that she’s “meat” (303). When she escapes that violence by joining the Gardeners, she says she “was lucky she hadn’t ended up fucked into a purée and battered to pulp and poured out onto a vacant lot” (123-124). Atwood creates brutal images in the reader’s mind by associating what is seen by the Gardeners as an ethical and ecological sin with violent scenes such as rapes. The only scene in which sex is not associated with violence or consumerism is when Atwood writes that Toby can “taste” the salt on Zeb’s arm (132), which is also a rare scene of sexuality between two Gardeners. As analyzed by Carol Adams in her essay *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), meat is historically and socially connected to the patriarchy and thus to the objectification and oppression of women. She states that: “Objectification permits an oppressor to view another being as an object. The oppressor then violates this being by object-like treatment” (Adams, 73). By writing this, Adams describe both the rape of a woman and the butchering of an animal. This standpoint can be viewed in Atwood’s text, for instance when she compares slicing Toby’s breasts with slicing a ham.

Those links between food, gender and sex have been explored by Katarina Labudova in her book *Food in Margaret Atwood Speculative Fiction* (2022), in which she analyzes, among other concepts and novels, cannibalism in *The Year of the Flood*. Her study deals with Atwood’s critique of consumerism through hunger and is centered around the collective narrative of the God’s Gardeners community. By reflecting on radical ecological movements, she argues that Atwood “warns us about the future that our greedy consumerism and aggressive destruction of nature is leading us towards” (Labudova, 65). She expands on the community’s use of natural food as medicine to move away from the pharmaceutical industry, as well as on the link between food and emotions. She draws a contrast between Atwood’s peaceful Gardeners and the “cannibalistic violence and predator-prey brutality of the rest of [Atwood] fictional human world”

(Labudova, 72). She also scrutinizes the God's Gardeners ecological impact, and their attempt to sustainability through food and vegetarianism. Moreover, as stated, she emphasizes the link between food, sex and gender. In line with Adams' essay, Labudova argues that some food is associated with masculinity and violence, such as the dangerous rapist Blanco eating meat, while fruits and vegetables are associated with the female characters or the pacifists' Gardeners. She also highlights that "[i]n Atwood's dystopia, food is seen as dangerous and it is associated with death, similarly, sex is not satisfying, but associated with sexual violence and rape" (Labudova, 84).

However, Labudova's comments need to be questioned. Indeed, when she states that "food is seen as dangerous", it is only the case for part of Atwood's world, the Exfernal world. In the environment and beliefs of the God's Gardeners, food is seen as a gift, an equal, something comforting and respected. The lack of it after the Flood might be seen as dangerous, but not the food itself. Moreover, the way the characters relate to food is parallel to the way they relate to their ecosystem and to each other. In the Exfernal World, as the world play suggests, Atwood portrays violent relationships between humans and animals (and food in general) and she mirrors that attitude in the relations the characters have to each other: violence, rape, murder. Similarly, in the enclave of the God's Gardeners' rooftop, they have a respectful relationship with the earth and other non-human living creatures. Atwood thus depicts caring relations between the members of the community as well.

Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* is the only novel out of the three scarcity novels in which the characters expect the catastrophe. Indeed, The God's Gardeners live in anticipation of the Waterless Flood, and thus prepare for it. They store food in "Ararats", learn how and when to plant and harvest vegetables and fruits, where to find edible plants in wilderness, and even how to hunt. The expectation is very specific to *The Year of the Flood*, and a rare situation in dystopias. In *The Road* and *Into the Forest*, the characters do not expect their world to change so drastically, and do not learn anything with the aim of surviving later. Toby initially loses the social aspect of food that she had through the community of the gardeners: the songs, the speeches, the collective prayers, etc. but maintains the respectful relationships with food she had before. She values food as she knows the time it takes to cultivate everything. The members of the God's Gardeners are also the only characters throughout all novels to be spiritually and ritualistically connected to food and the earth before the collapse. They have a respectful attitude

towards plants and animals and intend to maintain those relationships after the flood as well. Their lifestyle is similar to Steel's utopian world. The world has chosen to live according to what Steel described as the "industrial option", but when this collapses, the Gardeners' "organic option" becomes the solution. The writing style of the literary work is also unique. Indeed, Atwood's constant use of the semantic field of food for descriptions of the landscapes, the characters, the emotions or for insults, as well as her association between meat and violence with sex, is not something found in *The Road* or *Into the Forest*. Atwood immerses the reader in a world of food within the story and through the text itself.

***The Road*, brutal culinary survival**

McCarthy's Pulitzer-prize winning novel *The Road* came out in 2006 and revolves around a boy and his father, both unnamed, walking in a burned landscape made out of waste and dead nature. In order to survive, they must find industrialized food, as it is the only remaining thing edible in a destroyed ecosystem in which food can no longer grow. Others have chosen an alternative: cannibalism. However, the boy and the father refuse to eat others, considering themselves "the good guys" who are "carrying the fire" as they qualify themselves: "We wouldn't ever eat anybody, would we?"

No. Of course not. (...)

Because we're the good guys.

Yes.

And we're carrying the fire.

And we're carrying the fire. Yes." (136)

This is their own metaphor to say that they are trying to preserve their humanity, with their own value system and diet, based on a previous world that is now gone. They refuse to adopt the lifestyle of "the bad guys" and avoid them in fear of becoming food for those cannibals, while risking starvation every day.

McCarthy's world is one in which the ecosystems do not allow the characters to grow anything from the earth, and they can only rely on the remains of a once-abundant industrial consumer society. Food becomes the key element in the boy and the father's survival. They were used to buying food in supermarkets in a capitalist world, and now

they have to rethink their eating habits and food choices. This change leads them to adopt new behaviors towards food and new rituals. Indeed, in this new wasteland, every day is a quest for food. Whether they find some or not, they carry on their systematic search the next day. It carries more than the sole purpose of finding food to survive, the ritual of looking for food is also the man and the boy's way of maintaining some social cohesion in their lives. It structures their days and gives them a sense of purpose and order. It encompasses the elements of a ritual as defined by Rivière by involving their body, as it is a physical search for food, it is repeated everyday regardless of the results, it carries deeper meanings and has an effect on the man and the boy as it strengthens their relationships, maintains them connected to their past world, and gives them a sense of purpose.

In addition to the daily search for food, every night, the boy and the father put the plastic tarp above them, and every morning, they take their shelter down and put it back into the cart. More than those repetitive actions, the boy and the father also adopt ritualistic conversations. Their language is eroded, as the boy grows up in a reality in which lots of objects, events, and habits have disappeared: "The name of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally, the names of things one believed to be true." (93). "Okay" becomes the center of their communication, a way of reassuring each other, a way to survive. It allows them to preserve a sense of normalcy and persuade themselves that everything is and will be fine. In an environment in which "the other" is synonym of threat, where the earth cannot grow any food, and in which the characters have to constantly move in order to survive, the relationships the characters have with food are very different from the ones that can be analyzed in the fixed community of the God's Gardeners in Atwood's fertile world.

In "How to Continue: Sustaining Existence through Beckettian Ritual in McCarthy's *The Road*", Fledderjohann addresses the subject of rituals in the novel. He focuses on the repeated actions that allow the boy and the father to survive, such as building up and taking down the shelter, looking for food, looking for shoes, etc. Those acts provide the characters with the recurring structure they need to continue their quest, establishing familiarity in their post-apocalyptic world. This includes communication and the repetition of words such as "okay? okay.". *The Road* is centered around what they do and not why they do it. Critics have, however, often pointed out that their motivation is their interpersonal relationship (Fledderjohann, 45). As Fledderjohann explains, those

rituals are, probably unconsciously, needed for their survival. It is illustrated clearly when the boy and the father return to the road even after finding the bunker, a safe place filled with food. It is also demonstrated when, once they arrive at the sea, the characters start to abandon part of their rituals. This leads to even more threats and catastrophes, such as their shopping cart being stolen with all their food and possessions.

McCarthy depicts food in a unique writing style. His scarce use of words mirrors the post-apocalyptic landscape in which the man and the boy evolve. He writes very concise sentences and manages to immerse the reader in the harsh and almost foodless reality of his characters. He creates brutal and vivid images with just a few words, such as the description of the slave farm they find, with people in its basement, destined to be eaten: “Huddled against the back wall were naked people, male and female, all trying to hide, shielding their faces with their hands. On the mattress lay a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt. The smell was hideous.” (116). McCarthy does not give any unnecessary descriptions, nothing is sensationalist, it is almost factual. He gives a straightforward description of the people whose only purpose is now to be food. His precise choices of words create a haunting image in the reader’s mind. In just three sentences, one imagines the terror of those humans destined to be eaten, the constant pain and torment they must live through, as well as the panic of being eaten themselves that the man and the boy must feel when they witness such horrors. Another example would be for instance when McCarthy writes “They were all day on the long black road, stopping in the afternoon to eat sparingly from their meager supplies.” (62). By using words such as “sparingly” or “meager”, the readers can imagine the long and difficult days of the characters, the distances they cover on empty stomachs.

Ovidiu Matiu analyses food in *The Road* in his article “The Functionality of Food in Cormac McCarthy’s Desert Imaginary, or Abundance and Scarcity in *Blood Meridian* or the *Evening Redness in the West* (1985) and *The Road* (2006)” (2021). He focuses on the meal-replacement product of *Blood Meridian* or the *Evening Redness in the West* (1985), both its utopian aspect (easy, functional) and its dystopian one (no social or spiritual dimension). He then compares this with cannibalism in *The Road*. He offers a very interesting approach, in which he reads cannibalism as the symbol of dominant class, as the end of the former capitalist and abundant world, and as functional food. He opposes it to the food of the weak and always-on-the-run “good guys” (Matiu, 54), such as the man and the boy. However, Matiu argues that those “good guys” are the ones who still

have some social and sacrificial aspect in the act of eating. Indeed, by scavenging industrial food, sharing it, cooking and eat it together, the man and the boy maintain a social cohesion to their meals. They also preserve an altruistic value to food by sharing food with strangers, as it will be developed in the next chapter. Regarding the sacrificial aspect, during several meals throughout the novel, the man decides to leave his food to his son. For instance, towards the end of *The Road*, McCarthy writes: “They had for food a single tin of peaches but he made the boy eat it and he would not take any.” (296). Even in starvation, the love the man has for his son is such that he would rather give his own food to the boy, rather than have his son experience hunger to an even greater extent. This highlights that for the man and the boy, food is about more than just nourishing their body.

Moreover, Matiu uses biblical parallels in his comparative analyses of McCarthy’s two novels, highlighting among other things that the absence of food equals death. He also points to how food, or the lack of it, affects the characters’ mobility, as they constantly need to find new cans and industrial food. Matiu further develops that cannibalism is an extreme behavior that dehumanizes people to such an extent that the father would rather kill his boy or have him commit suicide rather than becoming one of the “bad guys”, as it will be delved into in the next chapter of this dissertation.

McCarthy’s *The Road* is the novel that exposes the most violent relationships between food and the characters out of the three scarcity novels. The man and the boy relentlessly have to find food in fear of starvation, and at the same time they have to avoid becoming food for cannibals themselves. It is also the only novel that has an ecosystem in which nature cannot grow. Both in Atwood’s and Hegland’s novel, the characters survive by tending a garden or finding food in the wilderness. However, in McCarthy’s novel the characters have no other choice but to find remains of industrial food to survive, since they have no connection with the earth that cannot provide anything edible. Even if they did not have to move to flee from cannibals, they could not survive by stopping, as they would have no way of having food. Cannibalism as a prime source of food is also unique to McCarthy’s novel. It is mentioned in Atwood’s novel, but only for a few individuals, which is significantly different from what happens in *The Road*. Although they also live after catastrophes that force the characters to question their food choices, neither in *The Year of the Flood* nor in *Into the Forest* does a significant part of the population choose to eat other human beings. However, in the two novels, they have the

possibility to have sustainable alternatives for food. McCarthy also has a unique writing style. His choice of using very few words reflects the desolation of the landscape in which his characters evolve, but, regardless of his minimalistic writing, he still manages to create vivid images in the reader's mind. He is the only author out of the three that draws such a strong parallel between his text and his world of food scarcity.

Into the Forest, eating in the wilderness

Published in 1996, *Into the Forest* by Jean Hegland depicts the life of Nell, the narrator, with her sister Eva in a house in the Californian forest at a time when the country is confronted with many challenges: they are deprived of electricity and gas, of any means of communication with the external world and of any food in the supermarkets. Their mother passed away before the catastrophe, and their father died in an accident while cutting wood at the beginning of the collapse. The sisters first try to survive by eating any type of processed food they find in their house, while hoping that the world will soon go back to normal. However, they quickly realize that “back to normal” might be something that will never happen, and so they start to find other ways to survive, reconnecting with nature and food. They tend a garden, but slowly turn to the forest and the nuts and edible plants that abound in it.

Hegland explores how humans can move away from consumerism and industrialization to adapt and survive in a new environment, both in a functional way and in a symbolic one. Indeed, the more Eva and Nell reconnect with nature and the food it offers them, the more they develop new rituals: they start to show and express gratitude towards the earth, or they start to hold hands before meals, for instance. While also happening in a post-catastrophe collapsed society, *Into the Forest* moves away from the violent relationships between humans and food in McCarthy's world, or the respectful relationships of the God's Gardeners towards food in Atwood's novel. By imagining a world in which the role of food is not defined by the threat of immediate starvation, cannibalism or eco-religious beliefs, Hegland offers different food representations, centered around Indigenous knowledge.

Hegland's writing is introspective and poetic. Because of the first-person narrative, the reader is immersed in Nell's thoughts and memories. He learns at the same

time as Nell does, has the same worries as she does, and discovers her life through her memories. Hegland's choices of words mirror Nell's knowledge about food she can find in the forest. For almost the entire first half of the novel, the author barely mentions the forest and its edible plants. The sisters only go in it to "get wood and open the chicken coop" (10). Hegland uses a less rich and precise vocabulary: forest, trees, wood, leaves. Eva and Nell spend the majority of their time inside the house, going through every room and every drawer, emptying the pantry. Eva only really goes in the forest once after their father's death, with Eli, when he suggests it. Hegland poetically described Eva's first walk in the forest in a long time: "after all this rain the woods were humid – steaming and voluptuous in the sudden gift of sunlight, and I felt both bewildered and newly alive, as though I had just woken after a long illness" (116). The terror of Eva's rape brings the girls back to the shelter of their house: "despite the bright weather and lengthening days, Eva and I stay inside" (147). However, when Eva and Nell start to reconnect with food from nature by tending the garden, Hegland's writing changes and her vocabulary and her descriptions of nature begin to be richer and lyrical: "The sun felt like a hand on my shoulders, birds called at the edge of the clearing, and once a butterfly landed on the naked soil next to me" (153). Through her knowledge of the Native Americans, Nell realizes that the forest must be a sustainable source of food: "Surely the forest is filled with things to eat. The Indians who lived here survived without orchards or gardens, ate nothing but what these woods had to offer" (171). That realization starts with a familiar ingredient, strawberries, and brings quick changes in Hegland's writing. The first half of the novel is centered around the house and the consumerist world, and the changes towards the sisters feeding themselves on nature are very slow. The sisters first only imagine food through stores and their pantry, now empty, before considering other ways to feed themselves. However, in the second half of the novel, when Nell finds the book *Native Plants of Northern California*, the changes accelerate, and the story very quickly becomes a guide on edible plants in the northern California forest. Hegland's vocabulary and descriptions of the forest mirror those slow changes. While she writes at the beginning of the novel that the sisters go out to "get wood", towards the end of the novel she uses a rich vocabulary centered around food to describe the forest: "the other day I was in the woods behind the house, harvesting yerba buena to add to the pantry's growing assortment of herbs." (177).

