UCL Université catholique de Louvain

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres (FIAL)

FIAL
Un éventail de formations, une multitude d'horizons

Walking Your Way out of the Woods

An Analysis of Cheryl Strayed's Memoir *Wild*

Mémoire réalisé par
Céline Lefort

Promoteur(s)
Prof. Véronique Bragard

Année académique 2016-2017
Master en langues et lettres modernes, orientation germaniques, à finalité didactique

UCL
Université catholique de Louvain

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres (FIAL)

FIAL
Un éventail de formations, une multitude d'horizons

Walking Your Way out of the Woods

An Analysis of Cheryl Strayed's Memoir *Wild*

Mémoire réalisé par
Céline Lefort

Promoteur(s)
Prof. Véronique Bragard

Année académique 2016-2017
Master en langues et lettres modernes, orientation germaniques, à finalité didactique

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the help and support of a few people, whom I would like to thank here. I would first like to thank Prof. Véronique Bragard for helping me choose a topic and improve this study, and for guiding me throughout the writing of this dissertation. Her comments and ideas have been highly valuable and I am extremely grateful for her advice, which has been of considerable help. I would also like to thank my parents and my brother for showing interest in my work and for always encouraging me. I would then like to thank Asseline Sel, Clélia Gurdjian, and Sarah Pesenti for always being supportive, and Manon Hausse and Lauryne Douxchamps for their encouragements and for finding the time to proofread this paper. Their observations were more than highly appreciated. Finally, I would like to thank Nicolas Van Holm for his constant support and for always believing in me.

Table of contents

Introduction

The topic of walking has fascinated human beings for a long time both for its apparent simplicity and for its complexity, as it involves many parts of the body. Humans have made long walks since the origin of bipedalism and, thus, of humanity, and this continues today. Although the automobile is now an extremely common means of transportation, at least in the Western world, walking still has significance, as is reflected in the numerous works engaging with this topic. Joseph Amato adds that "[t]oday, as comfortable sitting and convenient riding increasingly dominate Western society, walking still continues to take new forms" (14). Walking is therefore still a relevant means of locomotion, even in our contemporary society, where it can take many different forms, such as religious pilgrimages, mountaineering, protest marches, flânerie in cities, strolls in the countryside, and hiking and backpacking. People however walk for different reasons. Sylvain Tesson discusses in his book *Géographie de l'instant* (2012) why he walks and his personal reasons show the richness of this act. For Tesson, more than a way of staying fit (385), of "s'afficher antimoderne" (383), or of having fun (388), walking is for him much more important. Tesson explains why in the following terms: "*Je marche parce que* cela me donne des idées. […] Marcher éclaircit l'esprit […]" (384, emphasis in original), "*Je marche parce que* la marche ralentit le temps" (386, emphasis in original), "*Je marche parce que* la marche me réconcilie avec la nature" (386, emphasis in original), "*Je marche parce que* marcher m'aide à construire ma vie. […] Je dois à la marche de remettre régulièrement de l'ordre dans ma vie" (388, emphasis in original). He thus raises important questions: What is walking? What does it mean to walk? The present dissertation is concerned with the analysis of this act in a memoir, namely Cheryl Strayed's *Wild: A Journey from Lost to Found* (2012), by studying its representation in the book.

In her memoir, Strayed recounts her decision to hike the Pacific Crest Trail, a long-distance hiking trail in the United States that stretches from the Mexican border to the Canadian border and passes through the states of California, Oregon, and Washington. After her mother passed away, she suffered from a deep depression; her ties with her siblings and stepfather weakened and she distanced herself from her husband by being unfaithful. They subsequently separated, she began using drugs and developed an addiction to it. Her husband helped her break her addiction but they eventually divorced. She then went through what can be deemed an existential crisis when she decided to hike the Pacific Crest Trail, despite her inexperience in backpacking. *Wild* recounts how walking helped her overcome her depression and how she managed to regain control over her life through that activity. In addition, numerous vivid

descriptions are provided, such as the hikers she encountered, the different landscapes she observed, the different stops she made during her hike, as well as the notable events that happened, although her hike was mostly uneventful and repetitive. This however allows the readers to witness the therapeutic effect that walking had on her, and how she learned to accept her mother's death. Hiking the trail definitely was a transformative experience for her.

The present study is relevant for different reasons. First, as Strayed's *Wild* was only published in 2012, few academic articles analyze the book in detail. Only two scholars studied her memoir, to the best of my knowledge, both adopting a different critical perspective. The first article, "Learning to Live Again: Contemporary US Memoir as Biopolitical Self-Care Guide," was written by Megan Brown in 2013 and analyzes *Wild* as an addiction memoir that can also be deemed a biopolitical technology – a notion developed by Michel Foucault and which will be explained later. The second article, Tanya Kam's "Forests of the Self: Life Writing and 'Wild' Wanderings," (2015) focuses on the restorative force of solitude and on nature as a therapeutic element. While Kim addresses elements that will be discussed in this dissertation as well, the present analysis studies some of the elements that she mentions more thoroughly while also presenting a deeper investigation of the various aspects of walking that are present in *Wild*. These two articles will be given special attention in later chapters. The fact that the book has received little academic attention and that it is recent indicates a gap in the literature that this dissertation intends to fill. In addition, the present research adds to the theoretical works that analyze the topic of walking in a literary work, in contrast with the numerous studies that engage with this subject from a more historical or philosophical perspective.

It can also be pointed out that the popularity of *Wild*, which ranked number one on *The New York Times* bestseller list and was adapted into a successful movie in 2014, also makes its analysis interesting and relevant. An interest in walking as can also be seen in the success of other non-fiction books about it or about survival in the wild, such as Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail* (1998), Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* (1980), and Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* (1996). The success of Strayed's memoir can however be ascribed to other reasons than its subject. For instance, the fact that it is a memoir, a genre in which the author recounts "a particular life experience" (Larson 15) – as opposed to the "strict chronology" (Larson 11) and the "[summary of] the significant people and events in the author's life" (Larson 12) that are to be found in autobiographies – could account for its popularity. Leigh Gilmore stresses the popularity of memoirs by mentioning a "long memoir boom" and the form of celebrity that several authors achieved from publishing their "massively

popular memoirs" (658). In addition, *Wild* can be categorized as travel literature, a likewise popular genre, which Susan Bassnett describes as "hugely successful" (xii).

This dissertation intends to analyze Strayed's *Wild* from a literary perspective and to study the effect of walking on its narrator.[1] It will be argued that walking served as a restorative force for the narrator, who could reflect on her life and identity, precisely because of the long-distance hike that she undertook. The effect of her hike on her recovery from her depression will be analyzed with respect to different aspects, namely the physicality of walking, the slowness, rhythm, and repetitiveness of her hike, its solitary aspect, the personal growth it entailed, as well as the reflection and acceptance of her past that it facilitated. The way these aspects are expressed in the book will be analyzed as well.

The present study is structured in five chapters. The first chapter is more theoretical and is concerned with an exploration of the role and impact of walking on human beings. What is the importance of bipedalism for the development of humankind? How does walking alter one's perception, and what does it entail? How does it help humans comprehend their surroundings? Does being in motion influence the way human beings think? These questions are examined in this first chapter, which also studies how walking is represented in literary works. How does one write about walking? What form does it take and what are the aspects that lie at the heart of such works? Following this, the shift of walking from a necessity to a deliberate activity is explained. The consequences of this shift and what it means for walking today is studied in this chapter. The walking experience of women is then addressed, as well as the implications of the limitation of their movement. To conclude this chapter, the various forms that walking can take, and, more specifically, backpacking, are explored. The different aspects that distinguish this form of walking are detailed in the last section.

[1] As can be observed, the term "narrator" will be used throughout this dissertation to refer to Cheryl Strayed during her hike, i.e. the voice, the "I" that narrates the events of the memoir, whereas "Cheryl Strayed" denotes, in this dissertation, the person who wrote the memoir and lives in the present. This distinction seems important to make, as Strayed had to rely on her memory, the journals she kept while hiking, and her conversations with several people she met on the trail – as stated in the author's note at the beginning of the book (see Strayed ix) – in order to write her memoir. Strayed hiked the Pacific Crest Trail in 1995, but *Wild* was only published in 2012, 17 years later. Due to the rather long interval between the events described in the book and its publication, and the fact that memory is not always reliable, I consider the author of *Wild* to be different from its narrator, who is a younger version of her present self, hence the different designations.

The study of Strayed's *Wild* begins in Chapter 2, which is devoted to the analysis of the physicality of the narrator's hike, a major aspect of her journey. Various questions are raised in this chapter, such as the following: How is the physical aspect of the narrator's hike expressed in the memoir? What is the impact of the physical challenge of hiking the trail on the narrator? How does it help her recover from her depression? What is the role of the body in *Wild*? This chapter highlights the ambivalent role of the narrator's body regarding her progression and her recovery. The third chapter considers the slowness, rhythm, and repetitiveness of the narrator's hike. All three play a key role in her healing process and provide her with a sense of control over her life. The role and effect of slowness on the narrator are addressed in this chapter, as well as the way it helps her develop a sense of belonging to the trail. Other elements will be analyzed: How is the idea of rhythm conveyed in the book? Is the repetitiveness of hiking a positive or a negative aspect of the narrator's journey? Can it be seen as restorative? Chapter 4 then considers the effects of the solitary experience of hiking a wilderness trail on the narrator's psyche. The main questions that this chapter studies are the following: How is the ambivalence of solitude's role represented in the narrative? What does being alone entail for the narrator? How does she deal with her isolation from other people? The forms of companionship that she develops to cope with her solitude are addressed in this chapter. Finally, the last chapter examines the personal growth that the narrator finds on her journey. Does the narrator change and to what extent? What does she remember on the trail? The context and content of the flashbacks and her recollections are analyzed before discussing the narrator's acceptance of her past.

Numerous questions around the act of walking and its representation in a literary text will thus be raised in this dissertation. In her memoir, Strayed illustrates how one can write about walking and convey an idea of physicality, slowness, and rhythm in the text itself, while also devoting time to engage with the psychological aspect of her travel. More than a journey on foot, *Wild* engages with a mental journey as well, as its narrator progresses and changes along the way.

1. Walking and human beings

Walking on two feet is a key part of what characterizes human beings. It appears as a simple, easy, natural, and familiar act. For Frédéric Gros (8), walking is as simple as child's play, Rebecca Solnit describes it as "[t]he most obvious and obscure thing in the world" (3), Ben Jacks considers it a "simple act" (5) and Geoff Nicholson views it as a "basic, simple, repetitive [activity] that just everybody does at one time or another" (21). As illustrated by these quotes, almost every scholar who set out to write about the subject of walking emphasizes its simplicity and natural quality. Robert Manning even contends that walking is "the defining [characteristic] of what makes us human" (B13), along with thinking. This claim is also supported by Klaus Benesch and François Specq, who write that "walking, as Balzac famously claimed, appears to be at the center of the human condition" (v) and that "to be human is to be *in motion*" (vi, emphasis in original). All of these characteristics of walking highlight its importance for our species. Walking is a central part of the history of human beings in general, as humans have walked since millennia. Amato writes that "[s]ince time immemorial walking has been the primary mode of human locomotion. Since the very beginning, walking and being human have coexisted" (19). Humans have thus walked for a long time and continue to do so as "walking is a persistent characteristic of the human" (Jacks 5).

Before further explaining why the study of walking is of great significance, Rebecca Solnit's influential book, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (2000), should be introduced as her work will be cited throughout this chapter and is often referenced by other scholars as well. In her book, Solnit offers a brief a history of walking and explores the various theories that explain why human beings became bipedal. She also proposes a study of walking as a cultural act by examining walking through various perspectives such as its connection with philosophy, thinking, and religion, its symbolic aspect, and its aesthetic quality. In addition, Solnit explores walking in different environments such as the countryside, mountains, and the city. She also surveys the differences between the experience of walking of men and women, and the various literary texts that have been written on the topic. This book thus constitutes a good introduction for a work that focuses on the topic, such as the present dissertation, as it addresses many themes and characteristics associated with walking.

Going back to the idea that the act of walking is largely considered to be simple, as observed from the above quotes, it should be noted that this idea is probably reinforced by the fact that walking is often done unconsciously (Solnit 6; Edensor 82) and is frequently viewed as an

"unconsidered locomotive means between two sites" (Solnit 3). However, walking is more complex than it seems at first sight. To use Nicholson's words, it is "a precarious balancing act" (7) that can be viewed as

> a miracle[,] […] a symphony of moving parts involving our highly developed nervous, skeletal, and muscular systems and both the balance and the strength to hold ourselves upright on two relatively small feet, all while moving one foot in front of the other for miles on end, over varied terrain, without falling, and doing so with little conscious thought (Manning B13).

Manning underlines the complexity of the act of walking, which involves not only the feet and legs but the whole body. He also mentions the difficulty of keeping one's balance when in motion, which is also more precarious than it first seems. Nicholson emphasizes this aspect of walking when he says that "walking itself was a series of falls, a precarious balancing act that had the walker standing on one leg for most of the time, constantly pitching himself forward, transferring energy and weight in a reckless and dangerous manner, avoiding disaster only by constantly getting a foot down in the very nick of time" (7). This again highlights the complicated nature of walking despite its apparent simplicity. Human beings are familiar with this act as it constitutes a defining feature of his/her nature. Walking is mostly done without consciously thinking about the motions that are required to be able to put one foot before the other in order to move forward. It should however be noted that walking is not as elementary as it seems and that for some people, it can be a struggle or an impossibility due to a disability, for example.

It should also be pointed out that numerous features are characteristic of walking, such as its repetitive nature, its link with thinking – many writers praise the benefits of walking for reflection and introspection as will be explained below – and slowness. These aspects of a walk will be analyzed in greater depth and in relation to the narrator's hike of the Pacific Crest Trail in further chapters of this dissertation.

1.1. The origins of bipedalism

Writing a brief history of bipedalism would be too complex a task, especially in the context of the present dissertation. A few words can however be said regarding how the early ancestors of humans began to walk on two feet in order to contextualize walking and to gain a better understanding of its impact and its significance on the evolution of human beings.

It should first be pointed out that academics disagree regarding when and why humans became bipedal. Different theories endeavor to provide an explanation for the origin of two-legged walking and, as Nicholson points out, "there is fierce debate among supporters of the different theories" (9). Some ascribe this origin to an environmental change. Our ancestors had been living in trees until a massive deforestation occurred, forcing them to adapt their travel mode (Nicholson 9). Bipedalism was "the most efficient way of getting from nearby tree A to distant tree B" (Nicholson 9) and was suited to the life in the savannah, a result of that environmental catastrophe (Solnit 34). According to Solnit (34), this theory provides however no satisfactory explanation for bipedalism. She explains that the bones of our first bipedal ancestors that were found in Africa "are constantly being rearranged to correspond to a new evolutionary family tree, a new set of measurements" (40). The interpretation of these skeletons thus seems to be debatable and this partly accounts for the existence of numerous theories regarding why our ancestors began to walk on two legs. One theory developed by Owen Lovejoy, "an anatomist at Cleveland State University and an expert on human locomotion," suggests that bipedalism is an evolution that originated from a reproductive motive (Solnit 36). Lovejoy proposes that walking on two legs allowed males to carry food and bring it to females, who were consequently "able to bear more children as the challenge of feeding themselves and their young was lessened" (Solnit 37). This theory was also largely criticized (Solnit 38). Numerous other theories and hypotheses regarding bipedalism have been offered, such as the fact that two-legged walking is more profitable from an energy perspective than walking on four legs (Nicholson 9; Solnit 40) or the idea that "bipedalism limited solar exposure in the tropical midday sun and thus freed the species up to move into hot, open habitat" (Solnit 40). Laying out the details of these theories and hypotheses in this dissertation would be impossible and would go beyond the scope of this brief description of some theories on the origins of bipedalism. As Nicholson puts it, "the precise 'reasons' for bipedalism remain as obscure as ever" (10) and will surely keep scientists busy in the future.

Scientists however agree that upright walking is what sets humans apart from other primates (Amato 20-21; Solnit 35, 41). Solnit even states that it is "the first hallmark of what became humanity" (32). This view is supported by Benesch and Specq, who contend that "[t]he shift from quadrupedalism to an upright mode of movement, from crawling, jumping, or galloping to walking, has been a crucial moment in the history of human culture" (vi). The importance of walking for human beings is thus not to be undermined. While it is difficult to provide a precise date for the origin of two-legged walking – it could date back to four or six million years ago

(Amato 20), or even ten or fifteen million years ago (Nicholson 10) depending on the reference consulted – the impact of bipedalism on the human body is significant. It had an influence on

> the straight row of toes and high arch of the foot, […] the long straight walker's legs […] [and] buttocks, round and protuberant thanks to the massively developed gluteus maximus of walkers, a minor muscle in apes but the largest muscle in the human body, […] the flat stomach, the flexible waist, the straight spine, the low shoulders, the erect head set atop a long neck (Solnit 35).

As a result of the physical changes that walking on two legs entailed, it is therefore possible to assume that the human body would not have been the same had humans not been bipedal. Furthermore, bipedalism had consequences on other aspects of humans' lives. For instance, it "altered the human pelvis, [whose] thickness […] [sets] limits on the size of infants at birth, which resulted in longer postnatal nurturing and the development of family life" (Amato 21). Upright walking thus influenced the social life of our ancestors. In addition, it "facilitated humans' capacity to walk and talk simultaneously" (Amato 21). Most importantly, walking on two legs meant that humans' hands could be used more freely. Amato explains that upright walking enabled humans to "reach and pick more efficiently, especially as their species developed a thumb that could be used in opposition to the index and middle fingers. Free hands enabled them to examine objects, make and utilize tools, and start, set, carry, and control fire" (22). This new ability cannot be underestimated as it itself impacted humans' interaction with the environment (Amato 23) and is considered by some scientists to be the catalyst for the expansion and development of the brain (Solnit 32; Amato 23). Finally, bipedalism allowed humans to migrate (Amato 22). By freeing their hands, walking enabled them to "[climb] hills, [wade] ponds, and [ford] streams" (Amato 22) and "to transport significant quantities of food, water, and goods" (Amato 22), which means that humans "could sustain themselves over considerable distances" (Amato 22). Human beings were thus able to travel and migrate as a result of bipedalism.

The biological evolution of two-legged walking thus had a significant impact on the lives of humans and shaped their physical appearance. Although scientists can only estimate when our ancestors began to walk on two legs, walking is an ancient practice of great importance. Benesch and Specq emphasize this importance by stating that it "marks the beginning of civilization itself" (vi). They add:

> Whether the upright gait has been the sole driving force of civilization and the production of culture is, of course, debatable. There is little doubt, however, that walking has always been more than merely a well-coordinated movement of body parts. As an expression of the human will to explore, interact with,

> and ultimately transcend the limits of the physical environment, it has served as a motor of progress, a relentless force of change and transformation (vi).

It is thus clear that although walking had perhaps been but an element that played a key part in the evolution of human beings, bipedalism remains a central feature of the development of our body and our culture, as highlighted by Benesch and Specq, among others.

1.2. The influence of walking on one's perception

It seems evident that one of the main characteristic of walking is its slowness. According to Amato (22), humans can walk up to three miles per hour, which is equal to approximately five kilometers per hour. While this could already be deemed a decent speed, walking is undoubtedly one of the slowest means of transportation available to humans. Gros even claims that "[l]a marche, on n'a rien trouvé de mieux pour aller plus lentement" (8). It is indeed difficult to think of a mode of transportation that would be slower than walking. Biking, riding a horse, driving a car, taking a plane, a boat or a train, are all examples of common and familiar ways of traveling that are faster than walking.

It is precisely because of its slowness that walking allows for a different perception of one's surroundings and of the world in general. As will be examined more thoroughly further in this dissertation, walking made the American narrator of *Wild* aware of her own perception of the world and of her place within it; it altered the way she engages with her surroundings. This different perspective on the world that slowness – and thus by extension walking – enables is also addressed by the Canadian writer Anik See in *Saudade: The Possibilities of Place* (2008), a collection of ten essays on the author's various travels, illustrated with pictures she took herself. In this book, See explores the meaning of travel and place and perfectly exemplifies the shift in perspective that slowness and, thus, walking can bring. In "Saudade," the last essay of the collection, See writes: "Call me old-fashioned, but I like the texture of slowness. How it lacks invasiveness. […] Slowness permits a capturing of moments, and even of glimpses of energy inherent to certain things […] which would be impossible with contemporary speed" (175). As she compares slowness with speed, See praises the qualities of the former. Slowness allows her to perceive details of her surroundings that she would not have been able to notice with a quicker pace. She however explains that she does not undervalue or underrate the usefulness of speed, although she prefers slowness. She writes: "I don't deny the efficiency or convenience of speed – sometimes it's essential, at the very least, it comes in handy – but the cost of it is too much to bear most times, and so I usually hover around an ideal that views

takeout and anything 'to go' as unappealing" (See 175). In this essay, See recounts more thoroughly how she was able to notice more details of a town that she visited as a result of slowness. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the narrator of *Wild* experiences the same new ability to observe the details of her surroundings thanks to the slow quality of walking. Her view of speed is also akin to See's. Speed is present in the narrative as the narrator has to bypass some parts of the trail before continuing hiking due to external circumstances. She has to take a bus and hitchhike several times. When she is in a vehicle, she expresses how different it feels to move at a fast pace, which contrasts with her speed on foot – a pace that has become usual and familiar to her. This will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 3, but it should already be noted that while the narrator seems to praise the virtues of slowness in the same way as See does and while it is a contributing factor in her emotional and psychological recovery, the usefulness of speed during her hike is also foregrounded. This again shows that her view on slowness and speed is close to that of See.