Jean Hegland's novel has been the focus of fewer studies than the other two novels, and none included food as a central research topic. However, other resources can be used in order to analyze food and the characters' relationship to it in *Into the Forest*. Hegland herself acknowledges at the beginning of her novel that she read two books about indigenous knowledge in order to have background information for the writing of her novel: *The Way We Lived: California Indian Reminiscences, Stories, and Songs* (1993), edited by Malcolm Margolin and *Original Accounts of the Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island* (1961), edited by Robert F. Heizer and Albert B. Elasser (Hegland, Acknowledgments).

The first book is an overview of the way Californian Native Americans lived, using indigenous songs and stories to illustrate different aspects of Native lives from birth to death, tackling topics such as growing up, finding love or the aliveness of the world. It is not focused on food but does include the description of many rituals as well as the different relationships the Californian Natives had with the earth and the forest around them. This book also highlights several times the crucial role of acorn in Californian Indians' diet, and how their eating habits was shaped by their knowledge of the forest. In Hegland's novel, acorns become one of the main food Eva and Nell eat, as they are nutritious and can be found everywhere in the forest. The sisters had never realized that they lived surrounded by food, acorns being very abundant.

The second book is a collection of testimonies from the crew that found an Indigenous woman on the island of San Nicolas, California, eighteen years after she was abandoned there. It includes suppositions of how the woman survived all those years based on observations, as no one is able to speak her language. She died several weeks after having been brought back to California, some suspect it is because of the diet, and others because she lost the hope of finding the rest of her tribe. The story of the lone women of San Nicolas is mentioned several times in *Into the Forest* and has an impact on the story. It is when she learns about the Indian's story that Nell first realizes that "there will be no rescue" (148), and that their fate would probably be similar to hers and result in death if they keep hoping for help from someone else than themselves. This makes her rethink their future. Her story is also Nell's inspiration and what gives her strength when she needs to kill the wild boar in order to feed her pregnant sister. This is really difficult for her but thinking about the Native American woman's survival brings her faith in herself. Finally, it is also by thinking of the lone women and other strong

indigenous women that Nell realizes that Eva needs to give birth in the forest and not in their house, to be connected to nature.

Those books about Native Americans' lifestyle were an important source of knowledge for Hegland when she was writing the book, and it appears in her novel. Indeed, within the story, her characters survive when they find written knowledge about Indians. Nell first learns about them through her encyclopedias, then about their food in *Native Plants of Northern California*, and finally about their lifestyle and myths in "an anthropologist's collection of stories, songs, and interviews from indigenous Californians" (178). This last book can be assumed to be Margolin's *The Way We Lived: California Indian Reminiscences, Stories, and Songs*. The Index of the encyclopedias and the two books about indigenous food and lifestyle are the ones Nell decides to take with her in the end of the novel. She chooses them for Burl, Eva's son, and saves them from their burning house to take to the stump where they will settle in. Eva and Nell's relationship to food and the rituals they create around it are heavily influenced by Native Americans' history.

One of *Into the Forest*'s specificities is the fact that the characters do not experience a sudden catastrophe. In *The Road*, the clocks abruptly stop, and in *The Year of the Flood* the pandemic kills everyone in just a few days. In Hegland's novel, the electricity takes months to completely disappear, the dad slowly stops going to work, the family stops making trips to town. Nothing happens that forces them to question their lifestyle from one day to the next, they have some time to adapt, and this is crucial for the diet they adopt. Eva and Nell gradually develop new skills and learn about the forest step by step. They start by finishing the food in their pantry, then use their garden, and only towards the end of the novel do they discover everything that is edible in the forest and realize they have lived in abundance of food since their birth. This time to adapt is a luxury that none of the characters in the other novels have and that questions the reader regarding their own food habits.

Another major aspect that is unique to *Into the Forest* is also the fact that at the end of the novel Eva and Nell willingly choose to adopt their new lifestyle. To make sure they never go back to their pre-catastrophe and consumerist lifestyle, they decide to burn their house. In Atwood's novel, the Gardeners hope to extend their own old lifestyle to the rest of the world. They do not dream of going back to the same world that existed before the Waterless Flood on a planetary scale, but at the scale of their community, they

intend to rebuild the same lifestyle. They aim at building a society centered around food from the earth that respects the non-human living world. In McCarthy's novel it is safe to assume that the man and the boy would prefer to go back to a world where they did not live in the constant fear of starvation or of being eaten. However, as Eva says about hers and Nell's situation: "All this time we've been living in the past, waiting to back to the past. But the past is gone. It's dead. And it was wrong, anyway." (232). The girls do not wish to go back to their consumerist past. Hegland's writing also parallels the characters' evolution. The more Nell and Eva learn about the edible plants, roots, leaves and nuts around them, the more Hegland's descriptions become precise, and her vocabulary gets richer. The author's writing is transformed from simple sentences and descriptions of the forest at the beginning of the novel, to clear and complete paragraphs about everything that is around the sisters, and the abundance of food that surrounds them.

From being a driving force for social cohesion, being a symbol of beliefs, a link to the past, or to nature and the wilderness, food carries unique roles in the three novels. Based on the elements highlighted in this chapter, the next chapters will delve into the inner values the characters have regarding food and rituals in the three scarcity narratives, and how their perception of time evolves.

Chapter 2: Hungry ethics: food scarcity and characters' values

“Spare your fellow Creatures! Do not eat anything with a face! Do not kill your own Soul!”
(Atwood, 48).

In this excerpt of Atwood's dystopian novel *The Year of the Flood*, Adam One, the leader of the God's Gardeners, protests in front of a SecretBurger fast food. He wants to spread his message and his own values: humans should be vegetarian. Eating is made of constant choices and carries a message. Whether one chooses to eat some animals and not others, or none at all, or to eat certain types of food on certain days, food becomes filled with values. Food choices and the values they carry depend on cultures, religions, or personal beliefs, for instance. They are also influenced by the environment and contexts in which people evolve. When the surroundings change, such as in dystopian novels, one's values are challenged.

In her essay *Sitopia*, Steel explains that eating implies a value judgment. Humans chose to value their life above, for instance, the life of a leek or of a lamb. Every meal implies a choice. However, humans do not have to question what food to eat every single day, as “our ancestors did all the hard work for us (...) by creating the framework within which we still eat today. The complex array of rules, habits, skills, knowledge, dos and don'ts that they've handed down to us is what we call food culture” (27-28). This food culture and these food choices depend on where people live, their religious beliefs, etc. They remain quite constant throughout time. In *Eating Animals*, Foer writes that “food ethics are so complex because food is bound to both taste buds and taste, to individual biographies and social histories” (32). Foer explores the food choices of western cultures and insists on the fact that it is a social construct. Some food that would never be eaten today in western countries is eaten in other parts of the world, or was eaten in the same countries centuries ago. Steel adds that occasionally “a crisis can override even the strictest norms” (28). She develops the example of Sir John Franklin's expedition of 1845, which aimed at finding the North-West Passage. The ship got stuck in the ice, and the “crew became so desperate that some resorted to cannibalism” (Ibid.). Similar moments of crises are part of what construct the worlds of Atwood's, McCarthy's, and Hegland's novels, and lead to some changes in the characters' values and food culture.

This chapter focuses first on the values and food choices of the characters in *The Year of the Flood*, *The Road* and *Into the Forest* in their pre-apocalyptic worlds. It then delves into the tensions, dilemmas, and new food choices the characters make in their respective dystopic and post-catastrophe environments. Cannibalism, a practice present to a certain extent in the three novels, is then developed, before concluding with an analysis of the gratitude experienced by the characters. Investigating the values carried by food in the three novels can allow for new interpretations of the role of food in the three scarcity narratives.

Values before the catastrophes

In their pre-apocalyptic life, the characters of Atwood, McCarthy and Hegland's novels have different values and ethics that influence their food choices. *The Year of the Flood* is the only novel out of the three which explains in detail that moment, as Atwood switches between timelines. In the novel, the community of the God's Gardeners has made the choice not to eat fellow-creature or "anything with a face" (48). Atwood's writing expresses the Gardeners' sense of equality between humans and other living creatures such as animals and plants. When she writes a speech given by Adam One, or the songs sung by the community, she capitalizes the names of the humans and the non-human living creatures. This is a symbol of respect, to show how living creatures are valued: "Dear Friends, Fellow Mortals, Fellow Creatures: (...) For this Feast we traditionally feature the Zucchini, a Serpent-shaped vegetable." (279). In this excerpt, Atwood designates as equals the Friends, the Mortals, the Creatures, the Feast, the Zucchini, and the Serpent. This eco-centric attitude is not present in *The Road*, in which there are no more living creatures as the ecosystems are destroyed. In *Into the Forest*, the main characters develop gradually a respect close to the God's Gardeners' regarding their environment, however, Hegland does not express it in her text as strongly and visually as Atwood does.

When members enter the Gardeners' community, they take the "Vegivows" and promise to remain vegetarian. Not only do they believe in equity between living creatures, but they also intend to help the earth through their lifestyle:

“By covering such barren rooftops with greenery we are doing our small part in the redemption of God’s Creation from the decay and sterility that lies all around us, and feeding ourselves with unpolluted food into the bargain. Some would term our efforts futile, but if all were to follow our example, what a change would be wrought on our beloved Planet!” (13).

In this excerpt, Atwood decides as well to put a capital letter on the word “Planet” to express its importance and the respect the Gardeners have towards it. Capital letters are often used to qualify God. By capitalizing other elements the same way, Atwood treats them equally to God. It is important to notice that those capital letters are only present when the text is a direct speech from some Gardeners, such as Adam One or Pilar. They are the ones who are older and have the most faith in the community’s beliefs. In the direct speeches of other characters, their thoughts, or the description of scenes, Atwood does not capitalize any common nouns.

Toby and Ren adopt the community’s diet, at first more out of conformity than true intrinsic belief in their principles. Adopting the Gardeners diet is a necessity to be part of the collective, as their vision of food is a central pillar of their principles. Toby enters the community because she is fleeing from the violence and regular rape of her boss Blanco. The Gardeners save her from her dangerous life, and she is grateful for it. However, she initially sometimes misses meat: “For one thing, she was swept with periodic but shameful cravings for animal protein. “You ever feel like eating a SecretBurger?” she asked Rebecca.” (56). Regardless of those cravings, she never eats meat while she is with the Gardeners. The cravings go away with time, as it can be assumed that the community’s beliefs start to be anchored deeper in her mind. Ren joins the God’s Gardeners as a little girl, when her mother starts to have a relationship with Zeb, one of the Gardeners, and decides to leave her Compound to move with him. The Compounds are the secluded and technologically advanced communities where the richer parts of the population live. At first, Ren wishes to go back to the Compound for several reasons, including because “[she] couldn’t remember ever being hungry at the HelthWyzer Compound.” (79). However, nothing indicates that the Gardeners do not have enough to eat, quite the opposite, as their garden is abundant with food. Atwood’s sentence can thus be understood to mean that Ren struggles to adopt the Gardeners’ diet at first and does not eat everything that she is given.

With time, both characters start to fully embrace the Gardeners' lifestyle and food choices. They respect the Vegievows, celebrate the Saints, participate in the feasts, pray, etc. For instance, Toby is offended when she is offered to drink a Happicuppa when she is undercover with Zeb, fleeing again from her violent rapist Blanco. Happicuppa is a high street coffee chain that uses genetically modified coffee beans that ripe simultaneously, which improves its rentability and threw small coffee growers out of business: "'We're drinking Happicuppa?'" said Toby. 'Genmod, sun-grown, sprayed with poisons? It kills birds, it ruins peasants — we all know that.'" (221). However, she still drinks it out of hedonism: "She'd forgotten how delicious they could be. She drank it in sips: it could be years before she got another, if she ever did get one." (Ibid). Through Atwood's words it is evident that deep down, Toby knows that it is against the Gardeners' values, but she decides that her instant pleasure and her desire for its taste are more important. She also allows herself to do so because she is undercover and alone with Zeb, and probably would not have drunk it if she was surrounded by Gardeners. Atwood's choices of words could also be understood to be an exaggeration, almost some irony from Toby's part.

Once she leaves the community, Ren is not able to eat meat right away. After all, she spent years at the God's Gardeners and their values are anchored deeply in her mind since her childhood. In her first day back at school in the Compound, she says that: "it still smelled like meat. Amanda would've eaten the bacon to show she hadn't been brainwashed by the leaf-eaters, but I couldn't go that far. I peeled the bun off my WyzeBurger and tried to eat that, but it stank of dead animal." (257). Those habits of not eating meat or processed food are rooted too deeply in the characters' behavior for them to change quickly or be consumed without guilt.

The food the characters of *The Road* and *Into the Forest* ate in their pre-apocalyptic lives can be assumed to be quite similar to one another, and to our current consumption habits. McCarthy does not explain much about the situation of the father and the son before the unnamed catastrophe, as opposed to Atwood's novel which constantly switches between timelines. Hegland, for her part, describes the past life of Eva and Nell in more detail. In both novels, it can be assumed that the characters used to buy their food in abundant supermarkets, not specifically storing anything, and used to celebrate traditional holidays such as Christmas or birthdays.

But how do all those diets and food choices change after the system collapses? Can Toby and Ren still survive without eating a fellow living creature and avoid processed food? Do they keep celebrating through feasts? What moral choices do Eva, Nell, the man, and the boy encounter when there are no supermarkets left to provide unlimited food? And how is it transcribed by the author and their writing styles?

Tensions in literature of scarcity

In dystopian literature, the characters' previous values, ethics, and food choices are challenged, as catastrophes force them to transform their lifestyles. After the Waterless Flood, the God's Gardeners' face multiple dilemmas and tensions related to food choices. One key aspect of the community's values is their Vegivows. They refuse to kill and eat a fellow creature. In order to respect that food choice, they live out of their garden. However, while preparing for the Waterless Flood, the Gardeners already realize that they might have to bend their beliefs in times of scarcity: "I [Ren] had a faint memory of meat-eating, back at the HelthWyzer Compound. But the Gardeners were very much against it except in times of crisis, so the idea of putting a chunk of bloody muscle and gristle into my mouth and pushing it down inside my throat was nauseating." (158). *The Year of the Flood* has the particularity of being a dystopian novel in which the characters anticipate the catastrophe and prepare for it, and that includes regarding their values. This is very different than in the other two novels. Indeed, although the Gardeners live in a strict vegetarianism, they try to get their mind ready to change that diet if needed. In their teachings before the Flood, the eco-community prepares its members to potentially eat their fellow living-creatures should starvation arise. However, as shown in the writing of the excerpt above, this is not easy for the characters. By describing the little piece of meat as "a chunk of bloody muscle and gristle", Atwood indicates the disgust Ren feels about meat, and the mental difficulty it is for her to eat something that lays outside of her normal diet of the time.

When the Flood hits, Toby starts living out of what she stored before, but very early in the novel, in the very first pages, she already questions her relationship to meat: "Maybe they'll generate fish, somehow. When the pool is more like a swamp. Is she thinking of eating these theoretical future fish? Surely not. Surely not yet." (5). With the

word “yet”, Atwood implies that if needed, Toby might be ready to eat another living creature. Since she still has food in her garden and her storage, Toby has yet to take the step of eating meat and thus going against her now deepest values. However, she knows that it might be something she will have to do if starvation comes. She also faces a dilemma when she sees that the Pigeons threaten her garden, and thus her sustainable food resource. She hesitates to kill them as she believes they are living creatures equal to her, but the need to keep her garden in order to survive in this collapsed world finally takes over:

“They’ve found the garden fence, they’re looking in. Then one of them begins to dig. They’ll tunnel under. (...) She holds one of the pigs in the scope — the boar, an easy shot, he’s sideways — but then she hesitates. They’re God’s Creatures. Never kill without just cause, said Adam One. (...) They’re a quarter of the way across the meadow when it occurs to her they’ll be back. They’ll dig under at night and root up her garden in no time flat, and that will be the end of her long-term food supply. She’ll have to shoot them, it’s self-defence. She squeezes off a round, misses, tries again. The boar falls down.” (21-22).