From this example, it can be argued that walking plays a crucial role in the way humans make sense of the world and themselves, as it alters their perception. Our physical perceptions influence our mental view of the world, as Mark Johnson explains it:

> As animals we have bodies connected to the natural world, such that our consciousness and rationality are tied to our bodily orientations and interactions in and with our environment. Our embodiment is essential to who we are, to what meaning is, and to our ability to draw rational inferences and to be creative (1987: xxxviii).

From this quote, Jacks (5-6) concludes that an upright moving body – i.e. a walking body – is essential to humans' thinking and understanding of the world. He contends that "[w]alking is, therefore, fundamental to human knowledge and understanding about self and the world" (Jacks 6). Benesch and Specq support this idea as well:

> […] walking allows us to interact with the environment in unique ways: through walking we acquire a sense of physical space and we learn how to measure distances, how to distinguish that which is far off from what is immediate and close by. Put another way, walking defines our experience of self and of the world (v).

Walking thus seems to be an inseparable part of our understanding of our environment and our self as it is an essential component of the nature of human beings, as was already discussed. Walking undeniably plays a crucial part in the narrator's shift of perception regarding herself and the world. She becomes more aware of her own place in the world and walking helps her

find her identity after her depression. It can therefore be said that the view of the world that a human being has can be altered by walking.

Nicholson discusses this characteristic of walking as well and uses Michel de Certeau's comparison of walking and speaking to state that walking "is one way to make the world our own" (27). de Certeau states that

> L'acte de marcher est au système urbain ce que l'énonciation (le *speech act*) est à la langue ou aux énoncés proférés. Au niveau le plus élémentaire, il a en effet une triple fonction « énonciative » : c'est un procès d'*appropriation* du système topographique par le piéton […] ; c'est une *réalisation* spatiale du lieu […] ; enfin il implique des *relations* entre des positions différenciées, c'est-à-dire des « contrats » pragmatiques sous la forme de mouvements […]. La marche semble donc trouver une première définition comme espace d'énonciation (148, emphasis in original).

de Certeau thus develops the idea that walking is a way of making sense of the world and of creating meaning. This supports the view that walking is linked to the way humans understand their surroundings, as this process is connected to being in motion, according to de Certeau. Nonetheless, and as Solnit explains it, walking is linked to the meaning that is attached to it. She explains that

> [m]ost of the time walking is merely practical, the unconsidered locomotive means between two sites. To make walking into an investigation, a ritual, a meditation, is a special subset of walking, physiologically like and philosophically unlike the way the mail carrier brings the mail and the office worker reaches the train. Which is to say that the subject of walking is, in some sense, about how we invest universal acts with particular meanings (3).

Solnit here shows that walking can be seen from a double perspective. It can be viewed as a functional act that allows humans to be mobile, without thinking too extensively about its possible meaning or function – i.e. what walking enables human to do, besides moving around. In addition, a special philosophical purpose or function can also be ascribed to it. Solnit cites the example of walking as a ritual or as a meditation to show that it can thus also have the purpose of providing humans with a better understanding of the world they live in.

This idea is linked to the fact that walking "restores a sense of connection" (Jacks 5) and "connects us to earth" (Jacks 5). For Amato, walking is "[i]nseparable from the foot and the earth it treads" (3). It allows the walker to feel closer to the biosphere, and by extension to better understand it. In a society in which vehicles have become an important element in the everyday life of a major part of the population, walking thus re-establishes a connection with the ground

itself, with the biosphere and the body's surroundings – a connection which could be described as lost or forgotten. In *Wild*, this restored sense of connection plays a key role in the narrator's recovery from her depression. Walking helps her find her place in the world, by making her realize that the complexity and sorrow of her situation are relative when compared to the immensity of the world, which she was not aware of before hiking the Pacific Crest Trail. It should however be noted that the sense of connection that walking creates is not limited to a connection to the earth. Walking also simply connects the different places we live in and thus links the walker with the whole world:

> [m]any people nowadays live in a series of interiors – home, car, gym, office, shops – disconnected from each other. On foot everything stays connected, for while walking one occupies the spaces between those interiors in the same way one occupies the spaces between those interiors in the same way one occupies those interiors. One lives in the whole world rather than in interiors built up against it (Solnit 9).

As explained by Solnit, the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl also addressed this characteristic of walking; he "described walking as the experience by which we understand our body in relationship to the world" (27). This echoes the comments made by Jacks and Amato. Husserl puts emphasis on the fact that the act of walking and not just one's sensory perceptions or thoughts is what allows one to better understand one's place in the world (Solnit 27). Solnit explains Husserl's view in the following terms:

> The body, he said, is our experience of what is always here, and the body in motion experiences the unity of all its parts as the continuous "here" that moves toward and through the various "theres." That is to say, it is the body that moves but the world that changes, which is how one distinguishes the one from the other: travel can be a way to experience this continuity of self amid the flux of the world and thus to begin to understand each and their relationship to each other (27).

Husserl thus suggests that walking and the body itself are the elements that create a connection between the walker and the world, not only the thoughts that one can have while walking. As will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, walking is a means that facilitates thinking and this is precisely what helped the narrator of *Wild* regain an emotional stability and accept the death of her mother. It would however be incorrect to state that it is only thinking, which walking eases, and not also the physical act of moving on foot that played a major part in her recovery. Her experience of the world and of her view of her place in it have been altered because she chose to walk. The physicality of walking, as suggested by Husserl, is a key element in her acceptance of her past. This aspect will, of course, be discussed later in this dissertation.

1.3. The link between walking and thinking

A great number of scholarly books and articles discussing walking point out the links that exist between walking and thinking and the influence that the former has on the latter. Manning claims that "[t]here has been a long and productive association between walking and thinking" (B13). He explains that this special relationship between the two dates back to the origins of bipedalism, which allowed humans' brains to expand (B13), a consequence of upright walking which was discussed in an earlier section. Benesch and Specq cite the examples of William Rowan Hamilton and Karl Marx, who found in walking a helpful practice to facilitate their thought process to illustrate the link between thinking and walking: "While walking, mathematician William Rowan Hamilton finally thought of a formula for the analysis of three-dimensional space, and Karl Marx, perambulating with his son-in-law […] is said to have envisioned the entire economic system as outlined in the first volume of *Das Kapital*" (v). Walking thus seemed to have helped Hamilton and Marx come up with important ideas for their respective works. The association between walking and thinking can be found in novels as well, as illustrated by Solnit. She uses James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) to show how the stream of consciousness, a literary technique characteristic of the two authors, illustrates the way in which walking "encourages digression and association" (Solnit 21) regarding one's thoughts. In both Joyce's and Woolf's novel, "the jumble of thoughts and recollections of their protagonists unfolds best during walks" (Solnit 21). For Solnit, this shows that spontaneous thoughts enter one's mind more easily when walking.

Hamilton and Marx are not the only examples of real people that found in walking a valuable help to think. Solnit devotes an entire chapter to the relationship between walking and thinking in her book *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. According to her, the relationship between walking and thinking can be traced back to ancient Greece, where philosophers were known for walking a lot (Solnit 14-15). Citing Felix Grayeff, Solnit (15) explains that Aristotle was known for teaching while walking. Aristotle ran a school in Athens and the philosophers that studied at his school were known as the Peripatetic philosophers, a name that highlights the connection between thinking and walking (Solnit 15). Solnit (15) makes the link between thinking and walking in ancient Greece even more clear by stressing that already before Aristotle's time, a group of philosophers known as the Sophists was also known for walking extensively. She however recognizes that "[i]t is now impossible to say whether or not Aristotle and his Peripatetics habitually walked while they talked philosophy, but the link between thinking and walking recurs in ancient Greece, and Greek architecture accommodated walking as a social

and conversational activity" (16). Indeed, as Solnit (15) explains citing Felix Grayeff, the architecture of Aristotle's school in Athens facilitated walking. Silvia Montiglio concurs with the idea of a close connection between walking and thinking during ancient Greece, by giving the examples of Plato and Socrates who needed to walk and talk to "[set] the thinking process in motion" (94). This notion that walking helps "set the thinking process in motion" is also discussed by Gros: "[…] rien ne vaut de rester assis […] quand la réflexion ne vient pas. Il faut se lever et faire quelques pas. Marcher, afin de se donner du mouvement et que, de cet élan du corps, les pensées prennent impulsion et redémarrent" (279). It thus seems that the physical movement of walking, of setting the body in motion is what facilitates thinking. This practice of moving when needing to think thus lived on, such as the ancient tradition of philosophers who walked. Philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Miller, Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein can be cited as examples of well-known thinkers who continued this tradition as well (Solnit 16).

Among those philosophers who appreciated a walk, Solnit lays emphasis on the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who walked a lot in the streets of Copenhagen, where he could observe people and study them more closely (Solnit 23). He was a socially isolated man (Solnit 23) who had few friends but he found in walking the streets of the Danish capital a way to feel more connected to other human beings (Solnit 24). By walking alone, Kierkegaard was able to feel both present and absent in his environment at the same time: "A lone walker is both present and detached from the world around, more than an audience but less than a participant. Walking assuages or legitimizes this alienation: one is mildly disconnected because one is walking, not because one is incapable of connecting" (Solnit 24). For Kierkegaard, walking was thus a way to feel less isolated and less alienated while still keeping a distance between himself and other people, which helped him in his observations. He loved walking in the city because it helped him think more clearly and because he felt that distraction and noise were beneficial to the mind (Solnit 24). The Danish philosopher himself claimed that most of his works had been written while walking (Solnit 24). Solnit proposes an explanation for Kierkegaard's claim: "Perhaps it was that the city strolls distracted him so that he could forget himself enough to think more productively, for his private thoughts are often convolutions of self-consciousness and despair" (24-25). This explanation could be applied to the hike of the narrator of *Wild* as well to understand why she needed to undertake such a long journey on foot. It can be argued that she needed the distraction that the difficulty of hiking provides in order to clear her mind and accept the difficult periods of her life which had led her to undertake this project. The physical pain

that she feels while hiking, the mental and physical fatigue that she endures, especially toward the beginning of her hike, provide her with some kind of distraction which eventually facilitated her thought process. The distraction here comes from the narrator herself – her sensations – and the silence and solitude of the trail, whereas the hustle and bustle of the city were the source of Kierkegaard's distraction.

In her study of the link between thinking and walking, Solnit also devotes particular attention to the poet Jean-Jacques Rousseau. She explains that he marks the beginning of a new form of walking "as a conscious cultural act" (14). She points out that the poet was a famous walker who perfectly illustrates the connection that links walking and thinking as he famously said that he was only able to meditate on foot (Solnit 14). For him, walking was fundamental as it allowed him to think: "La marche a quelque chose qui anime et avive mes idées; je ne puis presque penser quand je reste en place; il faut que mon corps soit en branle pour y mettre mon esprit" (Rousseau 248). Rousseau is thus another example of a man who needed to walk in order to be able to think. It can therefore be said that he continued the tradition of walking philosophers evoked above, thereby showing that philosophers were not the only ones to make use of walking. Rousseau "[walked] extensively throughout his life" (Solnit 18) and depicts an ideal walker in various of his works, such as in *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755). In Rousseau's works, "walking functions as an emblem of the simple man and as, when the walk is solitary and rural, a means of being in nature and outside society. The walker has the detachment of the traveler but travels unadorned and unaugmented, dependent on his or her own bodily strength" (Solnit 18). This kind of idealized walker that Rousseau depicts as "outside of society" echoes his view of his own society that he "feels has betrayed him" (Solnit 21). Rousseau walked because he felt that he had to move in order to be able to think and that he was more himself when walking (Solnit 19). This is a view that the narrator of *Wild* seems to share, as will be explained later in this dissertation. Thanks to walking, she is able to reflect on her divorce and the death of her mother, which helps her accept these difficult events of her life, something she could not do before starting her journey.

Both Kierkegaard and Rousseau offer personal and descriptive accounts of their extensive walks, which explains, according to Solnit, why their "walking is […] accessible to us […] rather than staying in the impersonal and universal realm of philosophy at its most pure" (26). In the two writers' works, walking is a personal act, almost intimate, and done for particular reasons, such as a will to be more isolated from society. Solnit explains the accessibility of their walking as follows: "Perhaps it is because walking is itself a way of grounding one's thoughts

in a personal and embodied experience of the world that it lends itself to this kind of writing" (26). In her view, the theme of walking and its meaning thus seem to be more fit for personal writings rather than philosophical discussions. This supports her idea that the meaning of walking is more often discussed in various literary genres such as "poetry, novels, letters, diaries, travelers' accounts, and first-person essays" (Solnit 26) rather than in philosophical works directly. The memoir genre could also be added to Solnit's list of literary genres in which walking is addressed, as Strayed not only provides an account of her hike in her memoir *Wild* but also shares her personal view of walking as a means to heal her emotional wounds, although she never discusses this in a direct way.

After having explained the link that exists between walking and thinking, it would seem natural to wonder why the former in particular facilitates the latter and is commonly considered as an activity that helps gather one's thoughts. Solnit suggests that the pace of thought is the same as the rhythm of walking: "I suspect that the mind, like the feet, works at about three miles an hour" (10). By working at the same speed, the mind is thus linked to the body in motion. This explains, according to Solnit, why walking helps think more efficiently. She also provides another explanation for the facilitation of thinking that walking entails by suggesting that while walking, "the mind, the body, and the world are aligned" (5). This symbiosis between the three "allows us to be in our bodies and in the world without being made busy by them. It leaves us free to think without being wholly lost in our thoughts" (Solnit 5). Tesson expresses a similar idea as he states that while walking, "le corps est occupé, l'esprit peut divaguer" (384). The connection that walking establishes between the walker and the ground, which was discussed in the previous section of this chapter, thus seems to be a central element to explain why walking is a helpful activity when one needs to think. It anchors the walker to his/her environment and his/her thoughts therefore do not unfold in every direction but are more focused, more concentrated on something particular. For Solnit, "[t]he rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking" (5) and the landscapes that gradually change as one walks mirror the train of thought (6). When walking, changes in the surroundings can be observed and the train of thought is made concrete and visible, in a sense. Seeing the landscape slowly moving helps to keep a certain rhythm, a continuity in thinking. Solnit claims that seeing the landscape change also

> creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it. A new thought often seems life a feature of the landscape that was there all along […]. And so one aspect of the history of walking is the history

> of thinking made concrete – for the motions of the mind cannot be traced, but those of the feet can. Walking can also be imagined as a visual activity, every walk a tour leisurely enough both to see and to think over the sights, to assimilate the new into the known. Perhaps this is where walking's peculiar utility for thinkers comes from (6).

This quote illustrates why walking can be seen as the perfect activity to think. It makes the train of thought concrete, as already stated, as one can see the progression that has been made on foot, which mirrors the thoughts. Again, Solnit here shows how the landscape, which passes slowly, helps "assimilate the new into the known." As the walker grows familiar with the landscape surrounding him/her, a new thought that emerges seems to have been present since the beginning. This thought is therefore associated to the landscape in the mind of the walker, which is what s/he knows and is most familiar with, especially in the case of long walks like the narrator's hike. As Gros puts it, "en marchant, je prends la mesure de ma demeure. Ce qu'on traverse comme des passages obligés, ce qu'on parcourt et qu'on laisse derrière soi, ce sont les chambres d'une nuit, […] mais pas le paysage. […] pendant plusieurs jours, j'habite un paysage, j'en prends lentement possession, j'en fais mon site" (49-50). One thus becomes familiar with the landscape while walking; it changes and is constantly new in a sense, but it also remains inexorably the same, a view that the walker knows extremely well. As will be analyzed later, this is another feature of walking that is present throughout Strayed's account of her hike. To conclude her explanation as to why walking induces thinking, Solnit suggests that "[i]t is the movement as well as the sights going by that seem to make things happen in the mind, and this is what makes walking ambiguous and endlessly fertile: it is both means and end, travel and destination" (6). A certain fascination for walking can be deduced from this quote. Walking fascinates for its ability to make one come up with ideas and thoughts – which is why, according to Sonia Overall, walking is particularly helpful "to the walking writer or artist in search of new ideas" (16) – and for the fact that it serves as a means to think and to empty one's mind, for example, while also being an end in itself. On the other hand, Tesson provides a scientific reason for the facilitation of thinking that walking provides. He states: "Les neuro-biologistes […] expliquent que l'effort conduit le cerveau à secréter des opiacées naturelles. Ces substances féconderaient l'inspiration en favorisant les échanges synaptiques : plus on s'épuise sur les sentes, plus les idées affluent" (Tesson 384). The way moving on foot helps one think can thus be scientifically explained, according to Tesson, although he finds this explanation less poetic (384).

1.4. Writing on walking

As it was made clear throughout the last section, "walking […] inevitably leads into other subjects" (Solnit 8), as it was here illustrated through its link with thinking. Walking is a complex act, as was already pointed out, and its complexity is highlighted when trying to analyze its meaning, roles, and functions in a literary work. This will be shown when analyzing the different characteristics of walking that helped the narrator recover from her depression. The complex nature of walking and the fact that it "leads into other subjects" are part of the explanation regarding the numerous works that have been written on this subject.

Robin Jarvis (1260) considers the Continental tour of Thomas Coryate, an English traveler born in 1577 and who died in 1617, to be the first work of pedestrian travel literature. More than a century after his death, pedestrian tours grew more and more popular, which resulted in "a rich and varied literature including poetry and essays as well as nonfictional prose" (Jarvis 1260). Walking is thus the subject of various literary works. Among influential writers on this topic, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Notebooks* are to be cited, "which are unprecedented in the detail and fidelity with which they record pedestrian perspectives on landscape and the bodily experience of walking" (Jarvis 1261). The Romantics, who continued the legacy of Rousseau's *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* (1782) and John Thelwall's *The Peripatetic* (1793) (Jarvis 1261), among others, are also to be mentioned. Many Romantic writers found in walking "an intense pleasure in greater personal freedom: freedom of movement […] [and] a bodily freedom that goes together with liberation of the mind" (Jarvis 1261). For the Romantics, walking allowed for a "greater scope for aesthetic enjoyment of landscape and detailed observation of nature; opportunities for closer encounters with local people (...); and more thorough detachment from the social context of their everyday lives and the straitjacket of conventional selfhood" (Jarvis 1261). The Romantics thus found a source of inspiration in walking and they left a substantial and enduring legacy, as well as a sensibility that lasted after the Romantic period.

Solnit (119) identifies the first essay on walking as William Hazlitt's "On Going a Journey" (1821), which Jarvis describes as "one of the masterpieces of walking literature" (1261). She claims that this essay "establishes the parameters for walking 'in nature' and for the literature of walking that would follow" (Solnit 119). In his essay, Hazlitt raises the question of solitude in walking, something that he deems necessary for his own walks in order to really be in nature, and discusses the connection that this act and thinking share. Hazlitt's essay thus stands at the

beginning of a new genre of essays on the topic which often describe a kind of walking that leads the walker back to his/her home in the same state as before (Solnit 120). Solnit (120) also points out that many of the classic essays on walking inform readers as to how to walk. She exemplifies this claim with Leslie Stephen's "In Praise of Walking" (1902), which is judgmental of other writers' ways of walking such as Shakespeare's, Ben Johnson's, and Wordsworth's (Solnit 120-121), and Robert Louis Stevenson's "Walking Tours" (1876), in which the author cannot "resist telling us that we should walk because it is good for us, [or] from providing directions on how to walk" (Solnit 121). Even Henry David Thoreau, who is, according to Gros (123), the first author to write a philosophical text on walking, simply entitled "Walking" (1861), and who praises walking for its liberating quality and for allowing us "[de] faire l'expérience du réel" (Gros 131), "could not resist preaching" (Solnit 122). Thoreau provides instructions to his readers throughout his essay, similarly to Stephen and Stevenson. Solnit (123) deplores this moralizing tone, which many early essays on walking share, as it confines walking, limits it, by stating how one should or should not move on foot. Many of these walking essays, which "[seem] to have been the dominant form for writing about walking in the nineteenth century" (Solnit 126), also spread the idea that walking is virtuous, or at least rural walking (Solnit 124), which is often associated with attributes such as simple, good, natural, and wholesome (Solnit 125).

During the twentieth century, "the lengthy tale of the very long walk" (Solnit 126) became the predominant form for writing about walking. Solnit explains that although travel literature was seen as usual in the eighteenth century, few accounts of long-distance walks can be found during that century (Solnit 126). She states that "[t]he first significant account of a long-distance walk for the sake of walking [she knows] is John Muir's *Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, describing a journey from Indianapolis to the Florida Keys in 1867 (published after his death in 1914)" (Solnit 126). Muir's book is representative of other walking books, which are often episodic and whose plots simply recount how the author went from a place to another (Solnit 126). A transformation of the self is also to be found in such books (Solnit 126). Solnit (126-127) considers books about walking for its own sake as "literature of paradise:" the protagonist is in good health and has no commitment which allows him/her to undertake a walk where no significant event happens; the thoughts of the protagonists and the landscapes are the only elements worth of interest. Muir offers however more than just an account of his long walk in *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, whose focus is not on his walk or the reasons that urged him to undertake this project, but rather on his surroundings and the natural landscape (Solnit 127).

As can be seen from his example but also from Thoreau's writing, in which the natural world is often described in detail, "[t]here is no well-defined border between the literature of walking and nature writing, but nature writers tend to make the walking implicit at best, a means for the encounters with nature which they describe, but seldom a subject" (Solnit 127). This is why, according to her (127), Thoreau's accounts of his walks belong more to the genre of nature writing than walking literature.

Other examples of accounts of long-distance walks include Charles F. Lummis's *Tramp Across the Continent* (1892) (Solnit 127), Colin Fletcher's *The Thousand-Mile Summer* (1964) and *The Complete Walker* (1968), John Hillaby's various books, Peter Jenkins's *A Walk Across America* (1979), Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* (1980) (Solnit 129), Alan Booth's *Roads to Sata: A Two-Thousand-Mile Walk Through Japan* (1985), and Ffyona Campbell's *The Whole Story: A Walk Around the World* (1996) (Solnit 130). In most long-distance recounts of walks, the journey contains elements that make it worth of interest and it often takes place in a remote place (Solnit 128). From the point of view of writing, "the long-distance walk is an easy way to find narrative continuity" (Solnit 128). The logic of the narrative is facilitated by its very own topic. As Solnit (128) highlights it, writing such books entail that the walker is a keen observer of his/her surroundings and is open to the new places and people s/he encounters. The walker can however overlook details of the environment if s/he is too "consumed by athletic endeavor as to be unable to participate in his surroundings, particularly when driven by a schedule or competition" (Solnit 128).

Some of these accounts of long-distance walks do not intend to make walking the focus of the book, such as Davidson's *Tracks*, which concentrates on the author's thoughts, or Booth's *Roads to Sata: A Two-Thousand-Mile Walk Through Japan*, whose main topic concentrates more on the encounters of the author (Solnit 129-130). In such works, walking becomes a means for telling another story. This could be partially applied to Strayed's memoir. In her account of her long-distance hike, the narrator specifically mentions walking and how exhausting and repetitive it is, for example. But throughout the memoir, she also refers to the various people she encounters, the towns and campgrounds she stops by, and she informs the readers on her past as well. It could therefore be argued that while walking is the focus of the memoir, it also serves as a means to write about her observations of the landscapes, her encounters, and most importantly, her self-discovery and introspection. Strayed's *Wild* thus exemplifies how the theme of walking can be used to address another topic while remaining at the center of the narrative. Long-distance narratives also emphasize "the notion that walking is somehow

redemptive and walking farther is more so" (Solnit 131). Both Davidson's and Campbell's books illustrate this (Solnit 131), and in my view, *Wild* as well. Walking allows its narrator to finally be at peace with herself and her feelings of resentment regarding the death of her mother, of failure concerning her recent divorce, and of guilt for becoming addicted to heroin. As will be shown, walking for a long distance is what has a therapeutic effect on her.

For Solnit, all "these books suggest how slippery a subject is walking, how hard it is to keep one's mind on it. Walking is usually about something else – about the walker's character or encounters, about nature or about achievement, sometimes so much so it ceases to be about walking" (132). This thus shows how other elements, other subjects, are involved in this kind of narratives. Even if walking still constitutes the main focus, few accounts of travels on foot involve only the act of walking, making such accounts so particular.

1.5. From walking as a necessity to walking as a free choice

Before the eighteenth century, and since our ancestors began to walk, people have been walking out of necessity (Amato 15-16), to work or to move from one place to another. In other words, people walked because no other choice was available or because they did not have the necessary means for another mode of transportation (Jarvis 1260). In our contemporary modern society, and as explained by Amato (16), walking is no longer an issue of necessity, but rather a deliberate choice. Jarvis (1260) highlights the importance of the end of the eighteenth century as the critical time when walking began to be considered as an element worthy of study in travel literature. It was not until it had become an activity done by deliberate choice, which was not the case before that century, that it began to be a source of literary investigation (Jarvis 1260). The various journeys on foot that both men and women undertook for thousands of years were often made by an underprivileged part of the population – which could only afford walking – and often no records were being kept of such travels, which explains, according to Jarvis (1260), why they were not studied more closely.

Before it became an activity done by choice, walking used to be an experience reserved to men, as is the case with travel more generally. Julie Taddeo (477) notes that, in the Western world at least, traveling and writing about one's travels were not experienced in the same way whether the traveler or writer was a man or a woman. Traveling was associated with qualities ascribed to men and it was believed that women belonged to the realm of the home (Taddeo 477). The same applies to traveling on foot. As underlined by Solnit (233), the most prominent walkers have been men. In an attempt to provide an explanation for the fact that few women have been

renown walkers, Solnit suggests that "most public places at most times have not been as welcoming and as safe for women. Legal measures, social mores subscribed to by both men and women, the threat implicit in sexual harassment, and rape itself have all limited women's ability to walk where and when they wished" (234). The fear of rape stops many women from walking alone, according to Solnit, as "women are the primary targets of sexualized violence" (240). This was on the narrator's mind during her journey as well, especially when hitchhiking: "Horrible things happened to hitchhikers, I knew, especially to women hitchhiking alone. They were raped and decapitated. Tortured and left for dead" (Strayed 47). For Solnit (241), this fear accounts for the reason why many women deliberately choose to stay at home and not to walk alone and why "[w]omen have been enthusiastic participants in pilgrimages, walking clubs, parades, processions, and revolutions, […] in part because companions have been women's best guarantee of public safety" (Solnit 244). A woman walking alone could also be seen as suspicious in the past and "[w]omen have routinely been punished and intimidated […] for attempting that most simple of freedoms, talking [sic] a walk" (Solnit 233). This is due to the sexualization of women's walking and the fact that preventing them from walking was a way to control their sexuality (Solnit 233-236). Women were also sometimes suspected of being prostitutes when walking alone (Solnit 238). In the United Kingdom, in the 1860s, a woman walking "had become evidence of sexual activity, and sexual activity on the part of women had been criminalized" (Solnit 239). For Solnit, "the limitations [of movement] […] placed on women […] have profoundly shaped the identities of both gender over the millennia in most parts of the world" (234-235), more so than for other reasons such as race, class, religion, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

The walking of women was thus associated with suspicion and sometimes prostitution. As explained by Jarvis, it also used to be "[i]dentified with poverty, low social status, [and] even criminality" (1260), which partially explains why people did not use to walk for leisure before the eighteenth century. Before that time, "[h]ierarchies of class and status were commonly built out of and around walking" (Amato 10). Amato explains that "[u]ntil recent times, those who could not walk well, or at all, were negatively classified. Those who were seriously impaired or unable altogether to stand, move, work, and travel formed the lowest ranks of humanity" (10). Those who could walk were considered as stronger than those who could not (Amato 10). But as Amato (10) shows, across the ages, people who had to walk and did not have the possibility to sit or ride were considered in turn as inferiors. In addition, they had to bring goods to those who had the power and the means to sit and ride (Amato 10). People thus walked

"because they couldn't ride. They were compelled to walk because of the force of circumstances or at the command of others. Walking out of necessity rather than by choice, they literally inherited the inferiority of the foot, which fastened them to the soiling earth" (Amato 11). This view of walking as being fit for those with a lower social status was reinforced by the fact that people who lived mostly on foot "have long been seen as bringing with them disease and disorder" (Amato 11).

This view of walking changed gradually as time passed and walking shifted from an activity that is done only by necessity to an activity freely undertaken. Solnit (82) traces the beginning of walking for pleasure to the walks that the British poet William Wordsworth regularly did with his sister Dorothy at the end of the eighteenth century. She writes:

> Wordsworth and his companions are said to have made walking into something else, something new, and thereby to have founded the whole lineage of those who walk for its own sake and for the pleasure of being in the landscape, from which so much had sprung. […] [The first generation of Romantics] introduced walking as a cultural act, as a part of aesthetic experience (82).

Citing Christopher Morley, Solnit (82) shows that walking for its sake or for aesthetic reasons was rare before the eighteenth century and Wordsworth. The poet thus stands at the beginning of a new form of walking, which does not originate from a necessity but rather from a choice. Solnit (84) however concedes that Wordsworth did not "create" this new kind of walking for its own sake; he was heir to a long tradition that already existed. She explains that "walking had already become an important tradition" (84) but as few people walked for pleasure or leisure, historians "[concluded] that walking for pleasure was a new phenomenon" (84).

After the end of the eighteenth century, more and more people began to walk for pleasure. Walking even became an obsessive act in modern literature. Benesch and Specq contend that modern literature is replete with examples of characters walking "endlessly and excessively" (vii). Walking entered a golden age in the late eighteenth century, which "peaked around the turn of the twentieth century" (Solnit 249), when interest in this act reached a high point and walking clubs were popular (Solnit 249). Walking flourished in the nineteenth century as a result of improvements in towns such as sidewalks and sewers and the development of national parks and mountaineering (Solnit 249). The developments brought by the twentieth century and the ever-increasing number of suburbs are the elements marking the decline of walking's golden age, according to Solnit (249). With suburbs came a change in mentalities as well. Solnit takes the example of Americans who "now perceive, value, and use time, space, and their own bodies

in radically different ways than they did before" (249-250). People still walk but mostly for short distances between their cars and different interiors but "walking as a cultural activity, as a pleasure, as travel, as a way of getting around, is fading, and with it goes an ancient and profound relationship between body, world, and imagination" (Solnit 250).

However, and as claimed by numerous academics, it should be reminded that walking is still a highly popular activity. Lee Crust et al. even claim that it is "the most popular outdoor recreational activity in the United Kingdom" (243). William Siddall explains that "[w]alking has never lacked its enthusiasts; even in the age of the automobile, it has enjoyed resurgences of popularity" (310), thus showing that it is still considered a pleasant activity, notwithstanding the existence of automobiles. Among the various forms of walking, hiking "witnessed a resurgence in the last few decades of the twentieth century. […] One now finds microregional hiking trails throughout Europe, Asia, Latin America, and North America, where certain regions are joined by immense trails like the Appalachian Trail" (Amato 258). The Pacific Crest Trail could be added as well. As pointed out by Melville Saayman and Armand Viljoen, "[a]mong the variety and diversity of ecotourism activities, hiking is one of the most popular and enjoyable ones" (41). The advent of vehicles and the fact that walking is not a necessity anymore thus does not mean the end of this activity.

Following the shift of walking's place in society, a rather radical change in the way it is perceived can be witnessed. As it was not an issue of necessity anymore and as one can freely choose to walk for leisure, it became increasingly seen as an eccentric activity, whereas it used to be ordinary, as underlined by Amato (16). In a society in which productivity and efficiency are always expected and in which technologies grow rapidly (Solnit 10), walking can sometimes appear as a strange activity and as "a waste of time" (Amato 271). The reasons for walking in a modern society are sometimes not understood, as highlighted by Gros: "Pour qui n'en a jamais fait l'expérience, la simple description de l'état du marcheur apparaît vite comme une absurdité, comme une aberration" (13). The reasons for walking seem to be mysterious for some people. As Manning expresses it, "[i]n today's world it's easier, more convenient, to sit and ride" (B13), which explains why walking can seem absurd when it is no longer necessary.

1.6. Backpacking and some others forms of walking

Walking can be viewed as the act of getting from one point to another, its most simple function, but it can also be much more than that. As Benesch and Specq (v) observe, walking can be an act of protest against capitalism and the self-alienation that it entails, or against modernity in general (vii). Anti-modern feelings are expressed through walking, especially when it is slow (Benesch and Specq vii), as everything in the modern world seems to move quickly. Walking can thus be a way of showing disapproval and complaint and can therefore be "an alternative mode of movement, one that engages both body and soul and, thereby, sublates the tensions inherent in modern society" (Benesch and Specq vii). It can also be experienced as an escape, a way of "[resisting] the demands of family, society, civilization" (Benesch and Specq viii). Benesch and Specq add that "[f]rom the late eighteenth to the twenty-first century walking repeatedly figured as an alternative mode of human existence, one that is outside of the restrictions and limitations of modern life as we know it" (viii). By walking, the walker is thus disconnected from society, an idea that was present in Rousseau's writing, as explained earlier. This idea of being outside of society and of walking as a kind of alternative mode of transportation is also highly empowering, as highlighted by Benesch and Specq: "walking has often come to signify a counterspace, a mode of mobile existence that frees the mind from the limitations of history and tradition, thereby empowering the autonomous subject and providing moments of epiphanic insight" (vii). The empowering quality of walking is especially visible in *Wild*. Through hiking, the narrator discovers that she is able to regain control over her life and her emotions, that she has the ability to walk for a long distance.

A special form of walking worth mentioning is that of the pilgrimage. As pointed out by Manning (B13), pilgrimages represent a very ancient practice that highlights the spiritual dimension of walking. In a pilgrimage, walking is codified, as well as its goal and its conduct (Gros 149). Because of its religious characteristic, "the normal social inhibitions regarding walking did not apply to pilgrimage" (Jarvis 1260). This distinguishes pilgrimages from other forms of walking, as well as "its emphasis on repetition and imitation" (Solnit 68) of saints and gods, which makes it unique in Solnit's view. By imitating saints and gods, by following their steps in the same place, the pilgrim hopes to be closer to them (Solnit 68). The religious purpose of the pilgrimage is thus central to its understanding. Regarding *Wild*, it could be argued that the narrator's hike was a sort of pilgrimage as well, although she did not have any religious goal in mind. She had however the aim, or at least the hope, that walking for a long distance would be a transformative experience, which is also what pilgrims strive for. Gros explains that

"[l]a transformation intérieure demeure l'idéal mystique du pèlerin : il faut en revenir absolument *altéré*" (167, emphasis in original). In this sense, the narrator's hike is akin to a pilgrimage as she thought that hiking would change her. As she explains when she first saw the guidebook on the Pacific Crest Trail, the catalyst for her decision to hike for a long distance, the narrator thought of the trail as "[a] world [that] would both make me into the woman that I knew I could become and turn me back into the girl I'd once been" (4). She later says that this thought helped her during her preparation for her hike:

> *I had to change* was the thought that drove me in those months of planning. Not into a different person, but back to the person I used to be – strong and responsible, clear-eyed and driven, ethical and good. And the PCT [Pacific Crest Trail] would make me that way. There, I'd walk and think about my entire life. I'd find my strength again, far from everything that had made my life ridiculous (57, emphasis in original).

These two quotes highlight a contradiction in her decision to undertake her journey. She states that she hopes to become another person, a better version of herself, but that she also wants to be the woman she was before her mother died, which caused her depression, her drug addiction, and her divorce. Nonetheless, the narrator hopes to be changed, transformed by her hiking experience, as pilgrims hope as well. In this sense, it can thus be argued that her hike resembles a pilgrimage.

As the narrative of *Wild* is concerned with the narrator carrying a backpack, it can be said that backpacking is the form of walking that she adopted. It will thus be briefly addressed here. As Gene McQuillan (57) explains it, long-distance travels have been done while carrying packs for thousands of years. Citing Sally Tisdale, McQuillan (57) highlights that lone backpackers are often in search of an authentic experience of travel, a kind of simplicity. In the United States, backpacking is often linked to national parks and hiking trails, which is why "backpacking is often praised for its elegant simplicity and its rigorous (but not violent) encounters with the natural world" (McQuillan 57). But as McQuillan (57) points out, the experience of backpacking is not only about being alone in the wilderness, but also about meeting other hikers and sharing a common space with them and about going astray, sleeping badly and eating frugally. All of these elements are to be found in *Wild*. Although the narrator did not choose backpacking because she longed for a more authentic travel experience, she still benefited from it and experienced the more difficult parts associated with it, as mentioned above. Backpacking contributed to her recovery because of the fact of carrying a pack, which the narrator grows to

love and which she affectionally nicknames “Monster,” and because it makes her realize that her life could be much simpler. She writes:

> I was amazed that what I needed to survive could be carried on my back. And more surprisingly of all, that I could carry it. That I could bear the unbearable. These realizations about my physical, material life couldn’t help but spill over into the emotional and spiritual realm. That my complicated life could be made so simple was astounding (91).

It is thus clear that although the narrator’s relation to her pack was complicated at first, in part because it is considerably too heavy for her, and because it rubs her skin raw due to its weight, she gradually learns to see it as a kind of companion. Furthermore, carrying a backpack makes her realize that her life could be much simpler. As her example shows it, “the act of backpacking is closely associated with the spiritual renewal of a person” (McQuillan 58). As already expressed, walking helps her regain her emotional stability and recover from her depression.

In conclusion, walking is both a simple and a complex act that is a fundamental characteristic of human beings. The evolution from quadrupedalism to bipedalism marks an important step in the history of human beings as it radically changed humans’ lives in different aspects. Walking has been a source of inspiration for many writers and it undeniably affects the mind in the sense that it facilitates thinking and introspection, as many authors and philosophers have highlighted it. Walking also represents a way of feeling connected to the biosphere and it thus provides a better understanding of the world and can alter one’s perception of the environment. People used to walk out of necessity but it gradually became a voluntary act, as Strayed exemplifies it in her memoir *Wild*, in which walking is a central element.

2. The physicality of hiking the Pacific Crest Trail

In this chapter, the focus will be placed on the physicality of the act of walking. As will be shown, the body is a central element of Strayed's *Wild*, as the reader can find numerous references to the body parts and the physicality of hiking from the beginning to the end of the memoir. The narrator can recover from her depression, find her place in the world and mourn the death of her mother precisely because she set out to hike the Pacific Crest Trail. Walking involves a mental transformation for her, resulting in several realizations about her life – which will be explained in detail in Chapter 5 – that help her accept her past and who she is. While her mental recovery is of utmost importance, the physicality of the act of walking itself also plays a crucial role in the narrator's finding of her identity and acceptance of her past, as will be argued in the following pages.

2.1. The place of the body in walking narratives

Central to the act of walking is the body, as Marguerite Helmers and Tilar Mazzeo point out when talking about traveling: "travel is experienced *through* the body" (270, emphasis in original). Charles Forsdick concurs with the idea of the centrality of the body in travel writing by stating that travel is "a profoundly corporeal experience" (68). It should also be noted that the body plays a particular role in this type of writing, as highlighted by Forsdick: "[t]ravel writing is the most physical of all literary genres" (68). Helmers and Mazzeo (267) explain that the articulation of body references in travel narratives is a sign of authenticity for the readers; it tells them that the author visited the place s/he describes. The body is all the more important in the analysis of travel accounts of female writers, as it defines their experience and can help them evolve psychologically. As pointed out by Helmers & Mazzeo, women are "both surveyor and surveyed" (269) in the sense that their bodies are being assessed by others.

This is particularly true in *Wild* as the narrator is acutely aware of the feminine quality of her body and of the fact that it might be surveyed by other people and especially men. For example, during the narrator's first stop at a campground, she meets with six hikers, all men, some of whom she has previously encountered on the trail before arriving. They all decide to go to a restaurant that night, resulting in the narrator's self-consciousness regarding her body and physical appearance: "I was going out to a restaurant with six men, and I had nothing to wear but what I was already wearing" (Strayed 110), implying the clothes that she has been wearing since the beginning of her hike and which are stained with sweat. The narrator then proceeds to

put on a fresh t-shirt and a necklace, "simply because [she] felt prettier with it on" (Strayed 110), and to comb her unkempt hair. This extract illustrates how the narrator presents an awareness of her own body in terms of its femininity, especially in the presence of men. Notwithstanding this attempt to make herself look more feminine, she then decides that she can "let [herself] look and feel and smell the way [she] did" (Strayed 111). Being the only woman, she "felt [she] had to sexually neutralize the men [she] met by being, to the extent that was possible, one of them" (Strayed 111). Although this is not easy for her, the narrator feels that the trail forces her to show herself as she is to the world (Strayed 111). This exemplifies the narrator's attempt to find her identity as she plays with gender roles by trying to be like the other male hikers while also being feminine. This attempt also involves accepting that her physical appearance on the trail might not be as appealing as she would like it to be or as she is used to, and trying different gender roles by being different from what is often expected of women – being pretty in all circumstances – which represents who she was in the past, as she explains it (Strayed 111). The narrator feels constrained to try a different gender role, which is exactly what she aimed to do when she set out to hike – to change and find her identity.