In this scene, Toby realizes even more that she is close to animals. Both the pigs and her are “God’s Creatures”. However, she still feels both like prey and like predator. She has the power to kill them, and she does it, but at the same time they have the power to kill her by destroying her food resource, which they do later in the novel. A threat from a non-human living creature is unique to Atwood’s novel. In *The Road*, there are no other living creatures than humans, and in *Into the Forest*, the sisters live in harmony with their environment and its animals.

In Atwood’s dystopian world, Toby’s previous values of never killing a living creature becomes lower in her hierarchy than preserving her garden and having a sustainable source of food. It is now less important, and something she would never have imagined doing before the Waterless Flood becomes a necessity for her own survival. She now puts her life above the one of another living creature. Scarcity makes her reconsider her beliefs. Self-defense is also a reason to kill that the Gardeners have not anticipated. In their preparation for the Waterless Flood, they imagined having to kill to eat, because of starvation, but never once does Atwood write about them preparing to kill a living creature to defend themselves.

Later in *The Year of the Flood*, Toby starts to eat animals regularly. When her garden is destroyed by the Pigoons, and her stored food starts to be critically empty, Toby leaves her safe place to go to the dead pig she killed a few days ago. Food is the driving force behind her decisions. There, she takes maggots from the carcass: “With the other hand she pokes at the dead boar with her stick: maggots boil forth. They’re like giant grey rice. Just think of them as land shrimp, (...) She scoops up the twirling white maggots with the spoon and transfers them to the plastic snap-on.” (394). From then on, Toby eats meat everyday: “She’s up on the roof, cooking her daily portion of land shrimp in the cool of the morning. (...) Rich in lipids, a good source of protein. How do you think bears get so fat?” (418-419). Her pragmatic values take over her emotional ones. She needs it to survive, even if the core beliefs of the Gardeners are still anchored into her habits. She gets used to eating smaller animals like maggots, but it is still hard when it comes to bigger portions of red meat: “The dog skins are laid aside, the meat’s cut up and put into a pot. Toby feels a little sick. But she also feels hungry.” (472). Atwood’s writing makes the reader understand Toby’s internal conflicts between her ethics and nourishing herself. Hunger is a powerful driver, which leads the characters to adapt their values to the survival context. Adam One himself states in one of his speeches that “there are times when the rules must bend” (444). In fact, he eats rats at the beginning of the flood, when hidden with other members of the community. By having the leader of the God’s Gardeners eating an animal, Atwood really shows how scarcity has the power to make one act against their deepest values. However, only in her novel do the main characters act so drastically against their beliefs. In *The Road*, the man and the boy refuse to change their diet by eating other humans, even if they are on the verge of death several times, and in *Into the Forest*, the sisters adopt gradually new beliefs and do not eat anything reluctantly.

Ren had started to have difficulties because of her previous Vegivows as soon as she left the God’s Gardeners, before the Waterless Flood. Since she had already spent years outside the community when the Flood hits, it is easier for her to eat meat than for Toby or other Gardeners. Although she explains several times that she still has difficulty with it, by the end of the novel she fully accepts that meat needs to be part of diet if she wants to survive: “We can smell the smoke from their fire, and another smell: charred meat. I realize how hungry I am: I can feel myself drooling.” (499). Atwood does not use

any words that imply that the character questions her meal because it is meat: she is just hungry.

Related to the characters' need to reconsider their Vegivows and their relationships with other living creatures is their attitude towards other members of the community. Both Ren and Toby believe at first that they are the only survivors of the pandemic. When they find each other, Toby directly takes care of Ren as she is sick and wounded. However, Toby briefly considers killing Ren because she represents a threat to her food supply:

“This is going to be a lot of work, thinks Toby. And when Ren recovers — if she recovers — there will be two people eating instead of one. So the food stash will be gone twice as quickly. What’s left of it. Which isn’t much. Maybe the fever will get the better of Ren. Maybe she’ll die in her sleep. Toby considers the powdered Death Angels. It wouldn’t take much. Just a little, in Ren’s weakened condition. Put her out of her misery. Help her to fly away on white, white wings. Maybe it would be kinder. A blessing. I am an unworthy person, Toby thinks. Merely to have such an idea.” (427-428).

As seen in Atwood’s writing, Toby quickly blames herself for having had such thoughts and after that moment, Toby never thinks of killing Ren again, or any other Gardeners. She protects her constantly, she makes sure Ren eats even when she doesn’t want to, and cooks for her. Food in the scene is at the center of tensions between what Gilligan considers as two approaches of her ethics of care theory. Toby initially imagines solving her food problem with an approach of “ethics of justice” (Edwards, 232), which consists in viewing her problem rationally and drawing conclusions weighing pros and cons. If she had opted for this approach, Toby would have given Death Angels to Ren, thus keeping her meager food supplies for herself. However, she chooses Gilligan’s second approach, an “ethics of care” (Ibid.). This approach emphasizes the importance of the “the nature of the relationships between those involved in the problem.” (Ibid.). Due to the past life they have shared, Toby decides to nurture Ren back to health, regardless of the threat she represents for her food supplies. It is important to notice that, for Toby, food before the Waterless Flood had always been associated with sharing, with the collective, with feasts, and much more. Starvation radically changes that relationship, as she even considers doing such a selfish and terrible act as killing someone from her own former community to keep food for herself.

Ren also considers killing former Gardeners when they join her at Scales and Tails, the sex club she used to work at and in which she took shelter. She is scared of them being violent because they spent some time in the Painball arena. She considers locking them up in the room they are sleeping in and running away. However, she does not do it precisely because, as her friend Amanda reminds her: “They’re old Gardeners.” “Which means? I [Ren] said. “Which means they’re our friends.” (402). Although they felt initially threatened by others in the dystopian context of scarcity, once Toby and Ren find a community of former God’s Gardeners, now called the MaddAddams, they never show the slightest lack of trust. The first thing the community does is offer Toby some food: “Now come on in the kitchen, eat something. Tell me where you’ve been.” (470). By writing that, Atwood turns food into a symbol of hospitality again. The MaddAddams have a garden, but the characters are still in a dystopic environment and food is scarce, it is therefore generous of them to offer food so quickly. By making sharing a meal with Toby and Ren the first act of the community, food, which was viewed since the beginning of the Flood as mostly functional and necessary for survival, now reclaims a deeper significance: they are now part of a collective again. Sharing a meal can often be a ritual of hospitality, mutual aid, or support, as it is also the case in the other two novels. In this food scene, the shared meal adds value to the eating moment and makes it regain a sense of social cohesion and shared intimacy.

Now that Toby has access to the food from the MaddAddams and that she is part of a community again, she regains some of her previous ethics, such as her generosity by giving part of her food to the ones in need. For instance, she shares food with the violent Painballers that kidnapped and raped Ren’s friend Amanda: “Toby says the bone soup has boiled enough. She adds the mustard greens I collected, waits a minute, then ladles out. We’ve got only two cups — we’ll have to take turns, she says. “Not them too?” said Amanda. She won’t look at the Painballers. “Yes,” said Toby. “Them too. This is Saint Julian and All Souls.” (514-515). It can be assumed that she would not have been generous as such with strangers if she was still surviving on her limited resources in the AnooYoo building. Atwood also shows that she justifies her act by mentioning the Saint that the Gardeners celebrate on that day, to emphasize that once Toby’s food supply is secured and she no longer lives in fear of starvation, she is able to bring back generosity and social cohesion to food.

In McCarthy's *The Road*, the characters face one initial but crucial dilemma related to food: the ethical choice to reject cannibalism. They intend to maintain some of the same values in their collapsed world as they did in their pre-apocalyptic life. However, the destroyed ecosystem leading to food scarcity prevents them from maintaining the same diet as they presumably had in the past. They thus make the influential choice of keeping eating industrial remains rather than adopting a new food culture by eating other humans. This specific decision is developed in the following section: "Cannibalism".

One scene that illustrates the attachment the man and the boy have to their values from the past, even in their new reality, is when they find a bunker. Indeed, in the midst of their harsh and restless route, they find a bunker packed with canned food, filled with "the richness of a vanished world" (147). Their temporary safe shelter abounds with food from the past. In it, McCarthy describes one of their evenings as if they were not living in his dystopian burned land:

"They ate a sumptuous meal by candlelight. Ham and green beans and mashed potatoes with biscuits and gravy. He'd found four quarts of bonded whiskey still in the paper bags in which they'd been purchased and he drank a little of it in a glass with water. It made him dizzy before he'd even finished it and he drank no more. They ate peaches and cream over biscuits for dessert and drank coffee. The paper plates and plastic tableware he dumped in a trash-bag. Then they played checkers and then he put the boy to bed." (162).

McCarthy stages an evening that is from a life that should be gone: their meal, drinking whiskey, putting waste in the trash, playing games, or sleeping in a bed. All those elements do not belong anymore in his devastated world. All those ingredients are an unrealistic luxury in the burned landscape in which they evolve. Consumerist elements such as paper bags, plates, tableware, or trash bags appear odd in a world where they no longer have any use since people do not cook or share a meal anymore. Food represents the past, and the man and the boy recreate a ritualistic celebratory meal composed of several dishes, special drinks, and a dessert. The meal carries values of union, care, and celebration. For once, they eat together somewhere safe and warm. The meal even evokes a religious ceremony, as the boy gives thanks before eating in a form of prayer, as it will be developed later in this chapter. The bunker fulfills both their body and their mind. It appears in their journey almost as a divine reward for their decision not to eat other humans.

However, the man and the boy still decide to leave the bunker. As Fledderjohan mentions, they need their rituals to survive: “The comfort of using the supplies to sustain an alternative way is not compelling enough to separate them from the ritual of the journey” (Fledderjohann, 52). They need their daily rituals, they need to look for food together every day, walking towards what they hope will be a better life. He also adds that: “Later when McCarthy refers to them as being "filthy as street addicts" he raises the possibility that their dependence on the rhythms provided by this journey has become an unintermittible compulsion, unbreakable by even the richest windfalls of discovered goods” (Ibid.). It can thus be safely assumed that their constant search for food is more than functional but conveys a deeper ritualistic meaning necessary for their survival. Those rituals keep them alive, it nourishes their life, it gives them a sense of structure. It also strengthens their relationship and maintains them connected to the past.

Moreover, the man and the boy are confronted several times with a dilemma: whether to share food with strangers or not. In their previous life, they might have done so without necessarily questioning their action. However, in a world in which every little piece of food is a matter of survival, sharing one’s own food with strangers becomes dangerous. The man intends to maintain some ethical choices from the old world, but sharing food is a challenging one for him. The boy, however, gets very upset when the man refuses to help others: “Cant we help him? Papa?

No. We cant help him.

The boy kept pulling at his coat. Papa? he said.

Stop it.

Cant we help him Papa?

No. We cant help him. There's nothing to be done for him.

They went on. The boy was crying. He kept looking back. (...) He looked at the boy but the boy had turned away and lay staring out at the river.

There's nothing we could have done.

He didnt answer.

He's going to die. We cant share what we have or we'll die too.” (51-53)

McCarthy’s writing transcribes how food reveals people’s choices and ethics. The boy’s intrinsic goodness is portrayed through his will to share. He has maintained his innocence, his kindness, and his will to help others even in this destroyed world, as a Christ and savior figure. However, this is a dangerous attitude in McCarthy’s world. The

man knows that and refuses to sacrifice their own food, and thus their survival, to help a stranger. In the characters' situation, sharing food does not transform a meal into a symbol of community-building, shared moment, hospitality, or other deeper meanings; food maintains its functional aspect. *The Road*'s ambivalence is that food in the novel is portrayed both for its functional aspect in the characters' survival, but also carries a role of social cohesion and altruism. The father is against sharing as he is practical and it would only mean less food for themselves. The boy adds a spiritual dimension to the act. He has compassion, empathy, and a deep sense of humanity. Helping others who are starving is necessary to him, regardless of the practical aspect of it. Sharing food is a concern in the three novels, but it is a matter of survival even greater in McCarthy's literary work.

By the end of the novel, the man asks the boy if he wants a story, but the boy refuses because those stories "are not true" because "in the stories we're always helping people and we don't help people." (286-287). The reader understands that the boy knows that the values and moral choices his father talks about in his stories are not the ones he actually carries in real life. In the stories, they help others and are generous, they are heroes for endangered strangers. In real life, the father refuses to share food with strangers on the road, regardless of what he says in his tales, and fights and flees strangers.

In *Into the Forest*, Eva and Nell's values are less drastically challenged, as they have more time to adapt to their new reality. Nonetheless, several situations occur which would probably have been different in their previous abundant life. One of the dilemmas they face is when Nell finds a piece of chocolate in a box in a drawer of her room. In a world in which chocolate could be bought any day by the kilo in a supermarket, it would not have been a luxury to find a chocolate kiss. Nell would probably not have raised any question and would have eaten the chocolate right away, or she even would have thrown it away because of its expiry date. In their new scarce reality, chocolate becomes a rare luxury. Even later in the novel, when they start to live in symbiosis with the forest, the sisters cannot grow cocoa and make chocolate in North California, where they live. This chocolate kiss might thus be the last piece of chocolate Nell and Eva will ever be able to taste. Providing that, Nell starts to question what to do with the chocolate. She is torn between her own hedonism and instant pleasure and sharing it with her sister:

"I wanted to sit down on the floor of the room in which I had been a girl and stuff them all in my mouth at once, gum and chocolate together in a sweet, soft mass.

Then I remembered Eva, and for a second I wanted to run into her studio. But she had yet to forgive me for saving the gas. I stood weighing the kiss in my open palm. I remembered all the times she used to get angry with me when she saw me eating sweets.” (103).

Hegland describes her hesitation as an internal dialogue Nell has with an imaginary Eva. She imagines what her sister would say, and through the writer’s words, the reader understands that Nell is convincing herself that Eva would not eat the chocolate anyway. Therefore, she selfishly decides, moved by her desire for the sweet taste of chocolate, to eat the kiss without sharing it with Eva. This creates a fight between the girls that lasts several days. Maybe in their previous life, Eva would not have eaten the chocolate, but Nell fails to anchor this situation in their new reality. Cooperation disappears in the face of scarcity.

Another dilemma that the sisters face is the tension between saving something for the long term or consuming it right away. This occurs for the gas they find, but also for the last jar of tomatoes. Nell wants to save it for their nutritious need, but Eva does not see the reason for it: “I think we should save it,’ I said. ‘That jar of tomatoes is the only significant source of vitamin C we’ve got left.’ She gave me a withering glance and opened the pantry door, saying over her shoulder as she entered, ‘Save it for what—our funeral?’” (136). This disagreement results in the jar exploding on the floor and the girls left with no tomatoes at all. Food becomes a source of conflict in ways it had never been before. It is important to notice that Nell forgets about her attitude of saving everything and not sharing when her friend Eli comes to their isolated house to offer them to go to Boston with him. Based on Gilligan’s ethics of care theory, Nell initially chooses to adopt a justice of care approach and be rational about food. However, when Eli arrives, she favors their relationship in an ethics of care approach and the first thing she does is offering him food: “I asked, “Are you hungry?” and bent shyly over our little pots of food, scraping out more than his share onto a third plate.” (108). Here as well a meal becomes a symbol of hospitality, inclusion and care. All those dilemmas and changes of values are ones that Eva and Nell had never faced in their previous capitalist and abundant life, and scarcity encourages them to reconnect with the values of things.