This extract perfectly illustrates why Tanya Kam considers *Wild* as a gendered memoir. Regarding the narrator's relations to men during her hike, Kam (13) points out that the most serious threat she encounters has to do with men. Two hunters scare her by commenting on the fact that she is a woman alone, implying a lack of safety, and by lurking near her camp at twilight after she undressed. According to Kam (13), men hikers would not have encountered the same threat. She also comments on the narrator's feminist side. She notes that the latter read numerous books written by female authors, such as Adrienne Rich, and that these books motivated her to find the strength to hike (Kam 14). For Kam, Strayed's memoir is empowering women (16) and her "decision to walk the PCT could be interpreted as a feminist act" (14), as women are stereotypically linked to the domestic space (14). Her decision to hike for a long distance thus represents a break from the stereotypical role of women. It should also be noted that female explorers do not face the same difficulties compared to male explorers, such as the necessity to justify their experience, the discrimination they might face and the gender norms and stereotypes related to women in general (Kam 15). Notwithstanding these difficulties and potential dangers, the narrator recognizes that being a lone woman, coupled with her physical attractiveness, has advantages as well, as people are more inclined to help her (Kam 15).

If the body is often present in travel narratives, it is even more so in accounts of journeys made on foot, such as the narrator's hike. The very fact that she travels on foot puts the emphasis on

the body, and more specifically on the feet. As will be studied in this chapter using various extracts from the book, the narrator often provides the readers with descriptions of her body, the way it changes, its wounds and injuries due to her backpack, her shoes, and the overall difficulty of hiking the trail. Her feet are given special attention as they constitute the part of her body that most suffered from hiking. The narrator often emphasizes that they are continually covered by blisters and are often bleeding. In addition, she loses a total of six toenails during her hike, which contributes to the almost constant pain of her feet. It should also be pointed out that intimate and physical details of hiking in the wilderness are also disclosed, such as the way the narrator has to dig a hole to bury her "pile of […] hot dung" (Strayed 65), or how she deals with her menstruation by "push[ing] [a] sponge into [her] vagina as far as [she] could, wedging it against [her] cervix" (Strayed 164). The narrator explains how she deals with her bodily fluids and waste in a rather crude way, thereby emphasizing the physicality of her experience.

The central place of the body in walking narratives explains why it has been the subject of numerous studies in various fields in recent years (Csordas 1). As already pointed out, the body is an essential element of walking as it is a fundamentally corporeal act. It can therefore be observed that the physicality of walking impacts the body and that the two are closely related. As has been already mentioned, Johnson claims that "[o]ur embodiment is essential to who we are" (1987: xxxviii), and that "we are born moving. It is originally through movement that we come to inhabit a world that makes sense to us" (2008: 20). Humans thus gain an understanding of their selves and of the world through movement and through walking. Numerous scholars underline this idea as well, such as Tim Edensor who writes that "the body is the means through which we experience and feel the world" (2000: 100), and Neil Lewis who states that "[w]e make sense of the world by acquiring information through our bodies" (68-69). This could be explained by the fact that humans perceive the elements composing their environments "by walking around them" (Ingold 331). Their whole body enables them to perceive their surroundings (Ingold 330), which makes it the receptor of the information and sensations (Solnit 28) that are acquired through walking.

2.2. The impact of the physicality of walking on the walker

As has been highlighted, the body is inseparable from the act of walking and both are essential to humans' understanding of their surroundings. The effect that walking – in the sense that it engages the body and entails a movement – can have on humans should now be explained in order to analyze how the physicality of walking is essential to the narrator's emotional stability.

It should first be noted that walking restores a connection with the biosphere – a characteristic of walking that has been discussed in the first chapter. As Lewis contends it, when walking, the walker "is continually having to reassess [himself/herself] in relation to the landscape: taking bearings, locating [himself/herself], moving on, taking new bearings, relocating [himself/herself], moving on. […] Therefore, the body is spatially situated. […] [W]e are always somewhere, always viewing the world from a particular place at a particular time" (69). By constantly having to re-examine his/her place within the landscape, the walker is therefore always connected to it.

In *Wild*, this connection with the landscape and the earth allows the narrator to compare her situation with the immensity of the world. The unhappy events of the narrator's life that led her to hike the Pacific Crest Trail absorbed her attention. This can be noticed in the way she puts emphasis on the fact that her situation cannot stay the same: "*I had to change* was the thought that drove me in those months of planning" (Strayed 57, emphasis in original). In addition, the narrator describes her situation as being the lowest point in her life (Strayed 5). Her main preoccupation is thus to change, which is why she decided to undertake such a journey. She hopes that this will be a transformative experience, as the following quote illustrates:

> I'd set out to hike the trail so that I could reflect upon my life, to think about everything that had broken me and make myself whole again. […] I'd imagined endless meditations upon sunsets or while staring out across pristine mountain lakes. I'd thought I'd weep tears of cathartic sorrow and restorative joy each day of my journey (Strayed 84-85).

The narrator's view of the world is thus reduced to her unhappy situation. In addition, she regards her body as fragmented, as needing to be "made whole again." This explains why she often offers descriptions of the various parts of her body that are in pain, such as her feet. Walking in vast landscapes allows the narrator to witness the vastness of the world. When she resumes her hike after her first stop at a campground, she realizes that her perception of the world and its size has changed. She writes:

> […] I was alone in that world, occupying it in a way I never had before. Living at large like this, without even a roof over my head, made the world feel both bigger and smaller to me. Until now, I hadn't truly understood the world's vastness – hadn't even understood how vast a mile could be – until each mile was beheld at walking speed (Strayed 119).

Walking thus changes the narrator's perception of the world and of its immensity, which, to my view, helps her regain an emotional stability and a sense of agency. She learns to situate herself

again in the world. At the beginning of her memoir, Strayed explains what prompted her to hike the trail, how the death of her mother "broke [her] up" (Strayed 27), and most importantly, how she found her place in the world through walking:

> It took me years to find my place among the ten thousand things [the amount of love that her mother had for her children] again. To be the woman my mother raised. […] I would want things to be different than they were. The wanting was a wilderness and I had to find my own way out of the woods. It took me four years, seven months, and three days [the timespan between the death of her mother and the completion of her hike] to do it (Strayed 27).

As she explains it, the narrator could only find her place in the world again after completing her hike.

Another effect of walking is the sharpening of the senses that it entails, which can also be linked to the regained connection with the biosphere discussed above. John Wylie stresses this aspect in his article "A Single Day's Walking: Narrating Self and Landscape on the South West Coast Path," in which he recounts his walk in England, with the aim of studying the relationship between the landscape and the self. Wylie writes that "[w]alkers on the Path very often find themselves in such a close visual, tactile and sonorous relation with the earth, the ground, mud, stinging vegetation" (239). David Le Breton exemplifies the various sensations that a walker experiences in the following words: "il touche les pierres ou la terre de la route, […] il se baigne dans les étangs ou les lacs, les odeurs le pénètrent […], il voit les étoiles, et connaît la texture de la nuit, […] [i]l entend le cri des oiseaux, le frémissement des forêts" (31). As illustrated by these quotes, the closeness with the earth thus sharpens the walker's senses, and for Edensor (2000: 82), this is especially true for walks in the countryside. If this is the case, wilderness areas such as the Pacific Crest Trail should be even more suitable places to develop an awareness of the senses. As Edensor points out, "[t]he recovery of sensual experience continues to be a common theme in walking literature" (2000: 86), which shows the importance of this aspect of walking. He further argues that walking in the countryside engages all the senses, as opposed to walking in cities, which lessens one's sensory experience (Edensor 2000: 86). Le Breton supports this idea by stating that "[l]a marche est une expérience sensorielle totale ne négligeant aucun sens, pas même le goût" (31-32). In the countryside, "[t]he walker is not merely onlooker, but experiences nature as tactile and taste-full" (Edensor 2000: 86). As Tim Ingold (330) observes, this stands in contradiction to the Western idea that the senses of vision and hearing are "superior" to the others, which can be seen in the "ocular-centrism present in many pedestrian narratives" (Forsdick 74). As will be studied in the next section of this chapter,

this assertion could be held true for *Wild*. In addition, Jo Lee and Tim Ingold (69) put emphasis on the fact that many people find in walking a perfect opportunity to observe the environment. They report that "looking around is usually possible in a walk to a much greater extent than in other ways of travelling, and this is a basic but important factor in why people walk" (Lee and Ingold 69). People enjoy walking because, as was already stressed by several Romantic writers, it constitutes an opportunity to observe nature.

Parallel to the sharpening of the senses, walking also contributes to the acuteness of the sensations. Le Breton explains that walking alters the perception of humans regarding the sensations that they are accustomed to feel: "Jamais la nourriture n'est aussi savoureuse […] qu'au moment de la halte qui suit l'effort fourni depuis des heures. La marche transfigure les moments ordinaires de l'existence, elle les invente sous de nouvelles formes" (32). Walking can thus be seen as a possibility to experience those familiar sensations in a whole new way. Several examples of this can be found in *Wild*. For instance, hiking makes the narrator develop a kind of addiction to the lemonade brand Snapple. Whenever she has the occasion to purchase a bottle at a store during her stops off the trail, she does it (see for example Strayed 168 and 275). During an extremely hot day, her yearning for a Snapple lemonade is made even stronger: "My desire for one had grown so large that it wasn't even a longing anymore. It was more like a limb growing from my gut" (Strayed 197). When she finally manages to drink one that day, she describes the sensation in the following terms: "Each sip sent a stab of heady pleasure through me" (Strayed 198). The same kind of descriptions can be found throughout the book when the narrator has the possibility to eat something different from dehydrated food. For instance, she particularly appreciates her first "real" meal after a week on the trail: "I lifted a forkful of potato salad to my mouth. It was so good I almost fell out of my chair" (Strayed 77). Walking for a long-distance in the wilderness with only the most basic commodities, in addition to the physical effort and the exhaustion that it entails, makes the narrator appreciative of sensations that she was familiar with. This new appreciation of physical sensations is however not restricted to food. Sleeping in a bed, or taking a shower or a bath becomes a different experience as well. The comfort of a bed is also perceived differently by the narrator, who recounts during one of her stops at a motel the pleasure that she feels just sitting on one: "My body almost hurt with pleasure to merely sit on the bed, as if I were being the opposite of burned" (Strayed 129). During the same stop, she has to take two baths in order to be completely clean. She writes: "In the second bath of water I reclined, feeling more grateful than perhaps I ever had for anything" (Strayed 129-130). Walking reconnects the narrator with her physical

sensations and makes her appreciative of them, perhaps even to a greater extent than before, as she states it.

Finally, it should be mentioned that walking gives a sense of agency and freedom to the walker, as "body movement [is] a fundamental expression of agency" (Lewis 64). Lewis (64) explains this claim by the fact that walking came to symbolize a means of opposition and judgment of society for the Romantics, as movement freed them. In addition, he points out that walking signifies a special kind of liberty, independence, and autonomy as the walker is free to go in the direction s/he wants (Lewis 64-65). This was especially true in the eighteenth century (Lewis 64) but is still relevant today, as the narrator exemplifies it. The agency that walking gives is precisely what allows her to regain control over her life, as it gives her the sense that she is in command of her own life.

2.3. The impact of the relation between the body and the mind on the narrator's recovery

Notwithstanding the existence of a "conventional distinction between mind and body" (Csordas 7), it will be argued in this section that the two are closely linked, as proved in *Wild*. The narrator constructs her new identity after the death of her mother through both her mind – which is linked to her acceptance of being an orphan, of her divorce, etc. – and her body, which supports Helmers and Mazzeo's suggestion that "the traveler's identity is construed as double: in terms of mind (reason, emotion, and ideas) and body (the corporeal existence of the traveling person)" (271). This section aims to show how walking as a physical act helped the narrator reconnect with her body and the environment while developing a new awareness of her bodily sensations, which illustrates the way her physical transformation impacted her mental recovery.

Right from the beginning of the book, it can be observed that the narrator's body reflects her state of mind. She quickly realizes that hiking the Pacific Crest Trail is a much more challenging project than what she had thought (Strayed 51). Although she describes herself as outdoorsy, she has never gone backpacking (Strayed 32). When she manages after approximately one week to hike nine miles, she describes it as "a physical achievement far beyond anything [she]'d ever done. Every part of [her] body hurt" (Strayed 70). After her first day, her muscles are stiff (Strayed 61-62), and during her second day, the weight of her enormous backpack starts to excoriate the skin of her shoulders, back, and hips, and she describes her body as "a bag of broken glass. Every time I moved, it hurt" (Strayed 63). The pain of the narrator is already so intense that she has to focus her mind on the idea of putting one foot in front of the other

(Strayed 63). It can therefore be observed that the narrator's body reminds her right from the beginning that she has no prior experience in backpacking. Her body symbolizes a harsh confrontation with reality, that is, her lack of experience and preparation. It is a reflection of her state of mind, as the latter is, symbolically, as shattered as her body toward the beginning of her hike.

However, as the narrator continues hiking, her body quickly becomes stronger. After one week of hiking, she writes: "I could feel the muscles in my body growing stronger by the day and at the same time, in equal measure, my tendons and joints breaking down" (Strayed 70). This quote shows how quickly the trail starts to shape her body, both in a positive way as she grows stronger, and in a negative way as her body is still causing her pain. It can therefore be argued that in addition to giving the walker agency, the landscape itself has agency. For Amato (3), "the surfaces and distances," as well as the weather exert influence on the walker and the way s/he walks. Lewis adds to this idea and suggests that "the body physicalizes its relationship with the world" (70) and is being shaped by the physical practices it experiences. Discussing rock-climbing, Lewis writes: "Through the cuts and abrasions, the freezing cold and sun traps, the taut muscles and creaky joints, the practice of climbing inscribes itself upon the body […]. But touching is a reciprocal act: to touch something is to let something touch you in return. […] [C]limber and environment inscribe each other" (74).

Although Lewis does not examine the practice of walking, this last quote is relevant to this act as well. Walking the Pacific Crest Trail transformed the narrator's body. After about one month on the trail, she observes that her legs in particular are becoming muscular. She describes them as follows: "My legs had become as hard as boulders, their muscles seemingly capable of anything, rippling beneath my thinning flesh in ways they never had" (Strayed 190). Later, while hiking in Oregon, she feels "stronger than ever. Even with that tremendous pack of [hers], [she] was capable of hammering out the big miles now, though at day's end [she] was still pretty much shattered" (Strayed 275). Walking for such a long distance while carrying an extremely heavy backpack thus alters the narrator's body, enabling her to hike more efficiently. This physical change again mirrors her state of mind. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, most of the narrator's realizations, acceptance, and forgiving, happen toward the end of her hike, when she is more muscular and capable of lifting the symbolic weight of her depression, resentment, and self-loathing. A more muscular body thus symbolizes her mental recovery and illustrates how she constructs her new identity in respect to both her mind and her body. In other words, walking links the narrator's body and mind. Furthermore, the physical challenge that the

narrator accomplishes alone makes her proud of herself, as illustrated by the following quote: "Basking in the attention of the people who gathered around me, I didn't just feel like a backpacking expert. I felt like a hard-ass motherfucking Amazonian queen" (Strayed 202). A sense of pride can be perceived in this extract, in which the narrator is explaining to several people at a campground what she is achieving on the trail.

In addition to the fact that the physical changes impact and symbolize the mental recovery of the narrator, the reconnection with the natural landscape that walking entails is also of utmost importance regarding the construction of her identity. First, walking makes the narrator more aware of her physical sensations. Although this can be mostly examined in the descriptions of her observations of nature, therefore illustrating the primacy of sight that was mentioned in the previous section, examples of the other senses can be found in the book as well, such as during her first day of hiking. The narrator quickly realizes that hiking in the desert is more arduous than expected. The heat combined with changes of terrain – namely ascensions and descents – are especially hard for the inexperienced narrator. Seeking distraction to alleviate this difficulty, she turns to her hearing sense: "So then I tried to simply concentrate on what I heard – my feet thudding against the dry and rocky trail, the brittle leaves and branches of the low-lying bushes I passed clattering in the hot wind – but it could not be done" (Strayed 50). As the end of the extract shows, the narrator is however not yet in a state of mind that allows her to reconnect with her senses. As she explains, "[t]he clamor of *What have I gotten myself into?* was a mighty shout. It could not be drowned out" (Strayed 50-51, emphasis in original). At this point, the narrator is still too much focused on the idea that she will not be able to complete her hike to open herself to her senses. Nevertheless, as she progresses and becomes stronger, she develops a new awareness of her body and its sensations. An example of this can be found after the narrator has to hike in the snow (Strayed 143). At that moment, the narrator was beginning to feel confident about hiking, but this change of weather is especially difficult for her. The snow prevents her from seeing the trail – which almost causes her to get lost – and slows her down, as well as causing her new injuries as walking in the snow differs greatly from her hiking experience thus far. The narrator considers bypassing that part of the trail but ultimately decides to continue (Strayed 140). This new challenge however makes her more aware of her surroundings. She comments:

> As omnipresent as the snow was, I also sensed its waning, melting imperceptibly by the minute all around me. It seemed as alive in its dying as a hive of bees was in its life. Sometimes I passed by places where I

> heard a gurgling, as if a stream ran beneath the snow, impossible to see. Other times it fell in great wet heaps from the branches of the trees (Stayed 143).

This extract shows how the narrator not only relies on her sight but also on her other senses to actually *feel* the snow melting. This illustrates how walking allows her to be reunited with her senses and be aware of her surroundings, therefore connecting her to the natural landscape.

By walking, the narrator also develops a new awareness of her body. This consequence of a walk is evoked by Edensor (2000: 101) as well, who argues that walking entails different "bodily actions," in order to avoid an obstacle, for instance, which results in an awareness of one's body. Hiking the trail thus makes the narrator more conscious of her body, which was not the case before. As Thomas Csordas indicates, "in everyday life our experience is characterized by the *disappearance* of our body from awareness" (8, emphasis in original), which explains why engaging in a physical activity changes her perception of her body. The narrator discusses this as follows:

> The new way I'd been aware of my body since beginning my hike had blunted the old ways. No longer was I concerned about the delicate intricacies of whether I felt infinitesimally fatter or thinner than I had the day before. There was no such thing as a bad hair day. The smallest inner reverberations were obliterated by the frank pain I always felt in the form of my aching feet or the muscles of my shoulders and upper back that knotted and burned so hard and hot […] (Strayed 164).

Before hiking, the narrator's only concerns as to her body were directed toward her weight and hair. Walking turns her attention to her whole body, as a consequence of her physical transformation. This again plays a crucial role in her construction of her identity, as it involves both her mind and her body, as previously explained.

2.4. The body in pain as antagonist

Although the narrator's body represents a crucial element in her recovery from her depression, as has just been explained, its role is ambivalent. In my view, the narrator's body, and most particularly her feet, are the antagonists of the narrative; they represent obstacles to her acceptance of the traumatic events that prompted her to undertake a long-distance hike. From the very first day of her hike to the last one, the narrator suffered from various injuries and wounds. Even though "les blessures sont le pain quotidien des marcheurs" (Le Breton 43), the narrator is often concerned about her injuries and pains, especially the ones concerning her feet. They represent the part of her body that is the most affected by hiking, to the extent that the narrator thinks her feet will never fully recover: "They hurt deep. Sometimes as I walked, it felt

like they were actually broken, like they belonged in casts instead of boots. Like I'd done something profound and irreversible to them by carrying all this weight over so many miles of punishing terrain" (Strayed 274-275). As can be seen from this extract and will be analyzed in this section, her body prevents her from focusing her full attention on her thoughts in order to recover from her depression, since the pain is difficult to ignore. Although the narrator's body is, at the end of her hike, "stronger than it had ever been and would likely ever be, hiking on the PCT still hurt" (Strayed 307).

The narrator's body can be seen as an antagonist for several reasons. First, the fact that it almost immediately hurt her reminds her of her lack of experience and preparation for her project. This may have prevented her from reconnecting with the landscape, or at least slowed that process. Edensor (2000: 96) explains that the body needs to be trained and be fit for the walker to be fully able to feel and sense his/her surroundings. The narrator, however, hardly prepared for her hike and, as explained before, quickly realizes it. Several illustrations of her unpreparedness can be found in the memoir, such as the fact that she cannot use a compass and did not read the book she had bought to teach her how to do that (Strayed 39-40), she cannot lift her backpack because she planned to carry too many objects (Strayed 42), she purchased a pair of boots one size too small and failed to take enough money with her on the trail – to be able to eat at a restaurant during her stops, for example (Strayed 194). The narrator however recognizes several times in the memoir that she should have better prepared. For example, she writes: "[…] I was a big fat idiot and I didn't know what the hell I was doing" (Strayed 58). The narrator is fully aware that if she had physically trained for a long-distance hike, her experience would have been different and possibly more positive. It is here interesting to notice that the way the narrator describes herself is characteristic of the memoir genre, in which a strong idea of self-disclosure is present since "[t]he author must show us who he was" (Larson 170). This self-disclosure entails what Thomas Larson calls a "personable voice: diary-like, reflective, intimately close and trusting, at times uncomfortably so" (16). This is especially noticeable in the above quote, in which the narrator writes as if she were speaking to herself, enabling the readers to feel a close connection to her, as the way she expresses herself is relatable (Larson 186).