Cannibalism

In narratives of scarcity, some have decided to use humans as a food resource to fight their starvation. In Atwood's novel, cannibalism is implied in several scenes, or mentioned explicitly a few times, including before the Waterless Flood. In McCarthy's, the world is destroyed to such an extent that cannibalism becomes the norm for lots of survivors. In *Into the Forest*, however, eating other humans is never considered. In those dystopian worlds, characters who had never thought of cannibalism before are now faced with the possibility of eating other humans. Confronted with their survival instincts, the relationship the characters have to food implies new drastically different ethical choices.

“‘Surely you wouldn't eat your own relatives.’ ‘I would’, Toby said, ‘if I was hungry enough.’” (49). This is the first dialogue Toby has with Adam One, at the very beginning of *The Year of the Flood*. In her novel, Atwood implies cannibalism several times, sometimes explicitly, such as in the excerpt above. However, the author writes about it mostly implicitly, as she blurs the lines between industrial and genetically modified food, and cannibalism. Quite early in the novel, the characters mention rumors about human bodies who would be blended into the meat used to make SecretBurgers. Toby describes it as such:

“The secret of SecretBurgers was that no one knew what sort of animal protein was actually in them (...) The meat grinders weren't 100 per cent efficient; you might find a swatch of cat fur in your burger or a fragment of mouse tail. Was there a human fingernail, once? It was possible. (...) They also ran corpse disposals, harvesting organs for transplant, then running the gutted carcasses through the SecretBurgers grinders. So went the worst rumours. During the glory days of Secret-Burgers, there were very few bodies found in vacant lots.” (40).

Atwood never explicitly writes that there are human bodies in the burgers, but her words let the reader easily imagine that there might be. Regardless of that, Ren and her friends still eat some of the burgers after the Waterless Flood. When on the run from the violent Painballers, she and her friends eat some SecretBurgers found in an empty supermarket to avoid starvation. They never question the possibility of the presence of human meat in it, they just wonder how to cook it: “It had soybeans and berries — we ate those right away — and frozen SecretBurger patties, six to a box. “How're we going to cook them?” asked Oates. “Lighters,” said Shackie. “See?” On the counter there was a rack of lighters

in the shape of frogs.” (406). Scarcity and the characters’ survival instincts prevent them from being critical about their food, hunger numbs their core principles.

Cannibalism is also implied through the existence of Pigoons. Pigoons are pigs with human cells transplanted in them: “He said it was an enhanced splice — MaddAddam had known about those — and that it had human brain tissue in it.” (497). Several times, Atwood describes the pigs with human characteristics. They seem to understand when they are threatened, or when someone eats meat in front of them. They also seem to have a funeral for the pig that Toby killed while defending her garden, which baffles her:

“There are fronds scattered about, on top of the boar’s carcass and beside it. Fern fronds. Such ferns don’t grow in the meadow. Some are old and dry and brown, some quite fresh. Also flowers. Are those rose petals, from the roses by the driveway? (...) But pigs? Usually they’d just eat a dead pig, the same way they’d eat anything else. But they haven’t been eating this one. Could the pigs have been having a funeral? Could they be bringing memorial bouquets? She finds this idea truly frightening.”. (393-394).

The author often describes them as smarter than normal pigs, as if they did indeed have part of a human brain in their cells. By having them bring fern fronds several times, as some are old and others are fresh, as well as flowers; by making them understand the concept of funerals, Atwood blurs the borders between humans and animals.

Providing that, it can be wondered if eating pigs in Atwood’s world is considered to be cannibalism. Bacon from Pigoons is one of the first things Toby eats when she arrives at the MaddAddams. Ironically, Rebecca, Toby’s friend who is offering her food, claims that she knows what is in the pig, as opposed to the burgers previously mentioned: “They have coffee — dandelion roots, roasted, Rebecca says proudly — and some baked burdock root with herbs, and a slice of — could it be cold pork? “Those pigs are a nuisance,” says Rebecca. “Too smart by half.” She eyes Toby challengingly. “Needs must when the devil drives,” she says. “Anyways, at least we know what’s in it — not like at SecretBurgers.” “It’s delicious,” Toby says truthfully.” (471). The MaddAddams have a garden in which food grows, they could thus decide to go back to the same ethical choices as they made in the former community of the Gardeners and be vegetarian. However, hunger and scarcity made them realize the crucial role of their garden and the fragility of

food abundance. They now realize that they need to protect the garden even if it means killing a fellow living creature such as the Pigoons. They also decide not to waste food, since they probably value it even more after realizing how quickly it can disappear and cook the pigs they kill.

Finally, Toby also mentions that the violent Painballers, the criminals locked away in an arena where they had to kill to survive, would sometimes eat their victim: “Some teams would hang their kill on a tree, some would mutilate the body. Cut off the head, tear out the heart and kidneys. That was to intimidate the other team. Eat part of it, if food was running low or just to show how mean you were” (118). It is the only scene in which Atwood describes explicitly a human eating another human. Once they find the body of one of Ren’s friends hanging from a tree, Atwood describes the mutilated body and writes: “But these kidneys wouldn’t have been stolen for transplants” (450). She does not explicitly mention cannibalism. However, the reader understands that the Painballers who have killed him have eaten the boy’s kidneys. In her book, Labudova describes the world outside the God’s Gardeners as filled with “cannibalistic desires [that] represent the rampant appetites of the hyper-consumer society” (77) and opposes the Gardeners peaceful lifestyle to this “cannibalistic violence and predator–prey brutality” (130).

Overall, in an environment in which there are still ways to grow food from the earth, hunt animals, or scavenger industrial food from supermarkets, cannibalism is not directly intended by the characters of Atwood’s novel, except the violent Painballers. However, after the Waterless Flood, the characters do not question eating processed food even if there are rumors of the presence of human parts in it. Ren eats SecretBurgers even if she knows the hearsay about human bodies in the grinders, and Toby and her also eat bacon from pigs who quite clearly have human characteristics. Hunger prevents them from thinking about such questions. In the context of scarcity, they do not take the time to interrogate the links between their values and ethical choices, and industrial and genetically modified food.

In *The Road*, cannibalism became a common diet for the “bad guys”. Instead of spending their lives searching every day for industrial food left from a once abundant world, some people have chosen to adapt to their new environment and eat humans. Several groups of people wander around looking for refugees such as the man and the boy, in order to steal from them and/or eat them. One night, they have a bad encounter with such a group moving around in a truck. The man ends up killing one of the marauder

and McCarthy describes his eaten body: “Coming back he found the bones and the skin piled together with rocks over them. A pool of guts. He pushed at the bones with the toe of his shoe. They looked to have been boiled” (73-74). In the excerpt, it can be understood that the marauders were hungry to the point that they would eat their companion. However, the fact that they put a rock on his skin can be seen as a form of respect towards him, as if they made some type of grave for the remains of his body. When the man pushes the boiled bones with his boot, he reduces them to vulgar objects, as if they were never part of a human beings. The scene is also an almost-graphic reminder of why the man and the boy need to hide and flee from the cannibals.

Other “bad guys” have more organized systems, with the aim of having food available at any time. For instance, the man and the boy hide one morning:

“(…) in time to see the marchers appear four abreast. Dressed in clothing of every description, all wearing red scarves at their necks. (...) They passed two hundred feet away, the ground shuddering lightly. Tramping. Behind them came wagons drawn by slaves in harness and piled with goods of war and after that the women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant, and lastly a supplementary consort of catamites illclothed against the cold and fitted in dogcollars and yoked each to each. All passed on.” (95-96).

Once again McCarthy writes simple sentences, but his rich vocabulary creates a terrifying scene in the readers’ mind. The marchers’ formation evokes an organized and hierarchical society, with their scarves symbolizing their affiliation. The tramping of their feet underlines an oppressive atmosphere. The slaves in harness suggests a disturbing disregard for human life and dignity, enhanced by the pregnant women whose unborn child will probably serve as either slave or food. Finally, the “consort of catamites” implies dehumanized individuals, treated like animals, and which captures a sense of degradation and despair that lingers long after reading. Scarcity has completely transformed the values of the “bad guys”, as they adapted their diet to what is left in the dystopian world: humans. The “bad guys” are the characters out of the three novels whose diet and ethics associated with it change the most radically.

Refusing to become one of those “bad guys”, the man and the boy try to maintain the same values as in the pre-apocalyptic world. They are the “good guys” who do not eat humans. They also do not want to be eaten and would rather die than suffer the same fate

as the slaves who only live to be eaten. Cannibalism represents an extreme behavior that strips individuals of their humanity to the point that the father is willing to make unthinkable choices, such as teaching the boy how to kill himself in case he was caught: “He took the boy's hand and pushed the revolver into it. Take it, he whispered. Take it. The boy was terrified. He put his arm around him and held him. His body so thin. Don't be afraid, he said. If they find you you are going to have to do it. Do you understand? Shh. No crying. Do you hear me? You know how to do it. You put it in your mouth and point it up. Do it quick and hard. Do you understand? Stop crying. Do you understand?” (119). This is yet another terrifying image McCarthy creates for the reader: a world in which a father has to teach his own son how to commit suicide because of food. The man also reminds himself several times that if they are caught by the “bad guys”, he should kill his son: “Can you do it? When the time comes? When the time comes there will be no time. Now is the time. Curse God and die. What if it doesn't fire? It has to fire. What if it doesn't fire? Could you crush that beloved skull with a rock? Is there such a being within you of which you know nothing? Can there be? Hold him in your arms. Just so. The soul is quick. Pull him toward you. Kiss him. Quickly.” (120). With concise sentences, the author immerses the reader in the man's painful and long questioning, that no father should ever have to ask himself.

This constant threat of becoming food is also why the mother decided to commit suicide. McCarthy describes the last conversation she had with the man, in which she says: “Sooner or later they will catch us and they will kill us. They will rape me. They'll rape him. They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you won't face it. You'd rather wait for it to happen. But I can't. I can't.” (58). The mother's plain explanation of this new reality makes the reader question if her choice might not be the right one to make. Is it really worth it to live as prey during one's entire life? The mother decided that the answer was ‘no’, and McCarthy's awful depiction of the man and the boy's life might prove her right.

Cannibalism becomes a symbol of the new power dynamic exerted in *The Road*. The man and the boy decide to maintain their ethics and continue eating industrial food instead of adapting to their new reality. The “bad guys”, motivated by values of power and security, have adopted this new diet even if it dehumanizes them. However, while the “bad guys” have human flesh, which can be qualified as “functional” food, it lacks the social and sacrificial role of the boy and the man's food (Matiu, 53). Indeed, the boy and

the father maintain social cohesion as they are always together when they look for remains of industrial food, they cook it together, and the father sometimes leaves his own food to his son. Matiu states that cannibalism “symbolize[s] both the end of consumerism, of capitalism, of the world as we know it, and also serve[s] as a social label which distinguishes between the members of the powerful, the dominating class (the cannibals, the slave masters) and the weak, always-on-the-run “good guys”, promoters of humanity and supporters of a society based on mutual respect and love” (54). By refusing to eat other humans, the man and the boy live in constant terror, but maintain their humanity. McCarthy highlights the power food has on one’s core values, identity, and even humanity.

In *Into the Forest*, cannibalism is never mentioned. Eva and Nell never consider eating each other, or other humans. When they begin to eat the last of things in their pantry, the sisters start to grow a garden. Due to the time they have to adapt to their new world, Eva and Nell fear starvation, but never actually starve, as they always find a new food resource. This is probably one of the reasons why they never have to think about cannibalism. When Eli talks about Boston, he mentions that “Many, many people died from starvation or exposure or disease.” (122) but does not talk about people trying to avoid starvation by eating other humans. It can be assumed that if he had heard about that, he would have said it, as it would be shocking. The life and diet Hegland chooses for Eva and Nell is inspired by the way Indigenous people used to live. They go back to being connected with nature and the earth, and there is no trace of those tribes being involved with cannibalistic practices, as they had an abundant source of food within the forest. Cannibalism is not mentioned in: *The Way We Lived: California Indian Reminiscences, Stories, and Songs* or *Original Accounts of the Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island*, the author’s inspirations.

The three novels clearly highlight that cannibalism is linked with the ecosystems, and that humans resort to it when they think they do not have another choice. Both in *The Year of the Flood* and in *Into the Forest*, the characters have the option of growing food from the earth. They can find sustainability through tending gardens or wilderness. The man and the boy in *The Road* do not have that possibility. Because of that, McCarthy’s world becomes one in which a significant part of the population decides to become cannibals. It is the only novel in which this is the case. McCarthy illustrates the links between food, humanity, and power dynamics. In the novel, the “bad guys” have adapted

their values to the new world they live in and become the dominant class by having slave farms and almost unlimited food. The man and the boy decide to keep the values they have from their old world and refuse to become cannibals. This creates for them a life where they are always on the run, and in which they constantly fear starvation or being eaten.

Gratitude

Scarcity often makes humans realize what they do not have and makes them value what they do have, specifically regarding food. When almost nothing is left, each ingredient is regarded as a luxury. For that reason, literature of scarcity can easily be linked with the concept of gratitude. As they evolve in environments in which food is rare, the characters of Atwood's, McCarthy's and Hegland's novels experience different attitudes towards food in terms of gratitude.

In *The Year of the Flood*, the God's Gardeners express gratitude towards food already before the Waterless Flood, and they are the only characters out of the three novels to do so. Through their rituals, they thank God and the earth every day. When animals give them food, such as the bees for instance, they thank them: "Pilar and Toby had finished the honey extraction and Pilar was thanking the hive and the queen for their co-operation" (126). Indeed, they realize the hard work making honey requires, it does not just appear on the shelves of a store. They have the same attitude when they eat eggs and thank the creature who has laid them: "Adam One said that eggs were potential Creatures, but they weren't Creatures yet: a nut was not a Tree. Did eggs have souls? No, but they had potential souls. So not a lot of Gardeners did egg-eating, but they didn't condemn it either. You didn't apologize to an egg before joining its protein to yours, though you had to apologize to the mother pigeon, and thank her for her gift." (161). They also give thanks to the dead people and animals, as they are composted and transformed into dirt in which food will grow. In one of his speeches, Adam One says: "When next you hold a handful of moist compost, say a silent prayer of thanks to all of Earth's previous Creatures. Picture your fingers giving each and every one of them a loving squeeze. For they are surely here with us, ever present in that nourishing matrix." (193). They are grateful for the plants, the animals, and everything else the earth gives them as food. They value it and express their gratitude individually, as well as collectively through

songs, prayers, and speeches. The community and their lifestyle are a utopia like the one described by Steel.

Atwood's novel is interpolated with hymns, sung by the Gardeners. They always follow a speech given by Adam One, and celebrate a Saint, non-human living creatures, or retells in a biblical manner the history of the community. The songs spread messages that are at the core beliefs of the God's Gardeners group and are part of their identity. It celebrates their responsibility towards the earth, their vegetarianism, their egalitarian relationships with animals and plants, their religious devotion, etc. Singing poems is one major food ritual in the Gardeners' community. It is collective, intergenerational, a shared experience that reinforces social cohesion while also being didactic. Moreover, the hymns form a ceremony that honors food and elevate it to a sacred and spiritual moment, and reinforce the idea that food is not only a source of physical nourishment but also a symbolic representation of the Gardeners' values and beliefs.

After the Waterless Flood, the Gardeners maintain some rituals, such as being thankful for the food they have, even in scarcity. Members of the community who are still alive gather together in a shelter in which they had stocked food in anticipation, for which they also express their gratitude:

“Let us give thanks for this Ararat in which we have been sheltering over the past months. (...) But we are blessed that so many of our Rat relatives have donated their protein to us, thus enabling us to remain on this Earthly plane. It is also fortunate that Pilar had built an Ararat in this very cellar, hidden behind a concrete block marked with a tiny bee symbol. How providential that so many of her supplies retained their freshness! Though unhappily not all. But these resources are now exhausted, and we must either move or starve.” (413-414).

They are grateful for a human-made shelter and the food stored in it, as well as to have access to meat from their “Rat relatives”. Indeed, in starvation they need to break their Vegievow and eat animals that they consider as their equal, as shown by Atwood's choice of putting a capital letter at the word “Rat”. However, the food stored by humans is in limited amount, and they now have to move. This will be the case until they build a garden again and have an unlimited supply of food. Both before and after the Waterless Flood, the Gardeners have rituals of thanking God and the earth for the food available to them. Those rituals and the values they carry do not completely change in times of scarcity,

although they used to thank the earth for the plants and insist on their vegetarianism, they now thank the animals for their proteins, and humans for the shelter they created.

The Gardeners continue to pray and sing the Saints together, but it is not mentioned that they do so around a feast. Food continues to carry some symbolic function and they keep having rituals, but it is not abundant anymore. The meals and ingredients central to those rituals have changed, but the rituals themselves remain similar. It can be assumed that they use the little food they have in the same way as they did when they had a lot: as a collective spiritual symbol to express their gratitude to God, the Earth, and the Saints.

Before rejoining a community, when they are alone, Atwood does not write about Toby or Ren expressing gratitude for the food they have. Toby does not thank the earth for the garden she tends, nor does Ren say or think anything for having food in Scales and Tails. However, Atwood writes one scene in which Toby decides to open her last jar of honey because she needs comfort after having suicidal thoughts:

“To cheer herself up, she opens her jar of honey. It’s the last one remaining from the honey she extracted so long ago — she and Pilar — up on the Edencliff Rooftop. She’s been saving it all these years as if it’s a protective charm. (...) She swallows one fragrant spoonful, then another. It was hard work collecting that honey: the smoking of the hives, the painstaking removal of the combs, the extracting. It took delicacy and tact. The bees had to be spoken to and persuaded, not to mention temporarily gassed, and sometimes they’d sting, but in her memory the whole experience is one of unblemished happiness. She knows she’s deceiving herself about that, but she prefers to deceive herself. She desperately needs to believe such pure joy is still possible.”. (115)

Toby does not explicitly thank anyone for this jar of honey. However, through Atwood’s words the reader understands the hard work making honey takes and can assume that Toby is grateful for that work to be done for her own pleasure, and that she realizes it with each spoon she eats.

In *The Road*, gratitude is less present than in the two other novels. The man and the boy do not have a lot to be thankful for in their situation. They spend days starving, scared to be eaten, cold and threatened by forest fires. However, there is one scene in

which they express gratitude: when they find the bunker, filled with more food than they ever dreamed of. The boy wants to thank the people who stored everything:

“Do you think we should thank the people?

The people?

The people who gave us all this.

Well. Yes, I guess we could do that.

Will you do it?

Why dont you?

I dont know how.

Yes you do. You know how to say thank you.

The boy sat staring at his plate. He seemed lost. The man was about to speak when he said: Dear people, thank you for all this food and stuff. We know that you saved it for yourself and if you were here we wouldnt eat it no matter how hungry we were and we're sorry that you didnt get to eat it and we hope that you're safe in heaven with God. He looked up. Is that okay? he said.

Yes. I think that's okay.” (154-155).

McCarthy’s writing makes the reader realize that the boy has lived in a world in which he probably has witnessed gratitude only on rare occasions, as proven by his “I don’t know how”. His words still come out quite spontaneously, as if they were an ancient ritual rooted in the past that resurfaces. Nevertheless, the author shows that it is still important to the boy to thank the previous owners of the bunker, regardless of his own hesitation and insecurity.

Later in the novel, when the characters help a stranger on the road and share their food with him, the man tells him that he should thank the boy. This is an action for which the man expects gratitude, as in McCarthy’s world every tiny piece of food matters. Without the boy’s kindness, the man would not have shared his food with a stranger. However, the stranger does not show gratitude and does not thank the boy: “You should thank him you know, the man said. I wouldnt have given you anything.

Maybe I should and maybe I shouldnt.

Why wouldnt you?

I wouldnt have given him mine.

You dont care if it hurts his feelings?

Will it hurt his feelings?

No. That's not why he did it.

Why did he do it?

He looked over at the boy and he looked at the old man. You wouldn't understand, he said. I'm not sure I do." (184). McCarthy insists again on the intrinsic kindness and goodness of the boy. He has only known a world of starvation and danger, but he is still spiritually good and kind and wants to share the little food he has. He wants to help others who starve even if they do not thank him, because he believes it is the right thing to do, because he is "carrying the fire", one ritual that they engage in throughout the entire novel. "Carrying the fire" represents for the man, and even more for the boy, the fact that they maintain their humanity, their past values, and their compassion in their violent dystopian environment.

In *Into the Forest*, Eva and Nell show increasing gratitude towards nature throughout the novel. They were used to living a life in which they took food for granted. The shelves of the supermarkets were filled, and they just had to pick it up and pay for it. Once this system collapses, the sisters start to reconnect with nature. They start to value food in a way that they had never did before. Once they start to tend the garden, Nell writes: "We're eating like queens from the seeds our father saved, from the garden we hoed and mulched and planted and weeded and watered. Summer squash and zucchini, cherry tomatoes, carrots, beets—each picking is a feast, a gift, a windfall" (176). Hegland uses the word "gift" to qualify the food the sisters now have from their garden. They do not take for granted their food as they used to when they had supermarkets because they now realize the difficulties of growing and harvesting it. This makes them value their food and be grateful for it. Hegland writes: "We have begun to hold hands for a moment before we eat, our faces bowed over our plates of food, and though I can't really say what we mean by that gesture, we find we do not want to eat without first reaching for each other's hands." (162). The food ritual involves their body, takes place before each meal, and has a symbolic meaning for the sisters, even if Nell is not (yet) able to identify what it means. It is a moment related to food that is intimate between the girls, that connects them to one another, and which adds a sacred dimension to their meal, by involving a form of prayer before eating. It is a moment that transcends verbal communication but still expresses gratitude and appreciation from the sisters for the food they have.

Nell also expresses gratitude when she kills the wild boar. As Eva is pregnant, she needs meat to avoid suffering from anemia and having complications that could lead to

the death of the baby or herself. Nell thus decides to go hunting for a wild pig. This is a difficult experience for her, as she has a lot of respect for those animals that she describes as “monstrous, ancient creatures, blunt and—in this moment—startlingly beautiful” (202). Here as well, Hegland chooses words that transcribe the beauty of the moment, even in dystopias. She also writes: “I heard them muttering together in the mud below me, and I felt honored to see them like that, relaxed and naked and unaware of my presence.”. Hegland’s choice of words such as “honored” or giving the boars human traits with “relaxed” or “naked” transcribes the respect and relation of equality Nell has towards that animal. However, the threat on her sister and her baby’s life is too important for Nell not to kill one of them. When she does, she trembles, cries, throws up, but she still starts to cut up the animal, out of respect: “You shot her. You owe her a home in your belly. She *deserves* to live again in you, and Eva, and Eva’s daughter.” (205, emphasis mine). The author carefully chooses her words here as well. Once she is done with cutting the boar, she qualifies the meat as a gift, once again expressing the respect she has for it: “There’s nothing I can’t do now, I thought as I sorted through the warm and iridescent entrails for her heart and liver—my first gifts to Eva and her daughter.” (206).

Moreover, the sisters also show gratitude towards the forest and the food it brings them, Hegland qualifying it once more of a “gift”: “Each day brings gifts. Yesterday we found a fresh patch of sheep’s sorrel to add to our dried sow soup. Today I noticed what looked like bright beads spilled on the path to the stump—madrone berries. I gathered a few in my hand, and a sort of thanksgiving passed through my mind before I nibbled a berry.” (208). Nell starts to spiritually connect with the forest and actively thanks it for the gift of food it gives them. She adds a moment of reflection to her foraging, before eating anything. Here as well it can be viewed as a form of prayer, insisting on the sacred aspect of food.

Through their new food rituals of gratitude and the knowledge they gain, Eva and Nell have an attitude similar to Native Americans. In the end of the novel when she needs to decide which book to keep before burning their house and moving permanently into the forest, Nell decides to take the book about indigenous legend and stories: “Finally I decided to take for Burl the book of songs and stories of those humans who had peopled the forest before us, the book that contained Sally Bell’s story, the stories of Coyote and Bear, and songs of mourning and thanksgiving, songs for luck.” (238-239). The sisters’ lifestyle become really close to what is described in *The Way We Lived: California Indian*

Reminiscences, Stories, and Songs, Hegland's inspiration. The book mentions the way the Indians saw food as a gift from the forest and "did not take this abundance for granted. Rather, throughout California people adopted conservation practices and laws that maintain and even increased the richness of their land." (53). Moreover, it explains that their feasts were made of different ingredients depending on the season. It also states that:

"According to California Indian thought, people, plants, animals and objects were basically equals. The relationship between people and animals was not one of exploitation, but of reciprocity. People had to respect animals and perform certain rites for them; animals on their part provided people with food and skins. People and animals live in balance, and to maintain that balance demanded mutual restraint. Animals acted benevolently towards people despite the animals' extraordinary physical and spiritual powers. People did not slaughter needlessly or humiliate the carcass of a slain animal despite humanity's great hunting prowess. To reach beyond reciprocity and demand more than one's due was to upset the balance and ultimately bring punishment" (95).

This passage of the novel clearly echoes Nell's experience of hunting. As expressed by Hegland's choice of words highlighted above (honored, relaxed, naked), Nell has a very respectful view of the wild board, as if it was her equal. She also only kills it because she has to, and only kills one, as she does not need more. She is grateful for the animals' death and respects his carcass as she owes it to the board, and it *deserves* it. Nell truly realizes the value of meat and the physical and spiritual work it takes to kill an animal in order to eat it. This is something she had never experienced before, when she was buying her meat in a supermarket, already cut, sometimes even seasoned or pre-cooked. Just as Steel advocates in *Sitopia*, Hegland argues for a world in which humans value food again, and a reconnection between humans and nature. By the end of *Into the Forest*, Eva and Nell value the food the forest gives them, expressing gratitude like the indigenous tribes did before them, and creating their own Sitopian world.

The characters in the three novels have different attitudes regarding food and gratitude. The Gardeners are the only ones who expressed thankfulness already before the collapse of their society. After the catastrophe, the food they use for their gratitude rituals changes, but the rituals themselves remain similar. However, they only occur when the members are in a collective. This is also a particularity of Atwood's novel: when they are in a community, food has more than a functional meaning. This is neither the case in

McCarthy's novel, nor in Hegland's. Gratitude does not have a central place in *The Road*, as opposed to the other two novels. The only time the man and the boy share food with a stranger, he does not thank them. They express their gratitude once, when the boy thanks the former owners of the bunker in which they find food. The characters of *Into the Forest* are the only ones who did not express gratitude before the collapse, as the Gardeners did, and slowly start to do it as they adapt to their new reality. In Atwood's novel, the characters continue rituals they had started before the Flood. In *Into the Forest*, Eva and Nell's attitude appears because of food scarcity. Hegland uses the word "gifts" several times to describe the food the sisters have from their garden or the forest.

To conclude, it can be stated that eating is an action which involves ethical questions. The motivations behind the characters' values vary and are often linked to the food culture. In their pre-apocalyptic world, the God's Gardeners have taken the Vegievows and refuse to eat or kill any living creature as they have a respectful relationship towards them. As a symbol to illustrate this, Atwood capitalizes their names. They also avoid processed food, pray, sing, and celebrate together around feasts. Eva, Nell, the man, and the boy live a typical westerner's life and buy their food in supermarkets. After the catastrophes, the characters' values are challenged. Toby and Ren find themselves killing animals and eating meat. The man and the boy have conflicts regarding sharing food with strangers. Eva and Nell have disagreements about sharing the last piece of chocolate, and about whether to consume resources straightaway or saving them for later.

Cannibalism is a topic mentioned in two out of the three novels. In *The Year of the Flood*, it is implied that there are human bodies in SecretBurgers, and human brain tissue in Pigoons. However, the characters do not question eating those, regardless of the rumors of human parts in it, when they need to for their survival. One type of characters is portrayed explicitly as cannibals: the violent Painballers. In *The Road*, human flesh becomes a main source of food for many people. The man and the boy qualify them of "bad guys" and themselves, the ones who refuse to eat others and still try to find industrial food to eat, of "good guys". However, the "bad guys" are the ones with an almost unlimited source of food, and become the dominant class, while the man and the boy, who fail to adapt to this new food culture, become the inferior class. Cannibalism is never mentioned in *Into the Forest*.

Finally, gratitude is a central value in mainly two novels: Atwood's and Hegland's. The community of the God's Gardeners have expressed their thankfulness to God and the earth already before the Waterless Flood, and those rituals remain after the pandemic. However, they used to thank the plants and nature for their food, as they were strict vegetarian, but they now thank the animal for the proteins, as they are eating meat again for their survival. In McCarthy's world, there is not a lot to be grateful for. In their scarcity, the man and the boy do not create new food rituals related to gratitude. The boy shows gratitude when they find the bunker and hesitates on how to express it as he has rarely witnessed it. He is intrinsically good and kind, even when he insists on sharing their food with strangers and does not receive gratitude in return. In their scarcity, the man and the boy do not create new food rituals related to gratitude. In *Into the Forest*, gratitude is increasingly present throughout the girls' adaptation to their new world. They slowly adopt a lifestyle close to Indigenous' tribes, in which they express their gratitude to the forest for the food it gives them, to the animals for giving them their life, and Hegland qualified food of a gift they need to be thankful for.

Chapter 3: Taste of time: food scarcity and characters' temporal perceptions

“Why dont we just wait?

We cant wait. We're almost out of food. We have to keep going.” (McCarthy, 210).

This excerpt from McCarthy's novel illustrates the intrinsic links existing between food and time. Indeed, stopping, taking the time to plant something and waiting for it to grow, making a fire to cook a meal, or spending time praying to express gratitude before eating are all actions that anchor the concept of food and food rituals in time. In scarcity narrative, the lifestyles and diets of the characters are disrupted, which changes their perceptions of time. In times of crisis, the relations the characters have to the past or the future are transformed. They often wish for the food resources from their past lives, or dream about a future in which food is abundant again. Dystopian novels often illustrate a disconnection between time and the food the characters now lack.

According to Steel, reconnecting food and time would lead to a true Sitopian world. She argues that this disconnection created by capitalism is the cause of lots of issues in the current western society. People live by clocks and artificial lights and have forgotten how to live by nature's rhythms of days, moons, and seasons. They now spend their days always on the run, looking to outpace time because 'time is money' and money is all that is needed. However, this lifestyle is not only destroying the earth, but also impacting humans' mental health. Steel states that “By offering a future reward in return for current sacrifice, capitalism places us on an invisible treadmill, living in constant hope of better times ahead. (...) capitalism ultimately denies us happiness by preventing us from dwelling in time” (298). Humans spend their lives working. They prioritize making money over spending quality time with their loved ones, wandering in nature, reading, creating, cooking, etc. They live with the aim of doing all that when they are old and have a full bank account, forgetting that they might never reach that point, or that they might be too tired, too sick, too depressed to enjoy any of it. Steel argues that this linear perception of time is wrong, and that time is “a series of nested events that form one long, ongoing present.” (307). Humans need to reconnect with time and live according to this concentric perception of it. They need to realize that repetitions are involved in life, that what they did the day before and what they will do the next day has an impact on the

present. In order to do that, Steel explains that food is the key: “It is the last aspect of food – its ritual power – that is the key to all the rest, since, if we really want to learn to live in time, ritual is what we need. (...) By eating together consciously, we can be both grounded and transported, connected to a greater order of things. We can exist, for a period, both inside and outside time, and we can feel profoundly at home.” (314-315). Rituals are tools to anchor humans in time, and food are at the core of those.