Second, the physical pain constantly reminds the narrator that her body is not infallible and has limits. Forsdick points to "the potential fallibility (or at least unpredictability) of the travelling body" (68), which can be observed in *Wild* as well. As Solnit stresses it, "[w]alking returns the body to its original limits again, to something supple, sensitive, and vulnerable" (29). When walking, the narrator is confronted with the limits of her own body. This is especially noticeable

in her pace and her inability to stand upright while carrying her backpack. On her second day on the trail, she explains that her goal is "to average fourteen miles a day" (Strayed 64) but she realizes that this will not be possible. Although she ulteriorly succeeds in walking more than fourteen miles in a day, her body did not initially allow her to do so. It thus represents an obstacle to her goals.

In addition, her feet can be considered as antagonists as well. After receiving new boots in the appropriate size, the narrator first feels elated but quickly desponds as they begin to "[chaw] [her] feet afresh" (Strayed 223). She then explains that her body is "finally up to the task of hiking the big miles" (Strayed 223), but that, due to the state of her feet, she is unable to do that. The next day, as the narrator is walking with other hikers, she cannot keep up with their pace of walking, again because of her feet (Strayed 227-228). It can thus be observed that her body and her feet are obstacles. The weight of the narrator's backpack also illustrates how walking made her aware of the limits of her body. As previously stated, the narrator can hardly carry her backpack and stand upright because of its weight; she can only "[hunch] in a remotely upright position" (Strayed 43). This again shows how her body has limits, as she cannot carry all the objects she packed.

This is linked to the idea that walkers need to "[monitor] the body" (Edensor 2000: 96), i.e. supply it with food and water. The body's most basic needs have to be fulfilled in order for it to function normally. The narrator cannot hike if she starves or is dehydrated. At one point of her hike, she completely runs out of water on a particularly hot day. When she arrives at a water tank to refill her bottles, a sign informs her that it contains no water. The thought of not being able to drink terrifies the narrator, who compulsively writes "*Nowaternowaternowaternowaternowaternowater*" (Strayed 194), stressing how desperate she is. Fortunately, she ultimately finds a pond of muddy water, which she can drink after purifying it (Strayed 195). This experience teaches her that her body is not infallible, as she realizes that she could easily have died (Strayed 195).

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the narrator's body can be seen as an antagonist because it impedes her psychological recovery. This is primarily linked to the painfulness of her body. As Mike Michael (110) discusses it, when pain becomes too intense, the walker cannot reconnect with nature anymore. Forsdick addresses this issue as well and states that the body "can also, at moments of exhaustion and dysfunction, serve as an impediment to the progress of the journey" (68). These quotes highlight the need for the walker to be able-bodied and pain-

free in order for the walk to go on smoothly and to be able to benefit from it. As Edensor points out, bodily sensations related to pain "may foreground an overwhelming awareness of the body that can dominate consciousness" (2000: 101), which was often the case for the narrator. Her sore muscles, her skin rubbed raw due to the heaviness of her backpack, and her blistered and bleeding feet, all often absorb her attention and make it difficult for her to shift her focus away from pain. On her tenth day of hiking, the narrator directly addresses this issue. She explains that when she decided to hike the trail, she had imagined that it would give her an opportunity to reflect on her life. Her body is however hurting too much and makes a reflection impossible:

> Instead, I only moaned, and not because my heart ached. It was because my feet did and my back did and so did the still-open wounds all around my hips. And also, during that second week on the trail – when spring was on the very cusp of turning officially to summer – because I was so hot that I thought my head would explode (Strayed 85).

The narrator is in so much pain that she cannot concentrate on her mental recovery. She sees her body as an obstacle to an inner introspection. This relates to her lack of fitness at the beginning of the book. It is only toward the end of her hike, when she becomes more muscular and used to the challenge of the trail, that the narrator can fully reflect on her life, although her body and her feet remain painful until the end. The narrator needed to accept pain and become better at hiking in order to be able to turn her attention to her inner self and not only her physical sensations.

As already stated, the narrator's feet are the most painful body part. This is partly due to the fact that the narrator had purchased her boots one size too small. Boots are an essential component of a hike, in part because they "[expand] the range of possible actions available to the body" (Michael 112). They thus allow the walker to hike more efficiently. Notwithstanding this benefit, boots can also have a negative effect on a walk. As explained by Michael (107), boots and similar forms of technologies have altered the way humans access nature and form a mental representation thereof. It can also be said of boots that they mediate "the relations between bodies and environments" (Michael 108), in the sense that they prevent the body from touching the environment. Consequently, as Michael (114) argues, boots can also change the information regarding the ground that the feet receive, such as the texture of the ground (Edensor 2000: 101).

The pain that boots can cause is especially important regarding the present analysis. As Michael (115) explains, boots can become painful when in the wrong size, for instance, which is the

case for the narrator. When this happens, boots interfere negatively with the relationship between the body and nature, to the extent that the walker can no longer reconnect with the natural landscape (Michael 116). This can be seen in *Wild* in the fact that the narrator's attention is sometimes only focused on her painful body, and not on her psychological recovery, as was explained above. It can therefore be said of boots that they contribute to "the separation of thought from action and of mind from body" (Ingold 323). When in too much pain, "a distanciation of the 'self' from the agonized body" (Michael 116) is to be witnessed. This aspect can be observed in the narrator's descriptions of her sore feet. For example, during her eighth day, the narrator writes:

> My feet hurt both inside and out, their flesh rubbed raw with blisters, their bones and muscles fatigued from the miles. The road was blissfully level or gently descending, a welcome break from the relentless up and down of the trail, but still I suffered. For long stretches I tried to imagine that I didn't actually have feet, that instead my legs ended in two impervious stumps that could endure anything (Strayed 70-71).

As this extract illustrates, one reaction of the narrator when her feet hurt is to imagine the disappearance of that painful body part, as a way of detaching herself from them. This is however not always effective, such as when, a few days later, the narrator attempts to ignore the pain that she feels but fails to do so continually: "As I hiked, I tried to force myself not to think about the things that hurt – my shoulders and upper back, my feet and hips – but I succeeded for only short bursts of time" (Strayed 82). When pain becomes almost unbearable, the narrator thus endeavors to overlook it. Her aim when she decided to undertake her hike was to mentally heal and find her identity, but as had been pointed out, her body and its pain impede that objective.

In conclusion, the body plays a key role in Strayed's *Wild* as walking is a physical activity. Walking impacts the narrator in different ways and the physicality of this activity can be highlighted since it has specific effects. Walking allows her to reconnect with the natural landscape and with her senses and sensations, which in turn alters her perception of the world and helps her find her place in it. She thus constructs her identity through the physical experience of walking. However, the body's role in the narrative is ambivalent as it is also an obstacle and an antagonist that hinders her inner reflection. She ultimately succeeds in overcoming the obstacle that her own body represents as she manages to complete her hike alone, although she is highly unprepared, as her body makes her realize. The narrator thus conveys an empowering message at the end of the narrative, as she proudly and excitedly

explains to a stranger that she has completed her hike: “Believe me, if I can do this, anyone can” (Strayed 310).

3. Slowness, rhythm, and repetitiveness as experienced by the narrator of *Wild*

The slow quality of a walk, the rhythm that is produced when walking, and the repetitive nature of such an activity will be discussed in this chapter. As will be explained, all these aspects of walking are linked and they all contribute to providing the narrator with a sense of agency. After the death of her mother, she experienced a difficult period, which resulted in a feeling of alienation. As her memoir highlights, slowness, rhythm, and repetitiveness all help her regain control over her life. Slowness and the physicality of her hike make the narrator more aware of her surroundings, in the sense that she develops a proximity to the trail and gradually feels at home there. As it creates a contrast with her past and is rewarding, slowness also contributes to her healing process. The impact of rhythm on the narrator will also be examined, as well as the way it is conveyed in the narrative and in the language that is used. Finally, the focus will be placed on repetitiveness and how it empowers the narrator while also being a negative aspect of her hike.

3.1. Slowness

It is obvious that walking is a slow activity, as has been underlined in Chapter 1. It is therefore interesting to study its role in *Wild* since it contributes to the narrator's mental recovery. It should first be noted that the impression of slowness or speed is not the same throughout the book. At the beginning of the narrative, the events unfold more slowly. This is due to the fact that the narrator first explains the reasons that led to her decision to hike the trail before writing about her actual travel. The part of her journey taking place in California is also described in greater detail than the part in Oregon. For example, her first five days are described with almost no ellipses, while these become more common as the narrative progresses. This is especially the case of her hike in Oregon: although she walked the entire length of that state, only 72 pages out of 311 pages are dedicated to it. This contributes to a feeling of speed when the narrator walks there, as the events unfold more rapidly and are told in fewer pages. In comparison, a sense of slowness is to be found toward the beginning of the memoir.

3.1.1. Living at a slower pace

Slowness played an important part in the narrator's recovery from her depression for several reasons. First, the narrator needed to figuratively slow down the rhythm of her life in order to be able to think more clearly as the events that led her to undertake her hike happened quickly.

Less than two months elapsed between her mother's diagnosis of cancer and her death (Strayed 21), although the doctors had estimated that she would live a year. After her death, which devastated and traumatized the narrator, the other unhappy events that prompted the latter to hike the Pacific Crest Trail happened rapidly. A week after her mother's passing, the narrator began cheating on her husband, Paul, by kissing other men (Strayed 34). Her family then drifted apart as she explains that her mother was "the apparently magical force at the center of [their] family who'd kept [them] all invisibly spinning in the powerful orbit around her" (Strayed 35). Although she tried to "keep [her] family together" (Strayed 34), this attempt failed. She realized at Thanksgiving, eight months later, that "[her] family was something [she] spoke of in the past tense" (Strayed 35). These events alienated her from her life. Although she attempted to "have a fresh start" by moving to New York City with Paul, she could not escape from her deep sorrow. During a subsequent long road trip in the West with him, the narrator wrote: "I didn't even remember the woman I was before my life had split in two" (Strayed 35). She cannot remember her identity, highlighting her emotional trauma following these events.

Feeling out of touch with her life, which seemed to be metaphorically tumbling rapidly, the narrator started to be sexually unfaithful to Paul (Strayed 36) two years after the death of her mother. They eventually separated (Strayed 36) and she began to use heroin a year later (Strayed 52). Her drug addiction constitutes the focus of one of the two scholarly articles written about *Wild*, namely Megan Brown's "Learning to Live Again: Contemporary US Memoir as Biopolitical Self-Care Guide." In this article, Brown argues that memoirs dealing with addiction – alcohol or drugs – and the author's recovery from a previous one exemplify how self-help memoirs can be used as guidance for readers as well (360). She claims that such memoirs advise readers on how to deal with similar situations in "the context of US neoliberalism" (360). She explains that "[a]s the United States continues to dismantle public services in favor of privatization and individual self-management" (360), taking care of oneself is being increasingly praised and viewed favorably (361). In this context, American addiction memoirs convey a biopolitical message of normativity, as the author "describ[es] his/her deviance from norms, and illustrat[es] possibilities for reentering the realm of the normal, the productive, the well managed" (Brown 360). The authors, by showing how they strayed from the norm but managed to become normalized, productive members of society again, illustrate an ideal of autonomy and self-sufficiency, which is typically American, according to Brown. She categorizes such memoirs as biopolitical technologies, "serving the broader goal of governing

at a distance as subjects learn and perpetuate norms for healthy, productive citizenship, for contributing to society" (361).

Brown thus examines how American addiction memoirs, such as *Wild*, can be used to serve the purposes of biopolitics, a concept she borrowed from Michel Foucault, as well as the notions of biopolitical technologies and biopower. Citing Jeffrey Nealon, Brown (371) explains that these notions are linked to the idea of controlling the population through a regulation of their lives. As was illustrated above, memoirs showing the normalization process of their author can be seen as biopolitical technologies, as Brown argues in her article, precisely because they represent examples for the readers to follow. To investigate the relationship between American addiction memoirs and biopolitics, Brown explores the self-help components of such memoirs. She discusses the fact that they "typically depict life as a 'project,'" (Brown 362) therefore suggesting that one does not recover quickly and suddenly from an addiction, but rather that this process takes time. Brown (364) illustrates this idea by showing how *Wild* contains more details on hiking than vivid descriptions of adventurous experiences because this is precisely what the narrator learned and the steps that helped her overcome her drug addiction. Strayed's *Wild* thus "exemplifies the transformation of a broad idea or goal (changing one's life/oneself via dramatic, new experience) into a series of rational actions or steps" (Brown 364). This also shows why *Wild* can be called a biopolitical technology memoir. Strayed presents her hiking experience as a possibility for her readers as well; she conveys the idea that they can also change or recover from a drug addiction, just as she did herself (Brown 363). Brown explains that the narrator does so by "[portraying] the experiences on the trail […] as formative lessons" (364) and by "illustrat[ing] advice through personal, first-person examples" (365). She thus never explicitly provides advice for her readers; she lets them witness her normalization process and learn from her experiences because she had to rely on herself for guidance (Brown 364-365).

Going back to the narrator's infidelity and drug addiction, it should be pointed out that although these last events happened a few years after her mother's death, her life still fell apart quickly. In several months, the narrator's life changed from having a family to losing her mother, "the keeper of [her] life" (Strayed 20), and then her whole family. The slowness of her hike allowed her to live at another rhythm, to slow down the pace of her life. As various academics points out, slowness is highly beneficial when seeking to heal. For Les Lumsdon and Peter McGrath (267), slowing down the pace of one's life is fundamental to the regaining of a quality of life. Steven Connor highlights the fact that slowness allows "to keep pace with our lives […] [and] to take control over our lives, to take our time" (154). William Grossin concurs with these ideas

as he deems slowness beneficial, as opposed to precipitation, which "nuit à la santé" (221). He explains that "[la] lenteur est prônée désormais à deux fins: d'une part comme un contrepoint aux méfaits de la vitesse, d'autre part pour ses vertus propres" (Grossin 224), such as the fact that slowness "favorise […] la réflexion" (Grossin 225).

This partly explains why walking and slowness play an important role in the narrator's recovery, as the latter allows her to look at her past from a distance and gives her time to reflect on it, which she needed. By creating a contrast with her life before she undertook her hike, slowness facilitates her reflection. Concurring with Connor's idea that a slow pace enables one to take control of one's life, the narrator gains a sense of control, inasmuch as she learns on the trail to take her time. Furthermore, she becomes more patient as well. Although she is always eager to reach campgrounds – as they mark the stages of her hike and show her progression toward her end goal and because she will receive her resupply boxes there – she gradually understands that she will always reach her next stop, even if hiking remains challenging. She focuses her attention on one step at a time, which provides her with a sense of agency. Although she still has hundreds of miles to hike, concentrating on the next miles seems more manageable. For example, when another hiker observes that they only have one more stop in California before reaching the border with Oregon and gives the impression that this will elapse quickly, the narrator does not share his enthusiasm as she knows hiking is a demanding task:

> "Only one more stop," said John, as if he could read my thoughts. "We've just got Seiad Valley and then it's on to Oregon. We're only about two hundred miles from the border."
> I nodded and smiled. I didn't think the words *only* and *two hundred miles* belonged in the same sentence. I hadn't let myself think much beyond the next stop.
> "Oregon!" he exclaimed, and the joy in his voice almost lured me in, almost made it seem like those two hundred miles would be a snap, but I knew better. There hadn't been a week on the trail that hadn't been a crucible for me.
> "Oregon," I conceded, my face going serious. "But California first" (Strayed 220-221, emphasis in original).

As this extract illustrates, the narrator is careful about being overly-enthusiastic and thinking that two hundred miles will not take long to walk. She knows that this will be an accomplishment and prefers to concentrate on the task ahead instead of being too impatient to reach Oregon. This also shows how walking and slowness can bring serenity to the walker. Frédéric Gros explains that the only thing to do when hiking is to walk. He states:

> Quant [sic] vous êtes partis pour la journée, que vous savez qu'il faut tant d'heures pour gagner la prochaine, étape, il n'y a plus qu'à marcher et suivre le chemin. *Rien d'autre à faire*. De toutes les manières, ce sera long, […] et les jambes auront fini par engloutir, par petites bouchées répétées, l'impossible distance. […] Il faut juste […] avancer, à son rythme, jusqu'à l'étape (Gros 199-200, emphasis in original).

The narrator seems to be aware of that, as she chooses to focus on one stop at a time. She knows that she will reach her destination and that she cannot do more than simply walk there.

3.1.2. The rewarding aspect of slowness

Slowness also contributes to the narrator's recovery because it is rewarding. Due to the fact that it takes her a long time to reach the numerous places where she stops, the narrator can feel proud of herself and be more appreciative. For instance, when she reaches Crater Lake in Oregon, she says that her "first sight of it was one of disbelief" (Strayed 271). She feels amazed by the view that the lake offers. In my view, had she not slowly reached that place, had she not prepared herself mentally while walking there by reading about the lake in her guidebook (Strayed 262-263), for example, she would probably have reacted differently to the view. The slowness of hiking makes her efforts more rewarding and makes her realize that she is capable of achieving her goal, that she is able to keep going despite the occasional wish to abandon. This can be observed several times when the narrator arrives at one of her stops as well. When she reaches Kennedy Meadows, her first stop, she writes: "I was here. I had made it to my first stop. It seemed like a miracle" (Strayed 102). The time it takes her to walk there makes it rewarding, in addition to the physical achievement it involves, as discussed in the previous chapter.

3.1.3. Reconnecting with the landscape and feeling close to the trail

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the narrator develops a closeness with the trail thanks to the slowness of walking. It has already been explained that the physicality of her hike allows her to reconnect with the landscape and the earth, thus helping her find her place in the world. It is here argued that slowness plays an important role regarding her relationship with nature and the landscape as well. It should first be noticed that like the physical act of walking, slowness helps the narrator understand the vastness of the world. During her fifth week on the trail, she notes:

> Foot speed was a profoundly different way of moving through the world than my normal modes of travel. Miles weren't things that blazed dully past. They were long, intimate straggles of weeds and clumps of dirt, blades of grass and flowers that bent in the wind, trees that lumbered and screeched. They were the

> sound of my breath and my feet hitting the trail one step at a time and the click of my ski pole. The PCT had taught me what a mile was. I was humble before each and every one (Strayed 191).

The narrator did not truly understand the length of a mile before hiking the trail. As previously explained, the fact of physically moving through the landscape makes her realize the vastness of a mile and of the world. This extract shows that a slow pace contributes to this realization as well by creating a contrast with her "normal modes of travel," probably referring to cars or planes. The rapid velocity of a car does not allow her to comprehend what a mile is, what walking a mile means, i.e. to feel the body move and notice the surroundings. In this sense, slowness brings her humility, which is therapeutic, in my view. Furthermore, slowness enables her to observe the way nature is alive. She describes weeds as "intimate" and trees "lumber" and "screech," making their presence more vivid. She also notices details of her surroundings such as weeds, dirt, and grass, which are not the most prominent elements of the landscape. Her description points to the physicality of her hike, which is reflected in the way dirt forms clumps and trees seem to move slowly and produce sound. As can be seen, the natural landscape thus accompanies her, as will be explained in Chapter 4.

Moving through the landscape at a slow pace thus means that the narrator has time to observe and notice details of her surroundings. As is pointed out in Kam's article about *Wild*, and as Sean Ireton highlights it, "[t]he therapeutic value of nature for both physical and mental health has long been recognized" (Ireton 122), which explains why the narrator's relationship to nature was restorative for her. As she slowly progresses on the trail, she can familiarize herself with various elements of the landscape, particularly mountains and woods in Oregon, as a considerable part of the trail in that state passes through forests. These features of her surroundings become familiar to her and eventually make her feel a sense of belonging to the trail.

The narrator already expresses this idea of feeling a close connection with the trail after approximately two weeks of hiking. As she is walking with two other hikers, she decides to take a break in order to be alone. She then reflects on her relationship with the trail. Being alone in the wild, she has the impression that the world is both vast and small. About her impression of smallness of the world, she explains: "And yet there was also its opposite, the strange intimacy I'd come to have with the trail, the way the piñon pines and monkey flowers I passed that morning, the shallow streams I crossed, felt familiar and known, though I'd never passed them or crossed them before" (Strayed 119). Although the trees, flowers, and streams are

different every time she observes them, the narrator feels a familiarity with them, as the kind of vegetation that she sees in the Californian desert remain similar. This supports Gros's idea that by walking, "j'habite un paysage, j'en prends lentement possession, j'en fais mon site" (50). Gros (49) contends that the landscape can be defined by its continuity, as hills, for instance, are always present. This can be observed in the extract above, as the fact of always seeing the same kind of plants creates a continuity in the narrator's surroundings.

Mountains, in particular, are features of the landscape that she grows the most familiar with and which contribute to making the trail feel like home. This is due to the fact that mountains, as well as rivers, "often constitute the centers of landscapes and landmarks" (Yamagishi 101), as Takeshi Yamagishi explains it. Mountains allow the narrator to visualize the ground that she covers on the trail, as the following quote illustrates: "From Lassen northward, the mountains of the High Cascades lined up in a rough row among hundreds of other, less prominent mountains, each one marking the progress of my journey in the coming weeks" (Strayed 167). Since mountains are prominent elements of the landscape, they can be seen from a long distance, explaining why she becomes accustomed to their view. For instance, when she arrives at the foot of Mount Hood, near the border between the states of Oregon and Washington, at the end of her hike, the narrator explains: "[Mount Hood], the last of the major mountains I'd traverse on my hike, felt like the most important, and not only because I was sitting on its very haunches. The sight of it had become familiar to me, its imposing grandeur visible from Portland on clear days" (Strayed 305). The narrator is used to the sight of this mountain, as she could observe it while she was walking there. As Amato contends, "[w]alking establishes intimate contact with place. It attaches us to a landscape […]" (276), which explains why the narrator progressively felt at home on the trail. Siddall stresses that it is especially the slow pace of walk that provides the walker with "an unrivaled opportunity to form an intimate acquaintance with the countryside that he traverses" (310). This accounts for the fact that slowness is essential in order for the narrator to feel more intimate with the natural landscape.

In addition to features of the landscape, animals such as birds also contribute to the narrator's feeling of familiarity with the trail. One morning, as she is still in her tent, she listens to the songs of birds: "I lay quiet but awake for a while, […] listening to the songs of birds I couldn't name. I only knew that the sound of them had become familiar to me" (Strayed 140). This again reinforces her feeling of being at home. She explains before starting her journey that she "had no 'home'" (Strayed 30) since she does not have a family anymore. As can be seen, she however finds one by hiking the trail on her own but not completely alone, as various familiar elements

keep her company. After more than three weeks of hiking, she even describes the trail as her "[h]ome base" (Strayed 137).

This sense of belonging becomes stronger as the narrator progresses on her journey. Her first realization that the wilderness has become her new home happens in a car. She has stopped in a city and encounters there a couple who offers to drive her to Packer Lake Lodge, which she accepts. While in the car, the narrator feels alienated from her surroundings due to the speed: "Our top speed was perhaps twenty miles an hour as we crept around bends in the road, but it still felt to me as if we were moving unaccountably fast, the land made general rather than particular, no longer including me but standing quietly off to the side" (Strayed 145). The narrator is now used to seeing the landscape from a slow pace and being in a car, which moves at a more rapid velocity, feels peculiar to her after having spent several weeks on the trail. Yamagishi explains that humans engage with the landscape differently depending on, among other factors, the "method of approach" (103). This accounts for the narrator's different feelings regarding her surroundings while in a car, as "[t]oday the enclosed, air-conditioned automobile […] insulates its occupants from the environment" (Siddall 314). Forsdick concurs with this idea as he writes that "[t]he mechanization of travel […] tended […] to abstract travellers from the surroundings through which they were conveyed" (70). Although cars and their fast rate of motion are useful to the narrator, speed alienates her from her surroundings. Slowness makes her feel a close connection with the landscape, which is disrupted in a car. As she later explains, after having hitchhiked, roads and modern transportation feel distant to her: "I hoisted Monster onto my back and ambled through the weeds down into the ditch and then up again, into the woods, which somehow felt like home to me, like the world that was mine in a way that the world of roads and towns and cars was no longer" (Strayed 182). The woods, the wilderness, have become her home and thus provide her with a sense of belonging. This is especially important as that intimacy with the landscape helps her heal mentally. After feeling lost due to the sudden passing of her mother, her divorce, and her heroin addiction, the narrator finally found her place in the world, thanks to walking and slowness.

It should also be pointed out that the narrator's relationship to nature, which is strengthened thanks to her slow velocity, is therapeutic for her as it helps her mediate her relationship with her mother and the trauma that her death caused. Various elements of the natural landscape remind the narrator of her late mother, particularly flowers. For instance, while she is walking during her twelfth day on the trail, she spots wildflowers similar to the ones that grow in Minnesota, where she grew up with her family. She writes about the flowers:

> Many of them were familiar to me, being the same species as or close cousins to those that prospered in Minnesota summers. As I passed them, I felt the presence of my mother so acutely that I had the sensation that she was there; once I even paused to look around for her before I could go on (Strayed 90).

As this extract illustrates, the narrator can sometimes feel the presence of her mother in nature. At moments, such as the aforementioned one, this feeling is even overwhelming. At other times, it helps her feel better, such as during the first day of her journey, when she realizes how unprepared she is for hiking an arduous trail. She is angry with herself as she deems herself "a big fat idiot" (Strayed 58), and while she rests to calm herself, she notices that she is sitting next to sage, a plant that her mother used to grow: "I reached over and picked a handful of the leaves and rubbed them between my palms, then put my face in them and inhaled deeply, the way my mother had taught me to do. *It gives you a burst of energy*, she'd always declared" (Strayed 59, emphasis in original). Smelling the leaves of sage, a scent linked to this loved one, she states: "[I was] feeling, in fact, a burst of energy, but mostly feeling my mother's presence, remembering why it was that I'd thought I could hike this trail. […] [T]he death of my mother was the thing that made me believe the most deeply in my safety: nothing bad could happen to me, I thought. The worst thing already had" (Strayed 59). The narrator can thus feel safe on the trail because of the sad realization that nothing worse than her mother's decease can happen to her. She is therefore able to regain the strength to continue hiking the following days. This also illustrates Yamagishi's idea that "[landscape] is thus an individual experience" (105) and that it "is experienced differently by different people" (101), as the natural elements that remind the narrator of her mother are personal.

3.2. Rhythm

The rhythm of the steps is a major element of a walk. According to Gros (52), it is of crucial importance. He even claims that a walker should find his/her own rhythm to be able to walk for several hours in a non-exhausting way (Gros 78). Edensor, however, contends that "walking cannot follow a regular rhythmic gait because of the variability of the surface underfoot, the unevenness of the fixtures blocking a seamless path which force high, small and extended steps, and the necessity to accommodate that which may be dangerous to walk upon" (2010: 73). Having a perfectly regular rhythm is thus impossible, according to him, although it would be ideal in a long-distance hike such as the one that Strayed undertook. Furthermore, Edensor (2010: 73) explains that the body can also impose limitations regarding the rhythm, especially if it is in pain or if the walker is hungry. Walking at a regular pace is also important because "it releases the walker from his or her normally interrupted, if not conflict-filled, consciousness

and provides an altered state of mind for prayer, reflection, or simply talking to oneself" (Amato 276). Concentrating on one's steps can thus be seen as therapeutic as it allows the mind to be in the right state for introspection, like the narrator needed. Furthermore, as Edensor argues, "the rhythms of walking allow for a particular experiential flow of successive moments of detachment and attachment, physical immersion and mental wandering, memory, recognition and strangeness" (2010: 70). This suggests that, when in motion, the walker experiences different phases of reflection: sometimes his/her attention is focused on the physical sensations of the body while at other times his/her mind wanders and s/he thinks about old memories. This is to be observed throughout the narrator's hike. As analyzed in Chapter 2, she often mentions her bodily sensations and discusses the various pains that she endures. In addition, she often describes her state of mind and the thoughts that she has while walking – which is also characteristic of the memoir genre, which "emphasizes the *who* over the *what*" (Larson 18, emphasis in original). Furthermore, the narrative is interrupted by flashbacks on multiple occasions. This aspect of hiking is essential, as it allows the narrator to mediate her past – and the painful memories that are linked to it – and her present, which is restorative and allows her to progressively be at peace, although her present is filled with physical pain. This alternate succession of descriptions of the narrator's walk, her thoughts, and flashbacks about her past therefore also creates rhythm in the narrative, as the reader learns more about each aspect at a time.

Nevertheless, the narrator rarely explicitly addresses her walking rhythm in the memoir. She however expresses feeling pressured to walk at a certain pace with respect to other hikers, especially at the beginning of her journey, when she is not able to walk fast. Many of the hikers she encounters are experienced and are therefore able to walk at a much faster pace than she can. For example, during her eleventh day of hiking, she meets another hiker, Greg, for the first time. They discuss their walking speed, which embarrasses her:

> He wanted to know […] how many miles I was averaging a day. Greg was averaging twenty-two. That very morning he'd hiked the seven miles I had agonized over the entire previous day.
> "It's been harder than I thought it would be," I confessed, my heart heavy with the knowledge that I was even more of a big fat idiot than I'd initially reckoned. "It's all I can do to cover eleven or twelve," I lied, as if I'd even done that (Strayed 87).

The narrator is ashamed of her performance to the point of lying about it. Although she does not state it explicitly, a certain pressure to conform to other hikers, "real hikers," as she describes them, can be perceived in this extract. Expert hikers like Greg walk more rapidly than

her and knowing the number of miles that he can walk in a day exerts pressure on her and makes her realize how unprepared she is.

Although the narrator rarely comments on the rhythm of her hike, the idea thereof is nonetheless present throughout the narrative in an implicit and more complex way. It can be perceived in how she describes the remaining steps of her hike in Oregon and in the way that she creates her own rhythm not only by walking but by singing, for instance.

The part of the narrative taking place in Oregon constitutes less than half the memoir, as already noted. As a consequence, more rhythm can be felt during the narrator's account of her hike in that state. Her description of her steps there also conveys a sense of rhythm. After leaving Crater Lake, she explains how she views Oregon: "Oregon was a hopscotch in my mind. I skipped it, spun it, leapt it in my imagination all the way from Crater Lake to the Bridge of the Gods [her destination]" (Strayed 274). Although she realizes that she still has more than three hundred miles to hike, she sees this state like a childish game, something that will pass quickly. As she progresses, she refers to this children's game on three different occasions. The first reference is to be found when she arrives at the Shelter Cove Resort, eighty-five miles away from Crater Lake. As she is looking at the view of Odell Lake, she thinks of the three last steps of her hike, "Olallie Lake and then Timberline Lodge and then Cascade Locks" (Strayed 276). Isolated from the end of the paragraph, "*Skip, hop, spin, done*" (Strayed 276, emphasis in original) can be read on a single line, in a way to emphasize it. The way the narrator cites her last three stops using "and then" without any comma also gives an impression of rhythm, in my opinion. The reader can easily imagine himself/herself skipping along the trail, like she does. The idea of rhythm is consequently very present in his/her mental picture. The second time that hopscotch is mentioned, the narrator is inadvertently following the wrong path, namely the Oregon Skyline Trail (Strayed 282). She is however not worried as the trail will cross the Pacific Crest Trail the next day. On the day after that, she will arrive at Ollalie Lake. The reader can then read "*Hop, skip, jump, done*" (Strayed 283, emphasis in original), again on a single line. Finally, the last mention of the game is to be found when the narrator reaches Timberline Lodge. While she is contemplating the landscape, she can observe the different mountains that she has seen on the way. On the next paragraph, the following extract can be read: "*Hop, skip, spin, done*, I thought. I was here. I was almost there. But I wasn't done. I still had fifty miles to walk before I reached the Bridge of the Gods" (Strayed 306, emphasis in original). This time, the allusion to the hopscotch is not on a single line but is integrated into a paragraph, which is constituted of short

sentences – except for the last one. This conveys an idea of rhythm as well, as they can be read quickly, giving the reader an impression of speed, similarly to the narrator's feeling in Oregon.

The narrator also creates her own auditory rhythm. Drawing on Labelle's observations, Edensor explains that "people walk through space in time with auditory rhythms, or whistle, sing or tap along, the rhythm simultaneously inside and outside their bodies" (2010: 70). This can be noticed in the narrator's hike as well. Rhythm is present both inside and outside her body, as she expresses it in the following quote: "I loved getting lost in the rhythm of my steps and the click of my ski pole against the trail" (Strayed 275). Her steps create a bodily rhythm while her ski pole produces an auditory one. This also happens when the narrator sings, but she mostly does it at times when she encounters a wild animal or fears that she might encounter one. This shows how the idea of rhythm in the memoir is more complex than just the pace of her steps.

3.3. Repetitiveness

As contended by various academics, walking is a repetitive activity. Gros states that "[l]a marche est morne, répétitive, monotone" (277) and that "il faut *s'y résoudre*" (199, emphasis in original). Le Breton (27) even claims that walking can become boring as the walking circumstances are often monotonous. However, Edensor (2010: 72) shows by citing the example of Hallam and Ingold that not every scholar agrees with the idea that each step of a walk is the same. This highlights the diversity of opinions regarding this characteristic of a walk. In *Wild*, the narrator shares the viewpoint that this activity is repetitive, as she acknowledges it several times, such as during her fifth week of hiking, when she explains how monotonous it can be. She writes: "[…] I walked on, my mind emptying into nothing but the effort to push my body through the bald monotony of the hike. There wasn't a day on the trail when that monotony didn't ultimately win out" (Strayed 193). She then explains that she likes to count her steps up to a hundred because it gives her an impression of accomplishment (Strayed 193). At one point, however, counting up to a hundred seems too high a number. She then decides to count up to "fifty, then twenty-five, then ten" instead (Strayed 193). Later, when the narrator is in Oregon, she expresses a similar feeling of boredom regarding the trail after highlighting the positive aspects of hiking, such as the rhythm, the silence, being surrounded by mountains, and seeing wild animals:

> But there would always come the point in each day when I didn't love it anymore, when it was monotonous and hard and my mind shifted into a primal gear that was void of anything but forward motion and I walked until walking became unbearable, until I believed I couldn't walk even one more

> step, and I stopped and made camp and efficiently did all the tasks that making camp required, all in an effort to get as quickly as possible to the blessed moment when I could collapse, utterly demolished, in my tent (Strayed 275).

As these two extracts point out, the narrator always finds walking boring and too repetitive after some time. This is, of course, to be linked with the physical challenge that long-distance hiking involves, as she explains in the extract that she finds hiking arduous. These quotes thus highlight a rather negative aspect of her hike, namely its repetitive nature.

Repetitiveness is also expressed in the language that the narrator uses. While describing the history of the creation of the trail, she writes: "[What mattered] had only to do with how it felt to be in the wild. With what it was like to walk for miles for no reason other than to witness the accumulation of trees and meadows, mountains and deserts, streams and rocks, rivers and grasses, sunrises and sunsets. The experience was powerful and fundamental" (Strayed 207). She here emphasizes the repetitive nature of long-distance hiking. Although her surroundings are always different and varied, her hike is also always the same: she walks and observes the accumulation of various elements of the landscape. The idea of repetitiveness conveyed in this extract is reinforced by the language used to describe it. The pattern "X and Y" is reiterated, which gives an impression of repetition and sameness. Interestingly, this pattern is present throughout the narrative, such as at the beginning of the book, when she describes hiking:

> The staying and doing it, in spite of everything. In spite of the bears and the rattlesnakes and the scat of the mountain lions I never saw; the blisters and scabs and scrapes and lacerations. The exhaustion and the deprivation; the cold and the heat; the monotony and the pain; the thirst and the hunger; the glory and the ghosts that haunted me as I hiked eleven hundred miles from the Mojave Desert to the state of Washington by myself (Strayed 9-10).

Here again, the reiteration of "X and Y" conveys repetitiveness and suggests that each day of hiking is similar to the previous and next ones. As for the idea of rhythm, repetitiveness is thus also expressed in the language, which shows that these characteristics of hiking are complex in *Wild*.

Although walking is repetitive and, in a sense, sometimes boring, it also plays a key role in the recovery of the narrator. Repetition helps her regain control of her life as it allows her to develop a routine. As Edensor contends, routines "provide a comforting reliability and mobile homeliness" (2010: 70). The narrator feels at home on the trail because of the routine aspect of walking. The repetitiveness of hiking provides her with an organization, which contrasts with

the chaotic state in which her life was before she decided to undertake her hike. Repeating the same act, namely walking, is therefore reassuring for her as it proves her that she can control her life. Furthermore, repetition allows her to become a better hiker. As Gros (195) puts it, the reiteration of an act ultimately leads to greater ease. The narrator can thus develop her hiking skills by continuing to walk, which provides her with a sense of accomplishment and empowers her. In my view, this is part of the reason why she feels proud of herself for hiking the trail, as was previously explained.

In conclusion, slowness, rhythm, and repetitiveness play an important role in the narrator's recovery from her depression. All three constitute a clear contrast with the unhappy and traumatic events of her life, which helps her regain control of her life. The slow quality of walking also contributes to creating a feeling of belonging to the trail, which is particularly restorative. It has been observed that both rhythm and repetitiveness are complex notions in the memoir and that they also play a part in the healing process of the narrator, although perhaps to a lesser extent or less noticeably than slowness.

4. Walking and solitude: being alone in the wilderness

The narrator's hike can be characterized by various aspects, some of which have already been analyzed, such as physicality, slowness, rhythm, and repetitiveness. This chapter will focus on the solitary aspect of her journey. Solitude is to be expected in *Wild* as the narrator chose to hike a wilderness trail on her own. As pointed out by Jay Vest, the Wilderness Act of 1964 "[defines] wilderness as a place offering 'outstanding opportunities for solitude'" (303). It thus seems that the narrator chose the perfect place to enjoy solitary moments. Some of the elements that will be discussed here have been addressed in Kam's article, "Forests of the Self: Life Writing and 'Wild' Wanderings," which aims to show that a solitary experience in nature can be restorative. Kam focuses her article on the role of nature and solitude on the introspection and re-evaluation of one's life. She examines Strayed's *Wild* and Krakauer's *Into the Wild* to emphasize the therapeutic effect of being in the wilderness in periods of sorrow and estrangement. She argues that the narrator of *Wild* managed to overcome her depression by isolating herself in nature: "solitude in nature is transformative and allowed Strayed to find her path back to emotional stability when she felt that all was lost" (Kam 11). Being alone in the wilderness, away from her everyday life and from reminders of her depression, drug addiction, and divorce, allowed her to process her emotions. It "was exactly what she needed to begin moving forward emotionally" (Kam 12).

Kam points out that although the narrator had never backpacked before, carried a backpack too heavy for her, and was not at ease with solitude at the beginning of her hike, she progressively became more experienced with hiking, which helped her overcome her depression. Some of these aspects were addressed in the second chapter of this dissertation, which also stresses the physicality of the narrator's journey and adds how she views her body and how the latter is an antagonist, among other elements. In her article, Kam also views the narrator's weighty backpack as a symbol of "the weight of her emotional baggage" (12), both of which are "considerably lightened by the end of her trip" (12). She (13) also notes that the narrator progressively learns to be comfortable alone as the days pass. This shows that solitude had a positive impact on her depression. Kam (12) also briefly adds that the physical experience of walking and the momentum of it played a role in the narrator's emotional recovery by allowing her to accept and deal with her grief and guilt, and her memories, especially those concerning her mother.

The present chapter will study some aspects that were not mentioned by Kam and go beyond the points that she already mentions. The various benefits of solitude will first be presented. It will then be argued that being alone is both a negative and a positive part of the narrator's hike and that she progressively learns to embrace that state. Throughout the memoir, solitude is linked to the idea of fear and silence. The impact that they both have on the narrator's recovery will be analyzed as well. Being alone also forces her to develop other forms of companionship, aside from other hikers. Her hiking equipment, and especially her enormous backpack, play here a particularly important role, as will be argued.

Before analyzing these aspects, a brief comment should be given regarding the notion of wilderness. Stephen Carver and Steffen Fritz point out that the aforementioned Wilderness Act defines wilderness as an area characterized by the following elements: "absence of human artefacts and management, lack of human settlement, remoteness, opportunity for solitude, ecological condition and size" (Carver and Fritz 2). A wilderness area is thus a place where the presence of humans in not visible. It could therefore be argued that "nature, to be natural, must also be pristine – remote from humanity and untouched by our common past" (Cronon 19). This concept, however, presents a paradox, as reminded by William Cronon (17), since visiting or walking in wilderness areas would thus mean that the land is not wild anymore. Notwithstanding this paradox, it seems that "there is no single accepted definition of what wilderness is" (Carver and Fritz 2). Carver and Fritz also mention two other explanations of the term: one provided by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (2) and the other by a European Parliament Resolution on Wilderness (3), which both address the same characteristics as the Wilderness Act. In summary, it can be said that "[w]ilderness is in many ways the ultimate and pristine resource" (Carver and Fritz 3). It "represents […] landscapes empty of human endeavour" (Carver and Fritz 4) and "provides a habitat and refuge for wildlife" (Carver and Fritz 4), which underlines the importance of its preservation.