This chapter first explores the way Atwood, McCarthy and Hegland decided to structure their novel and how, based on the characters’ relationship with food, it reflects their perception of time. It then analyzes the influence the past has on the characters’ present and future, and on the ways they decide to deal with food scarcity. Finally, it develops how food rituals are used as a structure for the characters’ measuring of time.

A novel structure that mirrors food and time

The authors of *The Year of the Flood*, *The Road*, and *Into the Forest* have all decided to structure their novel in different ways. None of the three novels is divided into numbered chapters in which the story chronologically unfolds itself. Atwood, McCarthy and Hegland have made other choices that mirror the way time is perceived by the characters of the novels, based on their relationships with food.

In her novel, Atwood interpolates the hymns of the Gardeners in between chapters, each celebrating food, living creatures or God. She then divides the chapters between the points of views of Toby, Ren and Adam One, and between different timelines. Some chapters are written in the third person omniscient point of view, when they are told from Toby’s perspective. Others are written in the first person, when it is Ren’s point of view. Finally, others are written as speeches and prayers given by Adam One to the Gardeners’ community and are followed by the sung poems. Switching between those points of view, Atwood also navigates between the “Year Twenty-Five”, which is considered the present and is the “Year of the Flood”, and previous years. She goes back and forth between several timelines and characters’ perspectives. She does not write a linear narrative, but one full of repetitions and movements in time that keeps the reader engaged with her story.

By constantly going back to the past, the food abundance of the time and the dietary choices of the characters, Atwood highlights its importance in the present. The changes of perspective between the characters explain why they make different decisions regarding food and survival in the present. Their previous lifestyles justify some struggles and decisions they make in the present. For instance, Ren's life as a sex worker at Scales and Tails explains her attitude of trying to find industrial food to survive when the Flood hits. She had been moving away from the Gardeners' values and ethics for quite some time already when the pandemic hit, and she continues in that direction in survival. The interconnectedness of time and the characters' memory also emphasizes the crucial role of the Gardeners' teaching for Toby, as it will be developed further in this chapter. Atwood's writing creates a circular perception of time that insists on the repetitions of the seasons, the Gardeners' food rituals, and their connection to the natural world.

The author's choice of dividing her novel into different perspectives and several timelines creates a non-linear narrative that explores how the past choices and knowledge of the characters continue to resonate in their current circumstances. Atwood constantly switches between a time of abundance and accessibility of food to one of scarcity and risks of starvation for the characters. The fact that the two lifestyles and diets are intertwined marks even more the contrast between the two for the reader.

Similarly, McCarthy's choice of structure for his novel mirrors his characters' experience. By not dividing his novel into chapters, he creates a clear parallel between his text and his story. The fact that there are no breaks in the text highlights the long, restless and starving journey of the man and the boy. It stretches time for both the characters and the readers. It illustrates the characters' difficult life, their long struggle to find food, the stretch of time between each meal, the monotony of their day. McCarthy's writing mirrors the characters' perception of time. There are no temporal markers indicating the past, the present or the future, the characters evolve in timelessness.

However, they also live in a world filled with repetitions. Those repetitions are both in the story, as the characters do the same actions every day, such as looking for food, but also in the author's words. In his sparse and minimalist prose, he repeats actions and words such as "they walked", "they ate", or "okay". Those repetitions increase the feeling of a blurred past, present and future. Every day, they face the same threats to be eaten, the same dangers in the environment, the same search for food in fear of starvation. They

did it the day before, they do it today, they will do it tomorrow. The days blend together, with both the characters' actions and the author's words being the same.

In the scenes in which they starve even more than usual, when they are on the verge of death, McCarthy maintains his unique writing style: "Crossing the grass he felt half faint and he had to stop. He wondered if it was from smelling the gasoline. The boy was watching him. How many days to death? Ten? Not so many more than that. He couldn't think. Why had he stopped?" (141). He writes brief sequences of actions and thoughts and manages to illustrate the characters' perception of a lethal future. Even if this scene could realistically be the last moments of the man and the boy if they do not find food imminently, McCarthy does not write a longer or more complete description of it than any other scene. However, with the few words written, the reader can realize the characters' hunger and agony and how the man is starting to lose to his mind on the verge of death.

Hegland has also made the choice of not structuring her novel with chapters. *Into the Forest* is a series of excerpts written by Nell, of varying length. She writes mostly chronologically, punctuating her story with memories from her past, and with sometimes very long elapses. To situate the reader, Hegland first gives some indication of time passing by having Nell writing some markers of time. Initially, the characters intend to keep track of the days by using a calendar. On the very first page, Hegland writes "We've crossed the days off the calendar much too conscientiously to be wrong about the date" (1-2). However, slowly, Hegland uses those markers of time less and less, and increases the use of natural elements to situate the sisters in the year. Nell starts to use other elements, such as food, to measure time, as they are more important in her life now than knowing the days of the week: "maybe counting teabags tells us more than any calendar about how this time is passing." (48). As their link to their consumerist past disappears, the sisters' use of a calendar disappears as well completely: "The days creep by. I think we're somewhere in the middle of April, but I have lost track of time. Weeks have passed since I've written anything in here, and when I try to match the blank squares of my calendar against the days we have just endured, I can figure no way to sort them out. We breathe and another night arrives, so I suppose time continues. But my calendar is obsolete." (150). As they start to know more about the forest and connect to it through its edible plants and the food it offers them, they start to live by nature's rhythm. Building her knowledge on Native American tribes, Nell writes: "The Pomo divided the year into

thirteen moons and named most of them for the kind of food available when they were full—the moon when you can get clover, the moon when the fish begin to run, the moon when the acorns come. I am no longer certain what month this is, but last night the moon was full, and we canned our first batch of tomatoes today.” (179). The sisters also start to adopt the Pomo’s time perception, as Nell linked the full moon with their tomatoes. This change in Hegland’s writing regarding markers of time really mirrors the sisters’ connection to the edible plants they can find in the forest.

Hegland decides to move away from the structured blank square of calendars. This clear and distinct manner of measuring time might be seen as being closer to consumerism than nature’s rhythm. The days and the weeks are linked with working and making money to buy food at supermarkets. They are disconnected from the seasons or the moon, as planting and harvesting does not matter. This might also be part of the reason for Hegland not to divide her novel into clear, distinct, chronological and numbered chapters. Nell journal entries have variable length, and are written in her present, but also intertwined lots of moments from the sisters’ past. This way of structuring the novel might be a parallel to Nell and Eva’s perception of time, not linked to their consumerist past, but reflecting the moons and the seasons, and the sisters’ adaptations to nature’s rhythm as they slowly revalue their food. They are gradually moving away from the way they used to live, and Nell writes less and less about their past as the novel unfolds and they adapt to their new reality, centered around the food they find in the forest.

The three authors have made different decisions regarding the way they divide their novels, but all reflect their characters’ perception of time. Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood* is the only novel out of the three that has numbered chapters. It is also the only novel whose chapters switch between different characters’ point of view, and between different timelines. By moving constantly between the past and the present, Atwood highlights how their past justifies the characters’ decisions in the present and accentuates the differences between their abundant past and scarce present in terms of food. *The Road*, as opposed to Atwood’s novel but similarly to Hegland’s, is not divided into chapters. However, McCarthy is the only author whose story has almost no words to indicate time. He blurs the line between the past, the present and the future, which mirrors the man and the boy long, restless and difficult journey to survive. In *Into the Forest*, Hegland has not divided her story into chapters either, but she has written clear indicators of time. Similarly to Atwood’s novel, she also often goes back to the past of the sisters. Hegland’s

story has the particularity of having the characters relating to two pasts: a consumerist one, and before that, an indigenous one. This appears in the author's writing and division of text.

A present and a future inspired by the food from the past

In all three novels, the way the characters ate in the past is crucial to their present and future. In *The Year of the Flood*, time is perceived by the God's Gardeners in a cyclic way, both before and after the Waterless Flood. They are conscious that life is made of repetitions: the repetitions of the days, the weeks, the seasons, the years, etc. In one of his speeches, Adam One uses a metaphor to explain the Gardeners' perception of life, using food as a symbol: "The Fruit remains a deeply meaningful symbol for us, embodying the notions of healthful harvest, of rich culmination, and of new beginning, for within every Fruit is a seed — a potential new life. The Fruit ripens and falls and returns to the soil; but the Seed takes root, and grows, and brings forth more Life." (329). This cyclic perception of time is at the core of their philosophy. It is also a pillar of their diet. Indeed, in order to be respectful to the plants and other non-humans living creatures, they live according to those repetitions. They tend their gardens every day, harvest their vegetables or pick their honey depending on the seasons, celebrate the same Saints, protectors of the non-human living world, through feasts every year. Their relationship with time influences their attitude and decisions, built on the knowledge they have from their peers, their classes and their experiences. For instance, after one of the Gardeners' death, Adam one says: "If you wish to present a floral tribute, may I suggest the nasturtiums, which are plentiful at this season. Please do not pick any of the garlic flowers, as we are saving them for propagation." (219). Even for something as symbolic as putting flowers on a grave, they respect the seasons and edible plants.

Ren and Toby survive differently after the Waterless Flood, both adapting their present to their most recent past. Toby, on the one hand, survives in the present by using the knowledge of her past at the Gardeners. She tends her garden based on the seasons and the moons and eats what she has stocked in her Ararat. When her garden is destroyed, she finds wild plants to survive on. She also carries the rituals of gratitude from her past to her new present even if they are adapted to her new reality. It is thanks to her past: all

the Saints, the songs, the classes, and in general all the information she gathered since her arrival at the Edencliff Rooftop that Toby has the skills to survive after the Flood. They have classes about the Gardeners history, Culinary Arts, Bees, Mycology, Wild and Garden Botanicals, or Predatory-Prey Relationship and Animal Camouflage and they have to “memorize every saint’s day, and every single day had at least one saint and sometimes more, or maybe a feast (...) plus what the saints had done to get to be saints” (73). Without it, she might never have survived and would have died of starvation. As they anticipate the Waterless Flood, the Gardeners’ philosophy aims at teaching this knowledge of the natural world. Their past was already anchored in an uncertain future, and this perspective influenced their lifestyle. In their numerous tributes to Saints, God and the earth, the Gardeners insists on the importance of remembering things such as which plants can be harvested during which time of the year, as they sing it for instance in this poem:

“The Dandelion shoots, for spring,
Before their flowers burst;
The Burdock root is best in June
When it is fat with juice;

When autumn comes, the Acorn’s ripe,
The Walnut black is too;
Young Milkweed pods are sweet when boiled,
And Milkweed shoots when new.” (152)

After the Waterless Flood hit, it is this knowledge gained from her past with the Gardeners’ community that allows Toby to survive. Remembering all of that, Toby writes everything in a notebook: “Toby’s been keeping track of the days on some old AnooYoo Spa-in-the-Park notepaper (...) At the top of each fresh page she prints the Gardener Fest Day or Saint’s Day. She can still recite the entire list by heart (...) Under each Saint’s Day name she writes her gardening notes: what was planted, what was harvested, what phase of the moon, what insect guests.” (195-196). She, just as any other Gardeners, realizes the influence of the moment in which they plant or harvest anything, and can thus tend a garden or find wild plants to survive. This is crucial to have a sustainable source of food and avoid starvation.

Ren, on the other one hand, had left the God's Gardeners a few years already before the Flood hit. She had adopted again the lifestyle of the Compounds' inhabitants by buying her food in supermarkets and finding everything any time of the year. Being in contact with this world right before the Waterless Flood explains why her first reflexes are to rely on the remains of this industrial world. Before joining Toby, she never thought about growing a garden or relying on wild plants, even if she learnt all about it during her childhood at the Gardeners. Instead, she eats processed food she finds in the fridges of the sex club, or genetically modified meat she scavenges from abandoned supermarkets.

The past is what allows both Toby's and Ren's survival after the Waterless Flood. Their decisions and actions are influenced by their previous lifestyle and their knowledge. They also shape their future. Initially, the two women struggle to imagine a future. Toby is at first completely alone, and she believes she is the last human on earth. Because of that she becomes desperate and considers suicide: "She can't live only in the present, like a shrub. But the past is a closed door, and she can't see any future. Maybe she'll go on from day to day and year to year until she simply withers, folds in on herself, shrivels up like an old spider. Or she could take a shortcut." (114-115). However, she slowly forgets those dark thoughts and starts to focus on what she needs to do in order to survive. The first thing she focuses on is food. As already mentioned, her past life at the Gardeners makes her conscious that she needs a sustainable food resource, and for that she needs to grow a garden.

When she is freed from her quarantine room by her friend Amanda, Ren starts questioning the future. She wonders what they will do: "'What should we do now?' I said. 'Stay here,' said Amanda. 'Until the food's gone. Or if the solar shuts off and the stuff in the freezers begins to rot. That could get ugly.' 'Then what?' I said. 'Then we'll go somewhere else.' 'Like where?' 'We don't need to worry about that now,' said Amanda.'" (388). They are not able to imagine a future, they can only think about the presence or absence of food. Later, when they spend a few days walking away from the violent Painballers, Ren imagines her future: "I guess this is what the rest of my life will be like, I thought. Running away, scrounging for leftovers, crouching on floors, getting dirtier and dirtier." (406). Every decision the characters make is related to one question for the short-term future: where could they find food? They are not able to imagine something else like rebuilding a community for instance, as long as they do not have a

sustainable food resource, in accordance with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs discussed by Steel.

Later, Ren and Toby find each other, then the MaddAddams community. The former Gardeners have the same approach to the future as Toby and their former eco-group: they need to tend a garden to have sustainable food. However, they also decide to raise a herd of sheep and eat animals and mention scavenging for industrial food in the short term. Their current goal is to find the other members of the former God's Gardeners' community: "After we've finished, they talk about what to do next. Zeb says they have to find Adam One and the Gardeners before anything or anyone else gets to them" (478). The Gardeners have always anticipated the Waterless Flood, and even hoped for it. It was for them a way of wiping out the sins humans have made on earth and rebuilding a new society respectful to all living creatures and the planet. In one of his speeches, Adam One says: "But these resources are now exhausted, and we must either move or starve. Let us pray that the outer world is Exfernal no more — that the Waterless Flood has cleansed as well as destroyed, and that all the world is now a new Eden. Or, if it is not a new Eden yet, that it will be one soon. Or so we trust." (414). The community's past values and lifestyle are what they hope to extend on earth to everyone in the future. They wish for "a new Eden", a new garden, somewhere where food would be abundant and sacred again.

In McCarthy's novel, the characters' vision of time is almost opposed to the God's Gardeners'. They do not have a cyclic perception of the years. The months or the seasons do not have any impact on their diet. There are no repetitions involved at that scale, there is no changes on the man and the boy's food choices whether it is winter or summer. Regardless of the time, they eat the same thing: the industrial food they find. They actually do not know precisely what time of the year it is: "He thought the month was October but he wasn't sure. He hadn't kept a calendar for years." (2). The man and the boy evolve in a destroyed and burned ecosystem, in which no food can grow. They cannot stop and plant a seed in order to grow and harvest crops that they could eat later in the year. The ecosystem does not allow it. This disconnects them from nature's rhythm. Since it has no impact on their diet, there is no reason for them to try to find a way to keep track of the seasons, the moons or the months. There is also no trace that they would have the knowledge to tend a garden or find wild food to survive, even if the ecosystems allowed it.

In *The Road*, the remains of the past are the man and the boy's chosen way of surviving, rather than adapting to the present diet of cannibalism. The only things left in the present are the remains of an industrial, capitalist and once-abundant past. The man and the boy wander on damaged roads, pushing an old shopping cart, symbol of this past world. Because of their choice of refusing cannibalism, the leftovers of this consumerist world are the only way the "good guys" can survive. Every day they try to find industrial food from before the collapse to eat, every day they look for the past. By doing so, they carry values from the past. The past shapes their morals, their food choices: they refuse to eat other humans, they tell each other stories, or they put their waste in the bin when they are in the bunker. However, they do not carry any food rituals from the past but adapt them to their new reality. McCarthy barely mentions the pre-apocalyptic life of the man and the boy, but it can be assumed that they had food rituals such as celebrations, that are absent in their present. Christmas, New Year or birthday celebrations are never mentioned. Every ritual they have in their present is new from the burned land in which they evolve.

It is also very difficult for the characters to imagine a future. They live centered around the present, trying to find industrial food from the past every day. They manage to gather so little every time that it is impossible for them to imagine a future in the long term. The only time this happens is when they find the bunker. In it there is so much food that they could live in it for weeks. In it there is 'everything'. However, the father is scared that someone else might find the bunker: "Anyone could see the hatch lying in the yard and they would know at once what it was. He had to think about what to do. This was not hiding in the woods. This was the last thing from that." (152). Because of this fear of being eaten and their unconscious need to keep their daily rituals to survive, the father and the boy leave the bunker. This was the only place where their physiological needs were met, and where they could have imagined a future. They find a huge amount of food once later, in a boat when they are on the beach, but they do not stay there, as it is too exposed. This possibility of a future through food abundance puts them in danger in the present. and by the end of the novel, the future of the boy is still as uncertain as at the beginning.

If the future still seems uncertain for the child, a cannibalistic future seems inevitable in the eyes of the reader. The man and the boy only survive thanks to the remains of the capitalistic world, but those resources are limited. There will be a time

when the past they survive on will be gone, a moment when all those canned goods will be eaten. If the ecosystem is still destroyed and burned, which is likely, there will be no sustainable way for the boy to survive without resorting to cannibalism. He will have to choose between death or eating human flesh. The mother realized that, and she decided to commit suicide because she knew that surviving in such a present was only a scary, painful and hungry way of delaying an inevitable future. Without the past, the man and the boy could never have survived in the present, as they would not have had any food to survive on, but this past and its industrial food is bound to disappear, and with it a future without cannibalism.

Eva and Nell in *Into the Forest* have a relationship towards time close to the God's Gardeners' one by the end of the novel, as they share the same respect and sacred view of food. Initially, they have a linear view of time: they work on dancing and studying to accomplish the next step of their life: ballet or Harvard. After that, they will probably have a career, build a family, etc. They do not show any sign of being connected to some kind of repetition. They eat industrial food found in a supermarket regardless of the seasons or the time of the day. However, with the collapse of the world as they have known it, they need to rethink their perception of time. Nell writes:

“When I think of how we used to live, the casual way we used things, I’m both appalled and filled with longing. I remember emptying wastebaskets that would seem like fortunes now (...) I remember tossing out food—scraping heaps of food from our dinner plates into the compost bucket—simply because it had sat untouched on someone’s plate for the duration of a meal. How I long for those brimming wastebaskets, those leftovers. I long to gulp down whole boxes of raisins, to burn a dozen candles at once. I long to indulge, to forget, to ignore. I want to live with abandon, with the careless grace of a consumer, instead of hanging on like an old peasant woman, fretting over bits and scraps.” (11).

Nell opposes two types of eaters: the consumer and the peasant, which is reminiscent of Berger’s essay on bourgeois culture. Nell is nostalgic for a time when she lived as a bourgeois and could overeat, while now lives as a peasant, for which “food represents physical work” (Berger, 63).

Slowly, as their food pantry empties, they start to grow food in their garden, then look for it in the forest. It is then then they start to realize the importance of the seasons

and time. They start to realize the need to can food for the winter, and the advantage of the sun in summer to dry fruits:

“We can’t let them rot.”

“We could dry them,” offered Eva.

“Dry them?”

“Like raisins or prunes. It’s going to be another hot day. Why not use the sun?” (185).

They begin to live according to the seasons, and they soon realize the impact of time for the edible plants they can find in the forest. Their survival, based on food, is linked to nature’s rhythm: for instance, storing food to survive during the winter depends on what they do in summer.

Gradually, they start to adopt a lifestyle close to the one of indigenous tribes. As Steel writes in *Sitopia*: “Indigenous cultures generally had two essential measures of time: the cosmic rhythm of seasons and days and those associated with specific events such as harvesting and milling or domestic tasks such as making bread” (296). This is the same measure of time that the sisters embrace. By the end of the novel, Eva and Nell have completely abandoned their initial consumerist mindset and perception of time. They do not live with the aim of reaching some specific studies, or career later in their lives anymore, but rather they live anchored in time. They are conscious of the link between time and food, and their days now revolve around it. They take the time to tend their garden, walk through the forest to find leaves, herbs, roots or nuts, spend their days cooking, drying, or canning them. Those rituals connect them to their lives in a way that they had never been connected to before. They adopt a new perception of time and life.

The sisters’ present evolve around two pasts: their consumerist past, and the past of the Native Americans. Initially, they survive in their present by eating the food from their consumerist past and hoping that it will go back to being their future as well. However, they soon realize that the resources they have in the house are disappearing and that living off the food from the past is not sustainable. Gradually, they start to tend a garden, then a turning point of the novel is when Nell finds a book titled *Native Plants of Northern California* on her mother’s shelves. The sisters start to slowly realize that the way they can survive sustainably is by living out of nature and the forest and adopting the lifestyle of northern Native American. While trying to maintain a life close to their recent past is doomed, the knowledge from before the industrial and consumerist time is the

sisters' salvation. Just as Steel hopes with *Sitopia*, Hegland argues for a return to values from the past such as a reconnection with nature and gratitude towards the earth. However, it might only be sustainable as they are only two people. As Steel states: "If we all started harvesting sea aster and picking wild mushrooms tomorrow, the land would soon be stripped bare, which is why most foragers follow a strict code that prescribes when, and how much, they harvest and why 'cultivated wild edibles' might not be such a bad idea." (233). This new past becomes their future. They actively decide to embrace that future by burning the house, and making sure they never go back to a capitalist and consumerist lifestyle. They go from a linear perception of time to a circular one made of repetitions.

Their rituals gradually change as well, following the sisters' adaptation. Initially, they keep a calendar, so they know the exact days, and they have some celebrations that involve food such as birthdays or Christmases. For instance, the novel begins with Eva and Nell celebrating their first Christmas as orphans after the collapse. For it, they take "an extra cup of tea" (3) and give each other a gift. Even in starvation and with limited resources, food maintains a celebratory role. By adding extra food to their meal, they potentially sacrifice tea that they might want later. However, it is a way for them to transform their day into a celebration, to maintain a ritual that they have done their entire life by adding a new role to their daily tea.

The sisters' vision of the future evolves drastically throughout the novel and is parallel to the changing relationships they have with the food from their past. At first, they hope for an abundant future in which everything would go back to normal, to their consumerist past. On the second page of the novel, Nell writes: "By next Christmas this will all be over, and my sister and I will have regained the lives we are meant to live. (...) In town there will be food in the stores and gas at the service stations. Long before next Christmas we will have indulged in everything we now lack and crave —soap and shampoo, toilet paper and milk, fresh fruit and meat." (2). Nell is certain that she will soon have back the life she had her entire life. However, as time passes, she slowly realizes that the future will be different: "There will be no rescue. Ever since this began we have been waiting to be saved, waiting like stupid princesses for our rightful lives to be restored to us. But we have only been fooling ourselves, only playing out another fairy tale. Our story can no more have a happy ending than the Lone Woman's did. (...) Eva and I will live like this until we die, hoarding and cringing and finally starving" (148). In

this excerpt, Nell links food with death, and thus time. When enough time will have passed, the lack of food is what will kill the girls. By the end of the novel, they have fully accepted that a sustainable future in this collapsed world will not include remains of food bought in a supermarket but will be made of food from the garden and the forest. The sisters have realized that their future needs to be lived according to the past values of Native Americans. In order to respect that, Eva and Nell decide to live in the stump with just a few possessions from the industrial time, such as the book *Native Plants of Northern California*.

In the three novels, the characters all survive in their present thanks to their past. In *The Year of the Flood*, Toby survives with the knowledge of how to grow food and find edible plants in the wild that she gained at the God's Gardeners. Her most recent past being at Scales and Tails, Ren survives by finding industrial food in the club, or in destroyed supermarkets. When they meet and find the MaddAddams, they eat food from their garden, their hunting, and their scavenging. In *The Road*, the man and the boy survive by eating the industrial food left from their consumerist past. Without that, they would have had to choose between death or becoming cannibals. In *Into the Forest*, Hegland created two pasts for Eva and Nell, their consumerist past, and the past of the Native American tribes. The sisters first survive by eating the food in their pantry, the leftovers from their abundant past, similarly to the man and the boy's diet in McCarthy's novel. Then, Eva and Nell gradually survive using knowledge from the past, as Toby does with her knowledge from the Gardeners. However, in the sisters' situation, they use some knowledge from a long time before the catastrophe, some knowledge they had never used before and did not even know existed.

The characters' futures are also influenced by the past. In Atwood's novel, the future Toby, Ren and the MaddAddams imagine is one filled with the values the God's Gardeners had in the past: they aim at building a world respectful of the food the earth and the non-humans living creature gives them. McCarthy's story is very different from the other two, as it is the only novel in which the past is bound to completely disappear in the future. With the absence of industrial food, the boy will have to choose between death or cannibalism. Hegland's future is one in which the remains of a consumerist world are gradually eaten, however, in *Into the Forest*, the sisters have the possibility of growing food and finding edible plants. Their future thus become one in which Eva and Nell adopt

the same diet as the Indigenous people had. It is the only novel in which the future is similar to such a distant past that the characters themselves have never lived like it before.

Food rituals as the structure of time

In the three novels, food rituals are a tool to structure time in the characters' lives. As Steel writes in *Sitopia*: "rituals were the means by which people situated themselves in time (...) [and] ever since culture has existed, food has been central to such rituals. Nothing else combines the cosmic and the domestic aspects of our life as powerfully as food." (315). In *The Year of the Flood*, the God's Gardeners cyclic vision of time is shaped by their rituals. Every year, they celebrate the same Saints at the same moment in the year. As mentioned, it helps Toby to survive after the Flood, as they are associated with knowledge of edible plants, but those feasts are also a way for all characters to situate events in time. For instance, at some point in the novel, a smell acts as a Proustian madeleine for Ren and triggers her memory: "There's that rich deep smell of rotting wood, the mushroomy smell I remember from the Gardeners, when we'd go to the Park for Saint Euell's." (449). Euell Gibbons was an American author who wrote several books on the gathering and preparation of wild food and helped founded several associations such as the National Wild Food Association. In his honor, the Gardeners spend a week "foraging for the Wild Harvest gifts that God, through Nature, has put at [their] disposal" (149). Later in the novel, she also remembers her childhood based on the celebration of Saints: "The new moon's rising now, out over the sea: Saint Julian and All Souls has begun. I loved Saint Julian's when I was little. Each of us kids would make our own Cosmos, out of stuff we'd gleaned. Then we'd stick glittery things onto it and hang it on a string." (512). Having feasts and celebrating those Saints is a way for current and former Gardeners to keep track of time both before and after the Waterless Flood. It is a tool to survive, but also a way to stay connected to their own lives and memories.

Through their yearly and daily rituals, the community develops a conscious relationship with food and time. By eating together, singing and praying, they stretch time, give a sacred dimension to food and connect to everything that is around them, including the present. It is not the case for all characters in Atwood's world. For instance, the inhabitants of the Compounds have a very different perspective on time. Those people

live disconnected from agriculture, eating industrial and transformed food: “A lot of upmarket trendies came to the Tree of Life. (...) even people from the Compounds, coming out for a safe pleebland adventure. They claimed to prefer our Gardener vegetables to the supermarket kinds.” (170). When she is back in the Compounds, a few years before the Waterless Flood, Ren describes the lunch at her high school: “Meanwhile they were eating their lunches, and there was meat smell everywhere. Bacon. Fish sticks, 20 per cent real fish. Burgers — they were called WyzeBurgers, and they were made of meat cultured on stretchy racks. So no animals had actually been killed.” (257). Since the meat grows on a rack, inside a building, seasons and time of the year do not matter. They can pick up any kind of food any time of the year. Inhabitants from the Compounds live a life similar to the one described above by Steel, the current western lives. They have a linear perception of time, disconnected from the production of their food, and thus from nature’s rhythm.

Because she left the Gardeners before the Flood, Ren struggles to use those old rituals to keep track of time after the Waterless Flood, even if she spent her childhood with the community. She states: “I’ve lost track of the Saints’ Days — I can’t remember which one it is today” (69). She can remember some specific events in her life that happened during celebrations of Saints, but she’s not able to link those feasts with a day in the calendar anymore. She disconnected time and her former food rituals.

In *The Road*, the man and the boy have a linear perception of time. They live for the next day and, on an annual scale, the repetition of time, of months, or of seasons does not have an impact on their food choices. Regardless of any exterior factor, the man and the boy look for industrial food and try to extend their lives by surviving one more day. On the scale of a day, however, they have a cyclic perception of time. They have the same rituals which begin in the morning and end at night. They take down the tarp, they walk, and they look for food, shoes, blankets, tools, etc., then they stop and eat something if they can, they sometimes make a fire to cook, and then put the tarp back up. They do not necessarily have a relationship with what comes before or after that day, but every day is still filled with the same actions, centered around avoiding starvation or being eaten.

Fledderjohann states that those circular rituals are what “sustain their being and provide them with a structure through which they can continue” (44). Indeed, those everyday rituals are a tool that maintain the man and the boy alive. As mentioned, once they are broken, problems ensue. This is the case towards the end of the novel, when they

arrived at the beach and stopped those rituals. When they do so, their shopping carts is stolen, and with it all their possessions. Their food rituals maintain a sense of order and meaning in the man and the boy's life. Fledderjohann adds that "The ritualistic qualities of their recurring practices locate their present existence in a cycle that simultaneously gestures back to the established familiarity of their past while anticipating the necessities of their future" (44). It keeps them connected to their previous life, and creates something close to a purpose, a sense of control in their unpredictable life. When they change those rituals, their perception of time changes. For instance, when they are in the bunker and do not need to look for food every day, they can imagine some type of short-term future. For the first time in the entire novel, they know that they won't starve the next day. McCarthy writes about the father that "He'd been ready to die and now he wasn't going to and he had to think about that" (152). Now that they have food, the father has to imagine what they will do in the next few days. It can be assumed that it is a challenging task for him, as it is the first time in years that he has to think about the future since he does not have to worry about food.