4.1. The benefits of solitude for human beings

As various scholars highlight it, solitude can have a multitude of benefits for human beings. Christopher Long and James Averill explain that "[t]hroughout history, many philosophers, spiritual leaders, and artists have attested to the benefits of solitude" (21). Among those, Rousseau, Stevenson, and Thoreau can be cited, for instance (Le Breton 37). Spending time alone thus seems to be a rather popular activity for the improvement of the self. However, before discussing the advantages of solitude, the following paradox, which was noted by Long and

Averill, should be considered: "People have biological needs for attachment, affiliation, and sociability, yet they continually seek to spend time in solitude" (22). This quote stresses two important traits of humankind: the need for sociability and for its opposite, i.e. solitude. The wish to be alone is paradoxical as it contradicts the biological needs of humans. This paradox can however be explained by the benefits that can be derived from this state and by the fact that complete isolation from other human beings is not necessary to enjoy those benefits. Long and Averill explain this as follows: "aloneness is not a necessary condition for solitude: A person can experience solitude while in the presence of others, as when 'alone' in the company of strangers or when an intimate couple seeks solitude for togetherness" (23). William Hammitt concurs with this idea as he discusses the fact that most wilderness users do not mean "complete isolation from all other people" (479) when referring to solitude but rather "escape and isolation from certain social structures and environments" (480) and a "*freedom of choice and spontaneity of action*" (480, emphasis in original). This holds particularly true for the narrator of *Wild*. Her hike can be seen as an escape from her life, her misery, her trauma, and her feeling of alienation but it is not a complete isolation from others. As was already briefly mentioned by Kam (13), the narrator accepts the company of other hikers on different occasions but never for more than a few days. She thus does not spend her entire trip in complete isolation.

Going back to Hammitt's idea of "freedom of choice and spontaneity of action," it should be noted that it is this particular characteristic of solitude that leads some academics, such as Gros (78), to contend that walking groups should not exceed three or four participants. Gros argues that groups up to that number allow for "moments de solitude partagée," (78) whereas this is impossible for larger groups, which he deems chaotic. Even in the larger context of travel writing, many writers defend the view that a journey should be undertaken alone. Paul Theroux, for instance, supports this idea as he believes that it is linked to greater freedom (Youngs 80). Early Romantic walkers shared this view as well, as is also the case of other writers such as Alfred Barron, Robert Louis Stevenson, G.M. Trevelyan, Morris Marples, and Henry Sidgwick, their reason being that only a lone walker can experience the benefits of solitude (Edensor 2000: 89-90).

Among these benefits, the freedom that solitude brings is also highlighted by Long and Averill. They state that being alone entails the possibility to freely "select one's mental or physical activities," (23) which they consider "a precondition for many of the other benefits" (24) that are linked to a solitary state. This kind of freedom is to be understood with regards to others. Drawing on Koch's observations, Long and Averill explain that "[t]he mere presence of other

people […] obliges us to coordinate our experience with theirs, thereby diminishing the scope of our actions" (24). The assumption is, therefore, that the walker should be alone, or at least in a small group, to be able to enjoy the beneficial aspects of solitude. This probably explains why the narrator of *Wild* chose to undertake her hike on her own. Being alone allows her to progress at her own pace. Furthermore, solitude protects her from the pressure or judgments of more experienced hikers, as she often compares her performance with that of others.

Solitude can yield a variety of additional benefits, although, as emphasized by Long and Averill, it "can be experienced as positive […] or as negative" (21). They further explain that "[o]ften, negative solitude experiences are characterized by loneliness. […] [H]owever, solitude's benefits often outweigh its detriments" (Long and Averill 21). As will be examined in the following section, solitude is ultimately positive and restorative for the narrator, although she sometimes experiences a feeling of loneliness on the trail. A reason accounting for this is that "solitude facilitates self-examination, reconceptualization of the self, and coming to terms with change" (Long and Averill 26). In other words, "people often gain from solitude a new understanding of themselves" (Long and Averill 26). This is of major significance for the narrator's recovery from her depression. A detachment from others is exactly what she needs to process and accept the changes in her life – i.e. her mother's death, the dissolution of her family, her affairs, her divorce, and her drug addiction – and to find her identity after these traumatic events. Her introspection is thus made easier because she is alone. Connected to this idea is the facilitation of "self-development, communing with 'nature' […] the cultivation of self-reliance and contemplation" (Edensor 2000: 89) that solitude provides. Other benefits of solitude, which are not directly addressed in *Wild*, should however be noted, such as "the spiritual, religious, creative, and artistic gains resulting from solitary experiences" (Long and Averill 21). This thus shows how beneficial spending time on one's own can be.

However, in order to reap the aforementioned benefits, it is important that the walker wishes to be alone. As underlined by Long and Averill, "[t]he voluntariness of the [solitary] episode is perhaps the single most important factor distinguishing between positive and negative experiences of aloneness" (30). It is easy to understand why a person forced to be isolated would not report this experience as positive and beneficial. In *Wild*, the narrator actively decides to be a lone hiker, which explains why she appreciates this isolation from others. The solitude that she experiences on the trail is a mostly positive aspect of her hike because she chose it.

It should also be mentioned that positive experiences of solitude are often linked to wilderness areas. This is related to the fact that "[s]olitude is a major attribute of wilderness experiences" (Hammitt 478). Spending time in wilderness areas generally entails being alone, which does not always hold true for other types of outdoor activities (Hammitt 478). As discussed by Sunwoo Lee and David Scott, "[i]mmersing oneself in natural environments facilitates an atmosphere that allows people to physically or emotionally detach themselves from daily social obligations and stressful life events" (235). Nature thus seems to be an appropriate place to be alone and enjoy the benefits of solitude as one can be away from everyday life. This explains why the narrator's prolonged travel in a wilderness area allows her to profit from her experience of solitude. However, and as will be analyzed in the following sections of this chapter, she does not experience this isolation positively at the beginning of her hike. As she progresses, she gradually learns to embrace solitude and can finally benefit from it. Lee and Scott offer an explanation for this change of perception toward solitude in their article "Natural Environment Influencing People's Affinity for Solitude." They argue that "nature is a significant facilitator for solitude experience which, in turn, contributes to the development of a general affinity for solitude" (237). This suggests that the narrator's experience on the Pacific Crest Trail led to her appreciation of solitude. Spending time in nature progressively made her love spending time on her own.

4.2. The narrator's experience of solitude

As previously remarked, solitude is both a positive and a negative experience for the narrator. She perceives it as negative mainly toward the beginning of her hike, as she needs time to adjust to her new environment. She then sees it as a positive aspect and even enjoys it. This ambivalent view of solitude will be addressed in this section, as well as the various benefits that the narrator gains from it.

Regarding the negative part of her experience of solitude, it should first be observed that isolation from others is at first not easy for the narrator, who is not used to be completely alone. On her eighth day, she spots a road crossing the trail and decides to follow it. She is running out of food that does not require cooking and needs to have her stove repaired. After a few hours walking on the road, she realizes that she has not seen anyone since she began her journey. Seeing the road and abandoned tractors, signs of civilizations, but not any human being, makes her apprehensive. She writes: "I felt as if I were starring in a science fiction movie, as if I were the only person left on the planet, and for the first time in my journey, I felt like I might cry"

(Strayed 71). Being completely alone for a few days feels surreal for the narrator, who longs to finally see another person. She continues to follow that road and finally encounters three men; "[her] relief at the sight of them was enormous" (Strayed 71). However, this feeling does not last and the narrator immediately thinks of the potential danger of the situation: "Now I was in a different kind of movie entirely: I was the sole woman with three men of unknown intent, character, and origin watching me from the shade of a yellow truck" (Strayed 71). The narrator seems to be constantly aware of the fact that she is a lone woman, causing feelings of anxiety. This fear will be analyzed in further detail in the following section. The above extract exemplifies how solitude is difficult to bear for the narrator toward the beginning of her journey and makes her conscious that it can lead to dangerous situations.

Connected to the narrator's eagerness and happiness to see other people is her longing for sexual intimacy with strangers or fellow hikers. When she is in her motel room just before setting out to hike the trail, she describes herself as "the woman with the hole in her heart" (Strayed 38). She then uses this expression on various occasions to refer to her desire for sexual intimacy, which had led her to have affairs with strangers and ultimately resulted in her divorce. It is also interesting to notice that this expression suggests that the narrator is not "whole," that she misses something, which echoes one of her other descriptions of herself: "I'd set out to hike the trail so that I could reflect upon my life, to think about everything that had broken me and make myself whole again" (Strayed 84). The narrator believes that a long-distance hike will restore her and fill the "hole in her heart." The trail proves to be healing at the end of the memoir, but the solitary aspect of her journey first causes her to seek intimacy with strangers and other hikers. The night before the beginning of her hike, she "thought about going out and finding [herself] a companion" (Strayed 31). She comments: "It was such an easy thing to do. The previous years had been a veritable feast of one- and two- and three-night stands. They seemed so ridiculous to me now, all that intimacy with people I didn't love, and yet I still ached for the simple sensation of a body pressed against mine, obliterating everything else" (Strayed 31).

Notwithstanding her feeling of ambivalence about her longing for intimacy – as she both finds it ridiculous but still feels it – it can be observed that the narrator is not "cured" of it. She decided to hike the Pacific Crest Trail in order to change but this transformation takes time. Even after several weeks of hiking, she still desires to have intimate contacts with strangers. While she is walking with two other hikers, one of them informs her about the Rainbow Gathering, a kind of celebration organized every summer, which is supposed to take place near the portion of the trail that they are following. The narrator quickly feels enthusiastic about it

and decides to stay there a few days to enjoy it and let her feet heal. She adds: "And possibly, just perhaps, I might get myself laid by a hot hippy" (Strayed 224). She then thinks of the condom that she carries with her and says that "it was high time to put it to use" (Strayed 225). A few days later, the narrator spends a few days in Ashland, a city near the border between California and Oregon. There, she encounters a man, Jonathan, a complete stranger with whom she has intercourse. It thus seems that a few weeks of solitude are not sufficient to help her break her old habits. It will take the narrator to almost finish her hike to be finally free from this need for this type of intimacy and be at peace with herself being alone.

It should also be noted that the narrator's longing for intimacy is also geared toward other male hikers. For instance, when she bypasses a section of the trail in the Sierra Nevada because it would have been too dangerous due to the heavy snow, the narrator spends a night in a hotel. She is with another hiker, Greg, who sleeps in a room next to hers. At night, she explains that she can hear him in his room. She writes: "Hearing him there made me feel so lonely I would've howled with pain if I'd let myself. I didn't know exactly why. I didn't want anything from him and yet I also wanted everything" (Strayed 131). She then wonders if Greg would let her enter his room and explains that she knows what she would do if that happened. Here again, the narrator is ambivalent about her feelings. Most noteworthy is that by imagining the possibility of being intimate with Greg, she feels extremely lonely. On the rare occasions when she describes her solitude as loneliness, the presence of another man is often involved, as in the extract above. Another example is when another hiker touches her arm, reminding her "how little [she]'d been touched in the past fourteen days, how alone [she]'d been" (Strayed 112). Solitude is not always a positive experience for the narrator and she sometimes feels lonely, especially in the presence of men. She has to learn to accept that she is alone, although it sometimes feels like a burden and makes her want to cry.

However, as the narrator progresses, her perception of solitude changes. This shift already begins after approximately two weeks of hiking as she is leaving her first campground with two hikers, Doug and Tom. After having walked with them for a quarter mile, she pretends to look for something in her backpack in order to let the two men continue without her:

> […] I'd only wanted to be alone. Alone had always felt like an actual place to me, as if it weren't a state of being, but rather a room where I could retreat to be who I really was. The radical aloneness of the PCT had altered that sense. Alone wasn't a room anymore, but the whole wide world, and now I was alone in that world, occupying it in a way I never had before (Strayed 119).

In this extract, the narrator clearly expresses a wish to actually be alone. She also suggests that she enjoys the sensation of being on her own in "the whole wide world." She explains the reason for her wish to be by herself to Doug and Tom: "Because the point of my trip is that I'm out here to do it alone" (Strayed 122). The narrator is clearly determined to reach her goal under the condition that she decided, i.e. alone. And although this decision is not always easy, she also appreciates the freedom that solitude brings.

After slightly more than a month on the trail, the narrator recognizes that she is alone and that it is acceptable. She had encountered a reporter, Jimmy Carter, earlier that day. Carter wanted to interview her and thought that she was a hobo, although she insisted that she was a hiker. He additionally expressed fear for her safety and reminded her of the myth regarding the existence of Bigfoot, "a mythical bipedal humanoid beast" (Strayed 224), in the area. This encounter left the narrator feeling nervous and lonely. However, at the end of that day, she reflected on her life and her trip. She explains that although she misses her ex-husband and her life, her decision to hike the trail is the right one (Strayed 189). She then thinks about her solitary state: "I took a drag and blew the smoke from my mouth, remembering how I'd felt more alone than anyone in the whole wide world that morning after Jimmy Carter drove away. Maybe I *was* more alone than anyone in the whole wide world" (Strayed 189, emphasis in original). Her reflection ends with the following sentence, written on a single line to emphasize it: "Maybe that was okay" (Strayed 189). As this extract shows, the narrator begins to accept that solitude can be positive and restorative. She realizes that being on her own is fine. She thus needed to be alone in order to reflect on her life as she herself states that this was not possible in the company of others (Strayed 122). The solitude of her hike allows her to concentrate on her self, her grief, and her trauma. This helps her progressively accept the death of her mother and forgive herself for having affairs and for her drug addiction. Being alone with her thoughts forces her to confront her painful memories. However, she first needed to embrace solitude in order for it to become a restorative force. This process began after approximately one month, as the quote illustrates it.

A few days before reaching the Bridge of the Gods, her final destination, the narrator fully recognizes the positive effect of solitude. As she is walking in the forest alone after having spent time with other hikers, she thinks: "It felt good to be alone. It felt spectacular" (Strayed 306). She thus acknowledges how solitude is an important factor of her hike regarding her mental recovery. She clearly expresses in this quote how she became at ease with herself and the isolation, an observation that Kam (13) made in her article as well. At the end of her journey,

solitude also brings her confidence and pride. Although she is completely inexperienced, she manages to reach her goal alone, which she considers an accomplishment and empowers her.

4.3. The link between solitude and fear

Throughout the memoir, the notion of solitude is connected to a feeling of fear. When she took the decision to undertake a long-distance hike on her own, the narrator was aware of the possible dangers that it entailed. She was mostly concerned about "bears and snakes and mountain lions and strange people [she] met along the way" (Strayed 181). It is easy to imagine how dangerous a long trip can be for a lone woman. As was explained in Chapter 1, women can face various threats in public spaces, explaining why few undertake a journey such as the narrator's alone. The narrator, however, decided that she was not going to be afraid:

> It was a deal I'd made with myself months before and the only thing that allowed me to hike alone. I knew that if I allowed fear to overtake me, my journey was doomed. Fear, to a great extent, is born of a story we tell ourselves, and so I chose to tell myself a different story from the one women are told. I decided I was safe. I was strong. I was brave. Nothing could vanquish me. Insisting on this story was a form of mind control, but for the most part, it worked. […] And it wasn't long before I actually *wasn't* afraid (Strayed 51, emphasis in original).

Right before she sets foot on the trail, she makes the decision not to be afraid. As she explains, her only way to feel safe alone is to convince herself that this is the case. Her trip thus entails that she relies solely on herself, even for reassurance. As she remarks, repeating herself that she is safe and does not need to be afraid works. This most certainly contributed to her pride for accomplishing her hike alone. She managed to "tell herself a different story," to make herself feel safe on the trail.

As can be imagined, this was not an easy task and did not always immediately achieve the expected result. As Kam (13) observes in her article, the narrator is at first uneasy about solitude and the silence that surrounds her. For example, on her first night, the silence, which is "[t]he irrefutable proof that [she] was out here in the great alone" (Strayed 61), prevents her from falling asleep. She later describes it in the following terms: "The silence was tremendous. The absence felt like a weight" (Strayed 83). Her difficulty to bear the absence of sound could be explained by the fact that contemporary modern cities are replete with noises, as Le Breton (52) points out. In comparison to her usual environment, the silence of the trail is thus startling.

The uneasiness of the narrator regarding solitude is also to be linked with the apprehension that being alone with one's thoughts, past, and mistakes can entail. As the narrator already notices on her fifth day, hiking in a wilderness area leaves her with only herself:

> The thing about hiking the Pacific Crest Trail, the thing that was so profound to me that summer […] was how few choices I had and how often I had to do the thing I least wanted to do. How there was no escape or denial. No numbing it down with a martini or covering it up with a roll in the hay (Strayed 69).

The narrator cannot escape being with her thoughts, as the trail does not provide many distractions. However painful addressing her past or solitude may be, she cannot avoid it or try to hide behind alcohol or promiscuity.

In order to reassure herself and to attempt not to let fear overcome her, the narrator repeats the sentence "*I am not afraid*." This often happens when she spots a wild animal (see Strayed 91, 192). At other times, she repeats this mantra, as she calls it, to calm herself after she realizes that she is lost on a road (Strayed 216) or after she believes to be caught in a mountain storm (Strayed 182), for example. The narrator also likes to say aloud "*Who is tougher than me?*" and to answer "*No one*," even if she does not believe it, again in an attempt to reassure herself (see Strayed 90). Apart from her mantras, she also sings aloud to break the silence. This also happens particularly often after an encounter with a wild animal or signs of the presence of one, as she fears an attack, being the only target since she hikes unaccompanied (see Strayed 68, 91, 228). The narrator thus has to rely on herself when faced with the fear connected to her isolation.

The various persons the narrator encounters during her trip often remind her of the danger of her undertaking. For instance, when day hikers in Oregon ask her if she is afraid and if she has a gun, the narrator replies that she is not, "laughing a little" (Strayed 281). The concern of others makes her feel uneasy and suggests that a lone woman such as her should be afraid. However, the narrator has decided not to let herself be afraid. It can be seen from her answer that reminders of the dangerousness of her hike nonetheless affect her and cause her to fake confidence in order to hide her fear. But she chose to undertake a long-distance hike "to stare that fear down" (Strayed 122), which also gives her a sense of empowerment and pride. By facing her fears on the trail, the narrator also gains agency and gradually succeeds in feeling safe alone.

4.4. Developing other forms of companionship

As a consequence of the solitude of her hike, the narrator develops other forms of companionship in order to cope with it. Apart from the presence of other hikers and the bond that she forms with them, the majority of the new relationships that she establishes concern her own body, nature, the books that she carries, and her hiking equipment.

The relationship between the narrator and her body has already been thoroughly addressed in Chapter 2. It should however be indicated here that the way the narrator separates herself from her painful body and, especially, her feet changes her perception of and relationship with the latter. In his book, Gros addresses the link between the body and the soul during a walk as well. He notes that a dialogue is created between the two, resulting in the walker's impossibility of being completely alone: "[…] dès qu'on marche, on est aussitôt deux" (Gros 82). This can hold true for the narrator as she creates a new relationship with her body. It could therefore be argued that she is never completely alone as her body, with its pain and its changes, always accompanies her.

The second new relation that the narrator develops on the trail involves nature. For Gros, the natural environment also makes a complete solitude impossible when walking. He claims that "[…] être plongé dans la Nature, c'est une sollicitation permanente. Tout vous parle, vous salue, appelle votre attention, les arbres, les fleurs, la couleur des chemins. Le souffle du vent, le bourdonnement des insectes, la course du ruisseau, le choc du pas sur la terre […]" (Gros 80). Various elements of the landscape follow the narrator as she walks. She often recounts how she passes the same kind of trees or bushes or comments on the mountains that she slowly approaches. These elements of the landscape function as walking companions. This is even more the case of the plants that are associated with recollections of the narrator's mother. Besides being companions for the narrator, those serve as reminders of the constant presence of her mother within her, therefore helping her cope with her passing. In addition, she enjoys talking to animals. For example, she greets a lizard (Strayed 66) and cows (Strayed 239), chants to cows (Strayed 71), and hoots at an owl (Strayed 279). Kam (13) also mentions this point in her article but puts emphasis on the distraction that these interactions with animals bring to the narrator. Most references to animals illustrate how the narrator simply enjoys seeing them as they are not threatening and she expresses her enthusiasm by interacting with them. She always seems happy to encounter this type of animals and they probably constitute highlights of her days. Seeing other living creatures decreases her feeling of loneliness and isolation.

Then, the narrator also develops a relationship with the books that she carries with her, especially her Pacific Crest Trail guidebooks. She describes the one on the Californian part of the trail as her bible (Strayed 60), which shows the extent to which she relies on it and how much she values its usefulness. The narrator also carries novels and poetry books[2] because she "loved books" (Strayed 105). They however become more meaningful to her on the trail: "They were the world I could lose myself in when the one I was actually in became too lonely or harsh or difficult to bear" (Strayed 105). Her books provide her with distraction and comfort her when the solitude of her journey feels overwhelming.

One book is of particular importance for her, namely Adrienne Rich's *The Dream of a Common Language*. She only opened it on her first night on the trail because she needed to be soothed, which is exactly the effect that reading aloud one of her poems, namely "Power," has on her. For Kam, "[t]his poem […] fuels Strayed to continue her trek" (14). The narrator describes Rich's book that she almost knows by heart – which is very telling of its significance for her – as "a consolation, an old friend," and her "religion" (Strayed 60). She even recites parts of Rich's poems during her hike, their familiarity giving her "a strange sort of comfort" (Strayed 304). Even before she started her hike, she used to recite "certain lines [that] had become like incantations to [her]" (Strayed 60) in times of "sorrow and confusion" (Strayed 60). The comfort that Rich's poetry brings her is thus linked to a positive part of her past and she carries on while hiking her own tradition of turning to these poems in difficult times.