In *Into the Forest*, the sisters' rituals slowly change as their perception of time changes as well. Initially, they keep hoping that the world would go back to the way it used to and keep eating the food from their pantry. During that time, they transform some of their previous habits into rituals. For instance, Eva keeps dancing. Slowly, she stops doing it for the practical reason of maintaining her dancer's body and remembering her performances but starts to dance because she spiritually needs it. In their collapsed world, there is no more functionality to her dance, but it symbolically nourishes her mind. She has no more classes, no more music, no more shoes, but she needs it to keep a sense of hope that everything go back to normal. Nell acts the same way regarding studying. She gradually stops studying with the aim to enter Harvard, but because it keeps her connected to the previous and abundant world. She ritualistically picks up her encyclopedias and reads it every day, even if she learns about aspects of the past that have no more sense in her new reality. As the sisters start to accept that there will be no rescue, that the food in their pantry will soon be gone, and that there is no way back to their consumerist world, they abandon those rituals and focus on the practicality of food.

During the time when they start to learn about the edible plants in the forest, their entire attention is fixed on that. They focus on the functionality of food, on planting seeds, harvesting them, then on recognizing the leaves and roots, and learning how to store them.

When they develop a deeper connection to the forest and the food it has to offer them, the spiritual dimension that was lost starts to appear again. Gradually, as their physiological needs are met, they start to spiritually connect to nature and the forest. After Eva's rape, she isolates herself and drowns into apathy. It is through fixing the garden and starting to grow vegetables that she reconnects with her life: "But when I stood up from the table, Eva stood, too, and followed me out to the yard she had not entered since the rape. (...) by the end of the day, when all but one post on the east side was set, she was anticipating the work's needs, and even offering a little advice" (156). Later in the novel, the way they start to hold hands before each meal illustrates the ritual power of food that Steel mentioned: by eating together consciously, Eva and Nell are "grounded and transported, connected to a greater order of things. [They] can exist, for a period, both inside and outside time" (315). By holding hands before each meal, they give food a sacred aspect, they expand time around them and, through this food ritual, disconnect themselves for a short time from the domestic aspect of their lives, to the cosmic one.

In the last paragraphs of Hegland's novel, Eva dances again, and Nell studies again. When the house burns, Eva dances in front of the flames. This symbolizes the way she spiritually accepts and embraces their future within nature. She gives a new purpose and a new meaning to dancing, which was previously connected to their past consumerist world. Now that the forest offers them everything they need and is abundant with edible food, she reinvests her dancing with a new meaning of celebration. Before they burn the house, Nell decides to keep some books. She is still connected to words and knowledge. However, she does not decide to take books that had a meaning in her former life, but rather the ones that carry Indigenous knowledge about food and stories. She does not care about Harvard anymore, but rather she wants to create a deeper spiritual connection with the forest and its gifts of food.

The characters in *The Year of the Food*, *The Road* and *Into the Forest* have different rituals but all are a way for them to structure their lives. Atwood's novel is the only one in which the characters use rituals to connect to their past memories, and as a tool to survive. Their connection to food through those rituals is what binds them with nature's rhythms, the moons and the seasons. In McCarthys' story, rituals structure their day, every day. However, it does not connect them to anything greater than their present day, which is unique compared to the other two novels. In Hegland's novel, rituals are what connects them first to their consumerist past, but then disappear when they focus on the practicality

of food to survive. Once food is abundant again, they recreate a spiritual dimension and a connection with the forest and its edible plants, the Native American past, and their future.

To conclude, the perception the characters have of time is related to the food they have. In terms of novel structure, the way the authors have divided their book reflects the characters' perception of time. Atwood separates her story into numbered chapters that navigate between different points of view and different timelines, interpolated with the Gardener's hymns about food. The switch between the present and the past explains the characters' food choices after the Waterless Flood and increases the differences between their lifestyles in a food-abundant world, and in scarcity. McCarthy's choice of not dividing his novel into chapters mirrors his characters' hard and restless journey to find food and survive. Hegland does not divide her story into chapters either, but she adds indicators of time in the text, while McCarthy does not. As the sisters learn more about the forest and its edible plants and move away from their consumerist past to an Indigenous one, the measures of time gradually switch from being blank squares into a homemade calendar, to being the moons and other natural elements.

Within the stories, the present and future of the characters are always somehow linked to their past. In *The Year of the Flood*, the characters survival depends on their most recent past: Toby uses her knowledge of the Gardeners to tend a garden and find edible wild plants, and Ren eats the remains of the consumerist world she lived in. Without that past, they would not have survived. Their future will probably be similar to their Gardeners' past: sustainable food resources that respect the earth and the non-human living creatures. In *The Road*, the man and the boy survive only by eating the food that remains from their industrial past. Without it, they would have to choose between death and cannibalism. This is what will inevitably happen in their future. In *Into the Forest*, the sisters rely on two different pasts: initially they survive by eating the food left from their capitalist world, but then they gradually move to a lifestyle close to the one the Native American tribes had. This past is also their future, as they will survive by continuing to find edible plants from the forest. This future, as well as the one of Atwood's characters are close to Steel's Sitopian world, as they connect time and food.

Finally, the characters' food rituals are a tool to structure their lives in all three novels. In Atwood's, it connects the characters to their own lives and memories. It is also a way for them to survive and be connected to time. Without the food rituals, they just survive

from one day to the other, disconnected from something greater, as the inhabitants of the Compounds do. In *The Road*, the man and the boy's days are structured because of their rituals. Without it, they would not survive. However, the food rituals only connect them to the present day, and not to the past or the future. In Hegland's novel, the sisters' rituals change as they gradually disconnect from their consumerist past and connect to the forest and the food it has to offer them.

Conclusion

This research project has uncovered how *The Year of the Flood*, *The Road* and *Into the Forest* envision diverse food futures while employing distinct narrative styles. Via the literary analysis of Atwood, McCarthy and Hegland's works, I contributed to analyzing the possibilities of literature to reveal the values of food and food consumptions. As argued in chapter 1, the authors immerse the reader in their realities through the use of sensory language or precise and rich vocabulary. Metaphors and symbolic representations offer the reader an understanding of the different roles food can carry and encourage them to question their own relationships to food. Additionally, the literary analysis can shed light on the character's beliefs, ethics and moral dilemmas, allowing the readers to explore diverse perspectives on food as a social construct, as seen in chapter 2. Moreover, as investigated in the last chapter of this dissertation, literature can also unveil the interplay of time perception and food, transcending the physical aspect of meals. Reading food scenes in the three scarcity narratives allows for new interpretations of the role of food. The characters of the novels embrace new symbolic relationships with food as the respective collapse of their societies leads to scarcity. The abundant worlds in which they used to live is gone, and they adapt to a new reality to avoid starvation.

As seen in this dissertation, humans have had a complex relationship with food since the dawn of time. It encompasses more than just a way to nourish one's body. Through rituals, food can be a symbol of hospitality, of power, of gratitude, and much more. Steel exposes those intrinsic links between humans and food in her book *Sitopia*. She questions humans' current relationships with food through numerous aspects, including several that transpire in the three novels, such as the value judgments implicated in food choices, or the ties between rituals, food and time. Steel also offers her utopian perspective of a world in which people value food again. Her vision is close to the God's Gardeners' lifestyle, or to the new reality of Eva and Nell at the end of Hegland's novel. However, the God's Gardeners' lifestyle only starts to be spread out at the scale of a society when almost the entire population is decimated, and the sisters' new reality might not be sustainable to a much bigger population.

Atwood, McCarthy and Hegland each have a unique way of portraying the changes their characters go through. Scarcity challenges a lot of components in the

characters' lives. The roles food had before their respective collapse regarding their values, beliefs and ethics often undergo drastic changes in times of starvation. They have to make new food choices and adapt or create new food rituals. Moreover, the characters' new relationships with food lead to new perceptions of time.

One distinctive feature of *The Year of the Flood* resides in the fact that it is the only novel in which the main characters anticipate the collapse. They proactively prepare for their survival, which is rare in the literary genre. They store food, learn how to tend a garden and find food in the wilderness. Their readiness extends to considerations of potentially conflicting choices: they anticipate some decisions they might have to make, even if they go against their beliefs, values, and core convictions. This preparation results in Toby and the Gardeners turning to the earth to survive, while Ren decides to find industrial food. Nevertheless, despite their foresight regarding the Waterless Flood, the characters still struggle to adapt to their new reality. Eating meat is challenging for most characters, but they gradually do it to avoid starvation. The context of food scarcity also makes the characters less trusting of others, even if they are former members of their own community.

Atwood's Gardeners are the only characters out of the three novels who value, respect, and see food as sacred already before the collapse. However, the new reality of food scarcity forces them to reconsider the role of food. It becomes initially mostly functional, a necessity for their survival. Nonetheless, the former Gardeners still view food as something that needs to be respected, even if, in practice, they do not perform the same food rituals as when they lived in abundance. They are able to do so only when they build a community again, centered around a sustainable food resource: a new garden. *The Year of the Flood* is also the only novel in which cannibalism is mentioned before the collapse. However, only the violent Painballers explicitly resort to it. For the other characters, cannibalism is implicit and questionable, through industrial and genetically modified food. Moreover, the novel is the only one in which the characters express gratitude towards food already before the collapse. Through the Gardeners' songs, prayers, speeches and feasts, they view food as something sacred even when they live in the abundance of it, and do not take it for granted.

The characters of Atwood's novel are the only ones whose perception of time does not vary because of scarcity. The Gardeners see time as cyclic, connected to nature's rhythm and repeated through the months, the moons and the seasons. They use their food

rituals and celebrations of Saints to stay anchored in time even after the Flood. Toby and the other Gardeners survive thanks to this knowledge of edible plants from the past, and Ren uses food from her past consumerist life. Both characters struggle to imagine a future as long as their food resource is not secure, but once it is (when they are with the MaddAddam community) they can start to move away from their present survival. The future becomes the past, the Gardeners' lifestyle before the flood. Throughout the entire novel, rituals structure the characters' days, help them to keep track of time and connect to it, and tie them to their own memory.

Atwood portrays all those elements with her singular writing style. She has the literary specificity of being the only author who uses the semantic field of food to describe elements of her book to immerse the reader in her world by creating sensory descriptions. Moreover, her choice of dividing her novel into chapters from different characters' perspectives and several timelines justifies the characters actions in the present, based on their past, and highlights for the reader the contrast between a time of abundance and a time of scarcity.

McCarthy's *The Road* portrays the most violent relationships between food and the characters out of the three novels. The man and the boy relentlessly have to avoid starvation and becoming food for cannibals at the same time. It is also the only novel without a viable ecosystem, which leads to humans being the prime source of food for a significant part of the population. The characters use food as a tool to maintain a relationship to their past in their destroyed world by refusing to eat other humans and choosing to eat remains of industrial food instead. In starvation, food is a powerful driver when it comes to the man and the boy's ethical choices. The man is practical and does not want to share their meager amount of food with strangers, but the boy does, as he's described as intrinsically good. However, he does not realize that altruism can be a dangerous attitude in McCarthy's brutal world. Cannibalism dehumanizes people so much that the man would rather kill his own son or have him commit suicide rather than eating human flesh or being eaten. Cannibalism also becomes the food of the dominant class in the new reality. By refusing to change drastically their diet and switch to cannibalism, the man and the boy intend to maintain their humanity and their past values, but they also refuse to adapt to a new reality and its new power dynamic, although it might be inevitable. Overall, McCarthy is the author that challenges the most the links between food, humanity and identity.

The Road is the only novel in which the author blurs the borders between the past, the present and the future. The past is crucial for the man and the boy's survival since the food they survive on comes from that time. Their present is filled with repetitions: the man and the boy have food rituals which structure their day and become necessary for their survival. It is also almost impossible for the characters to imagine a future since they have no food security. The only moment during which they could do so, for a limited amount of time, is in the bunker, filled with food. *The Road* is also the only novel in which the reader cannot imagine the future either. It can be assumed that the boy will have to choose between death or becoming a cannibal, as the industrial food available is limited.

McCarthy's writing style is unique. He has a sporadic and minimalistic style that mirrors the man and the boy's deserted land and lack of food. However, even with a few words he manages to create vivid and brutal images for the reader. The author's choice of not dividing his novel into chapters is also a clear parallel with his characters' long, restless and starving journey. He does not write any time indicators and blurs everything together for both the characters and the reader.

Hegland's *Into the forest* has the particularity of being the only novel with a slow collapse, which thus gives the characters time to adapt. This specificity has repercussions on all the other aspects of the story. At first Eva and Nell try to maintain their consumerist lifestyle and eat industrial food, but then gradually move on to creating a connection with the forest and adapting a lifestyle and a diet close to the one of Native American tribes. The sisters' values are not as drastically challenged as in the other novels, since they have time to adapt to their new reality. However, they still encounter some challenges when it comes to food such as maintaining generosity, or whether to consume something right away or keep it for later. Because of that gradual change and a healthy ecosystem, Hegland's novel is the only one that does not mention cannibalism at all. The sisters are also the only characters who start to value food, respect it as something sacred and express gratitude towards it because of scarcity. They now realize the work it takes to have food, and Nell uses the word "gift" to qualify it very often.

The sisters are the only characters out of the three novels who actively choose to refuse to go back to the lifestyle they had before the catastrophe by burning their house. They now favor their relationship to nature and its edible plants. Their present is initially governed by the food from their consumerist past, but then they gradually adapt to an even more distant past: the Indigenous one. The latter becomes their future as well, as

they will survive by eating food from the forest. Eva and Nell's perception of time switches from being linear to cyclic, as food production and their new food rituals anchor them in time. Those food rituals structure their lives and are first tied to consumerism, then to Native Americans, as they connect them to nature's rhythm.

Hegland's writing is the most poetic one out of the three novels. It has the particularity of a vocabulary getting richer and more precise as the sisters learn more about the forest, to the extent of becoming almost an anthology of plants edible in forests of northern America. The author does not divide her novel into chapters, but still writes time indicators, which vary throughout the novel to reflect Eva and Nell's adaptations: from blank calendar squares when their food came from supermarkets to the moons and the seasons when they forage it themselves, the sisters' perception of time evolves.

Considering the various elements explored in this dissertation, it can be concluded that reading food in the three scarcity narratives allows for new interpretations of its role. Literature serves as a powerful vehicle to imagine food futures and encourage us to rethink our relationships to food by creating immersing experiences. Through metaphors, rich vocabulary and symbolic representations, literature highlights how food scarcity affects the different relationships the characters have with food and food rituals and encourages them to reconsider the impact it has on their lives and among themselves. The characters reevaluate it in different ways depending on their reality, and the anticipation and connection to both the earth and God in Atwood's novel, the destroyed ecosystem in *The Road* and the slow collapse in *Into the Forest* are the main elements which have repercussions on every aspect of the characters' relationships to food and rituals in their new collapsed world. The immersive capacity of literature can encourage the reader to explore, critique and appreciate the intertwined relations between literature, food, values and time.

This dissertation focuses on reading food in narratives of scarcity, and delves into values associated to it, and its relationship to time. It is important to acknowledge, however, that further research could be done, considering other elements. One key aspect that would be worth studying in the context of scarcity novels is the relationship between food and gender. Indeed, food and gender share links from its production to its consumption, or from social norms to their depiction since, as written in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, "Not only is our language male-centered, it is human-centered as well."

(Adams, 93). Interrogating the portrayal of the two concepts in the three literary works could offer yet other interpretations of the role of food.

In conclusion, analyzing food scenes in *The Year of the Flood*, *The Road*, and *Into the Forest* highlights the intricate interplay between food, values, times, and rituals. Through the lens of food, literature invites the reader to explore the complexities of human relationships, ethical dilemmas, time, and survival. A journey from text to table can remind one of literature's remarkable capacity to engage senses, challenge perceptions, and inspire critical reflection when it comes to food.

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