Rich also constitutes a sort of human companion for the narrator, as her words are with her throughout her journey and she represents a familiar voice. The narrator is thus never completely alone, as Rich is present through her poems, which she describes as her friend. *The Dream of a Common Language* is also the only book that she cannot resign herself to burn in order to lighten her backpack and that she carries until the end of her hike. A few days before reaching her destination, the narrator reflects on the significance of the poems:

> Its lines had run all summer through the mix-tape radio station in my head, fragments from various poems or sometimes the title of the book itself. […] I'd chanted those lines silently through the days while I hiked. Often, I didn't know exactly what they meant, yet there was another way in which I knew their meaning entirely, […] so close and present and belonging to me […] (Strayed 304).

[2] A complete list of the books that the narrator carried and ultimately burned on the trail is provided at the end of the memoir (Strayed 317).

Although the meaning of the poems is not always clear to her, she nevertheless understands their sense, which is personal. Rich's poetry thus brings her strength and courage when she needs it, such as during her first night on the trail.

Finally, the narrator develops affection for her hiking equipment, and especially for her backpack, which she nicknames Monster. In the prologue of the memoir, she explains the bond that links her to her equipment. She feels affection even for her boots, although they are too small and injure her feet. She explains:

> They had become not so much inanimate objects to me as extensions of who I was, as had just about everything else I carried that summer – my backpack, tent, sleeping bag, water purifier, ultralight stove, and the little orange whistle that I carried in lieu of a gun. They were the things I knew and could rely upon, the things that got me through (Strayed 5-6).

In a similar way to her books, the familiarity of her equipment brings the narrator comfort in an unknown environment. They help decrease her feeling of solitude as they act as companions as well. Her tent, in particular, gives her a feeling of safety, as she explains after approximately more than a week on the trail:

> Each evening, I ached for the shelter of my tent, for the smallest sense that something was shielding me from the entire rest of the world, keeping me safe not from danger, but from vastness itself. I loved the dim, clammy dark of my tent, the cozy familiarity of the way I arranged my few belongings all around me each night (Strayed 93).

Her tent offers her a form of protection from the vastness of the wilderness that surrounds her and which can feel overwhelming for a solitary walker since it displays no sign of civilization. She can thus easily feel lonely but her equipment provides her with a companionship much needed. This quote also stresses how important the sense of familiarity of her belongings is to her. Being able to rely on her equipment and being in the presence of well-known objects reassures her, explaining why she grows attached to her possessions, which accompany her throughout her journey.

Her backpack is of particular importance, as is shown in the way that she personifies it by giving it a nickname. Her relation to it is however ambivalent, as is the one to her boots. As she packs her possessions in her motel room at the beginning of her hike, the narrator quickly realizes that her backpack is evidently too heavy for her since she cannot move it from the ground (Strayed 42). As previously discussed, its extreme heaviness quickly rubs her skin in various places during her hike. Although her relation to it is difficult at first, the narrator quickly feels affection

for it. After her second week on the trail, she gives him a name. She explains: “My backpack, heavy as it was, had come to feel like my almost animate companion. No longer was it the absurd Volkswagen Beetle I’d painfully hoisted on in that motel room in Mojave a couple of weeks before. Now my backpack had a name: Monster. I meant it in the nicest possible way” (Strayed 92). Her feeling of affection grows as she progresses to the point of considering it a friend (Strayed 179). After about a month, she describes it as follows: “Monster was my world, my inanimate extra limb. Though its weight and size still confounded me, I’d come to accept that it was my burden to bear. I didn’t feel myself in contradiction to it the way I had a month before. It wasn’t me against it. We two were one” (Strayed 190). This quote illustrates how important her backpack has become. She does not see it as an obstacle to her progression but as a part of herself. They form a team, collaborating together to reach her goal. This means that the narrator is never alone as she has Monster with her. She herself states that “in its company, [she] didn’t feel entirely alone” (Strayed 42). The previous quote also exemplifies how the relationship that she develops with it is healing. Monster provides her with comfort and companionship, and accepting its weight, which represents her “emotional baggage” (Kam 12), is an important step in her recovery. The fact that she considers it as a real friend and companion, instead of a sort of antagonist, shows that she began to emotionally heal.

In conclusion, the way that the narrator experiences the particular solitude that is characteristic of a travel in wilderness areas has been analyzed in this chapter. It has been shown how isolation from others is both positive and negative for the narrator, although its benefits outweigh its negative aspect at the end of the memoir, as solitude helps her focus her attention on her self and her recovery. The solitary aspect of her hike emphasizes her healing process as she is first restless alone but ends enjoying her own company. It can therefore be said that she “tames” solitude, in the sense that she manages to transform it in a positive and beneficial experience. The fact that the narrator does not let herself be afraid and that she develops various strategies to reassure herself also testifies to her control over solitude. It has also been observed in this chapter that she develops new forms of relationships with her body, nature, her books, and her equipment, as a result of being alone. The narrator thus often turns to her belongings in difficult times, which could lead to the questioning of her self-reliance as she does not always find the resources to make her feel better solely in herself, but regularly relies on objects, although she considers them as a part of her.

5. Remembering and accepting the past on the Pacific Crest Trail

Throughout this dissertation, the healing aspect of the hike that the narrator of *Wild* undertook has been emphasized. The aim of the present chapter is to observe how walking helps her reflect on her feelings and memories, her identity and personal growth, as well as remember her past and accept it. The focus will consequently be placed on the flashbacks that are to be found in the memoir, in order to analyze how they impact the narrator's recovery. As will be explained, most flashbacks are told when the narrator is not walking and they mostly concern the difficult events that influenced her decision to hike the trail. Another important point will be central to this chapter, namely the reflection that she has about her life. As she progresses on her journey, she learns to make peace with her past – a point that Kam (18) observes as well in her article – and to accept the changes in her life. The way her project brings her personal growth will be discussed as well. Accepting her past and finding her identity was her goal when she set out to hike the trail and, as will be observed, the narrator reaches that aim in the end.

5.1. Experiencing personal growth on the trail

As the narrator progresses, she witnesses changes in her attitude and her self in general. This is linked to the reflection that is made possible on the trail. As previously discussed, walking is an activity perfectly suited to reflecting, as "[i]t offers the possibility of thinking in a different way" (Lee and Ingold 71) and can therefore facilitate personal introspection. According to Amato, walking will always be a popular activity "for therapy and self-illumination" (277). On the Pacific Crest Trail, the narrator is free to think about her past and regrets and can take her time. However, the obstacles that she encounters impede this reflection, especially at the beginning of her journey. Her physical condition and the overall painful state of her body impact her recovery process. The other sections of this chapter will show that the narrator's acceptance of her past mostly occurs at the end of her journey, highlighting the fact that she needed to gain physical strength first, in order to be psychologically strong enough to face her depression and accept the idea of change. In addition, she needed to accept the solitude of her journey and to be patient, as walking is a slow activity.

Walking serves as a therapy for the narrator precisely because she figuratively brings her past, background, and experiences with her on the trail. These elements consequently influence and shape her hiking experience, explaining the various flashbacks that the natural landscape

triggers, as well as the realizations pertaining to her life. Walking connects her past, present, and future, allowing her to reflect on her life in its continuity. This idea of continuity is addressed by Edensor as well, who reminds that a walking body is always in movement and thus "experiencing continuity" (2000: 84). During a walk, as Lee and Ingold argue, "temporality […] can be shifting and unsettled: thinking and perceiving the past, present and future, and combining them in references to routes" (75). This is reminiscent of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of chronotope, and especially the chronotope of the road, where time and space "intersect at one spatial and temporal point" (243). Chronotopes "are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel" (Bakhtin 250), and in *Wild*, the trail, which links the narrator's past, present, and future, is present throughout the narrative. Consequently, walking is exactly what she needed in order to think about her life, as her past, present, and future self are connected on the trail. This continuity is mostly noticeable when the narrator accepts the death of her mother, as will be detailed in the last section of this chapter. She is recalling past memories of her mother, while walking and mourning her in the present, which will in turn influence her future self as she comes to terms with the latter's passing. This extract therefore illustrates how her past, present, and future are closely connected on the Pacific Crest Trail.

The narrator specifically notices that she has mentally changed at various points in her hike. It is particularly interesting to note that these realizations happen while she is in Oregon, two months after the beginning of her three-month hike. Right after passing the border between California and Oregon, the narrator remarks: "I'd been in California two months, but it seemed like I'd aged years since I'd stood on Tehachapi Pass alone with my pack and imagined reaching this spot" (Strayed 239). Finally reaching the border between the two states is momentous for her and she feels elated to be there, as it marks an important step in her journey. This makes her recognize her symbolic mental progression, which is linked to her physical advancement on the trail. In addition, this quote highlights how her perception of time has changed on the trail. Two months feel like years for her, especially, when considering her mental evolution. She considers that aging positive, as it proves her that she is slowly reaching her initial goal of transformation. The narrator later compares how her perception has changed in Oregon: "California had altered my vision, but Oregon shifted it again, drew it closer in" (Strayed 263). She links this inner change to the natural landscape: whereas she mostly walks in deserts and mountains in California, where she is able to see far around her, the trail in Oregon passes mainly through forests, hence its nickname, the "green tunnel," as the narrator explains it (Strayed 263). While she acknowledges a change in her vision in California, Oregon alters that again. The narrator's

state of mind is closely connected to her surroundings, explaining why she can only truly accept her past in Oregon. In California, her surroundings are often barren, which reflects her life before she set out to hike, i.e. sadness, death, separation. The desert reminds her of the end of a part of her life and of her previous self and is thus linked to a need to change and find herself again. This also explains why most of the flashbacks in the narrative are to be found while the narrator is in California. By contrast, the landscape in Oregon is green, full of life, and replete with "tremendous ancient trees" (Strayed 263). The more luxuriant nature that surrounds her there is associated with the progressive acceptance of her past. It also triggers and is reflected in a sort of rebirth for the narrator.

In Ashland, Oregon, the narrator encounters a man, Jonathan, and has intercourse with him, as previously explained. During the time that she spends with him, she realizes how much she has changed. While going to a beach with him, she remarks that she has been there with Paul, her ex-husband, before. This makes her think about "[w]ho [she]'d been when [she]'d been here with Paul and what [she]'d thought would happen and what did and who [she] was now and how everything had changed" (Strayed 257). Confronting her present self with the memory of her past self with Paul emphasizes her recent growth. While she is leaving Ashland, the narrator even decides to leave the condom that she has been carrying with her since the beginning of her hike for other hikers of the trail in a box dedicated to that purpose (Strayed 260). However, the fact that she had packed condoms exemplifies how she was aware that she was still "the woman with the hole in her heart" and that she would still need intimacy like her past self – as discussed in Chapter 4 – despite her wish to change. By leaving her remaining condom – the others had been taken away by another hiker who helped her lighten her backpack – in Ashland, the narrator shows that she is truly ready to break away from her past and change regarding her longing for sexual intimacy with strangers, which illustrates the importance of her stop in Ashland.

As can be easily imagined, the narrator fully understands the extent of her personal growth on the trail when she reaches her destination. This pivotal moment makes her cry and feel grateful. She writes: "*Thank you*, I thought over and over again. *Thank you*. Not just for the long walk, but for everything I could feel finally gathered up inside of me; for everything the trail had taught me and everything I couldn't yet know, though I felt it somehow already contained within me" (Strayed 310, emphasis in original). She explains that she will only know the true meaning of her hike when she will bring her family there, fifteen years later. Despite this, she already feels different and whole again, after having completed her journey.

5.2. Remembering the past

The Pacific Crest Trail constitutes a place of remembering for the narrator, as the narrative of her hike is often interrupted in order to recount past events. The first chapter of the memoir, after the prologue, already begins with a flashback regarding how she learned that her mother had cancer and was dying, a hint for the readers that the rest of the narrative will also contain flashbacks and be haunted be a wound caused by the traumatic experience of losing her mother. While providing details about each flashback in the book would go beyond the aim of this chapter, a few elements can be explained regarding their contexts and contents, in order to understand their importance for the narrator's recovery of her depression. It should also be borne in mind that the aim of this section is not to provide an exhaustive list of all the recollections of the narrator but to show their importance as they highlight her inner change by providing a contrast between painful memories and their later acceptance.

It is first interesting to notice, as previously stated, that most flashbacks are told when the narrator is in California. This also shows how important it is for her to first remember her past and reflect on her memories before being able to accept them. Kam makes a similar observation as she writes that "[t]he individual in crisis must confront the past and […] [come] to terms with self-harming impulses and experiences, before healing" (18). This chapter will go beyond Kam's comment as it analyzes in more detail the events that the narrator remembers, how she remembers them, and their significance regarding her mental recovery. Then, it can be observed that flashbacks mainly occur when the narrator is not actually walking but is having a break, is in a car or is lying in her tent, for instance. This could mean that although the physical act of walking was restorative and helped her introspection, the narrator needed to rest in order to think more clearly. The choice of recounting past events at a particular point can however also simply be a stylistic choice to create more rhythm in the narrative, for example. Most flashbacks begin in a way that does not clearly show whether the narrator is thinking about the events that she recounts or whether it just seems appropriate to inform the readers about them. For instance, while the narrator is walking during her first day, she thinks about the difficulty of her project and what she had imagined it would be. She writes: "I couldn't even remember what it was I'd imagined six months ago, back in December, when I'd first decided to do this. I'd been driving on a stretch of highway east of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, when the idea came to me" (Strayed 51). A flashback about the way that the narrator learned about the existence of the Pacific Crest Trail ensues. She also explains how she began using heroin and later learned that she was pregnant and decided to have an abortion. She is walking when she begins explaining these

events but nothing tells clearly that she remembers them during that specific moment of her hike. By contrast, the narrator clearly explains that she is thinking about an astrologer before a flashback regarding their encounter: "I thought of the woman I always thought of in such moments: an astrologer who'd read my natal chart when I was twenty-three" (Strayed 203). In the short flashback that follows, she explains their discussion on the absence of her father in her life and the fact that he was violent, a memory that left a feeling of anger and bitterness.

As can be already noted from the two examples above, most of the flashbacks concern unhappy or painful memories, such as when the narrator reflects on the meaning of her last name, Strayed, and how she chose it herself after her divorce with Paul, while she is thinking about presenting herself to an employee of a store at her first campground in order to have her resupply box (Strayed 96). A flashback about her married life with Paul and their divorce, which was a extremely difficult decision for both of them, follows. Another time, a flashback about how violent her father was with her mother and the fact that she did not have fond memories of him occurs after she thought of a conversation that she had with a therapist about her father (Strayed 131). Some memories of her mother are also characterized by regret, such as the time when she traded one of her books for *The Novel*, a book written by James Michener, her mother's favorite author. This made her think of her mother, and especially how arrogant she sometimes was with the latter, because she read "real" works of literature, unlike her mother (Strayed 149-151). Other difficult memories include the time when the narrator, her brother, and Paul, chose to kill Lady, her mother's horse, by shooting her, as the animal was old and in poor health (Strayed 158-163). The narrator tells this because she is touching her tattoo on her arm, which represents Lady, while in her tent (Strayed 157). Another example is the discussion between the narrator and her mother concerning the latter's funeral and whether she wanted to be buried or cremated (Strayed 268).

As can be seen from three of the above recollections, the narrator's name, the book *The Novel*, and her tattoo serve a similar purpose as the one of the madeleine in Marcel Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (1913-1927). As explained by Claudia Brodsky, the madeleine is linked to "involuntary memory" (1032) and is "the bearer and support […] of 'l'édifice immense du souvenir'" (1014-1015), which is also the case for the three above examples for the narrator as they each trigger a short flashback or recollection. Similarly to the narrator of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, for whom the "memories [are triggered by] mundane sensations" (Walker 391), the narrator of *Wild* remembers her past because of a mundane object, i.e. a book, well-known words, namely her name, and her tattoo. However, whereas the madeleine triggers

"vivid memories" (Walker 390), the narrator in *Wild* does not provide as much details as in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, with the exception of Lady's killing. It is thus interesting to notice that the recollections are linked to something specific and ordinary, like for Proust's madeleine. The act of walking is therefore not the trigger for these memories. It should however be reminded that the choice of recounting a memory could simply be a stylistic choice and that not all flashbacks are triggered by a familiar object or a detail.

By contrast to sad recollections, the narrator also shares happier memories, such as one regarding Eddie, her stepfather. She is hitchhiking and two women ask for her parents' opinion of her hike, to which she replies that her mother is deceased and that she has no father (Strayed 151). This makes her think of Eddie, whom she used to consider as her father. A flashback then begins about the first time that she met him and how she "instantly loved him" (Strayed 152). That fond memory however ends on a sadder note as she recalls how quickly Eddie "fell in love with another woman" (Strayed 153) and the fact that they did not see each other often after the death of her mother.

Other recollections of her past do not strictly constitute flashbacks or memories that interrupt the narrative of her travel but are nevertheless important with respect to the narrator's later acceptance of them. These mostly concern the long explanation that is provided at the beginning of the narrative in the first two chapters after the prologue about her childhood and growing up in poverty, the death of her mother, and the way she cheated on Paul, which led to their divorce. As will be shown, these recollections are important for the narrator as they involve parts of her life that she needed to accept and wanted to reflect on during her hike.

5.3. Accepting the past

As she progresses on her journey, the narrator progressively learns to accept her difficult past and to move on. It has been previously pointed out that various aspects of her hike play a key role in her mental recovery, such as slowness, physicality, and solitude. Another important element is the reflection on her life and herself that is made possible on the trail. As already pointed out, most of the narrator's realizations take place in Oregon, since her introspection is a long progress that takes time. Hiking in the green landscapes of that state allows her to have a different perspective on her past, which helps her accept the recent changes in her life. All the events with which she makes peace are first addressed in a flashback, as will be observed. Interestingly, and similarly to the flashbacks, the narrator comes to terms with her past while

she is not hiking, with the exception of her mother's passing. Again, this shows that she needs calm and to be at rest to contemplate these important aspects of her life.

The first element that the narrator learns to accept involves her relation to her father. While she is watching a particularly beautiful sunset at the middle of her hike, right before entering Oregon, the narrator thinks of her father as "the man who hadn't fathered [her]" (Strayed 233), which amazed her as she could not understand why he did not love her. However, as she looks at the sunset, "it occurred to [her] that [she] didn't have to be amazed by him anymore. There were so many other amazing things in this world" (Strayed 234). This realization makes her cry for the first time of her journey, but not from happiness or sadness. She writes: "I was entering. I was leaving. California streamed behind me like a long silk veil. […] I felt fierce and humble and gathered up inside, like I was safe in this world too" (Strayed 234). As she is leaving the first major step of her journey behind her, the narrator feels better and prepared to change. She figuratively leaves her unhappy memories behind her to concentrate on accepting them. The first step of this process is to accept that she unfortunately did not have a loving father.

Then, the narrator forgives herself regarding her affairs and her divorce with Paul. As she is at a beach, she writes his name in the sand, like she always used to do, but realizes that this is the last time. She decides that she will stop wondering whether their divorce was the right decision or not and that although she is sorry about her infidelity, she would not act differently if she had the chance (Strayed 258). Her contemplation takes the form of a series of questions beginning with "what if." It ends with the following: "What if what made me do all those things everyone thought I shouldn't have done was what also had got me here? What if I was never redeemed? What if I already was?" (Strayed 258) The narrator never answers those questions, which end a paragraph. They however emphasize her readiness to accept her divorce. This extract shows her wish to stop "tormenting [herself]" (Strayed 258) and let go of that former unfaithful version of herself. Although she wonders whether a redemption is possible, she also considers the possibility of being already redeemed. In my view, this also illustrates how walking helps her regain agency as she realizes that she has the power to forgive herself, if she decides it. Notwithstanding this first acceptance of her divorce, the narrator thinks about it on a second occasion, while she is in a car, a few days before the end of her hike. One of her friends joins her with her boyfriend and the narrator goes to a hot spring with them, along with three other hikers, nicknamed the Three Young Bucks, whom she befriended. Her friend has brought the narrator and Paul's old futon, which makes her think of him. She thinks: "My love for him was indisputable, but my allegiance to him wasn't. We were no longer married, and as I settled

alongside the Three Young Bucks into the bed I used to share with Paul, I felt a kind of acceptance of that, a kind of clarity where there'd been so much uncertainty" (Strayed 298). The narrator does not elaborate on this realization but it is clear that she finally accepts her divorce in all respects.

She next comes to terms with the death of her mother, although this is particularly difficult from an emotional point of view due to the trauma linked to it and the haunting presence of her mother during her journey. The following extract clearly emphasizes that mourning is a process with different steps. While she is walking on the day of her mother's birthday, the narrator thinks: "*She didn't live. She didn't get to be fifty. She would never get to be fifty* […]. *Be fifty, Mom. Be fucking fifty,* I though with increasing rage as I forged on. I couldn't believe how furious I was at my mother for not being alive on her fiftieth birthday. I had the palpable urge to punch her in the mouth" (Strayed 264, emphasis in original). As can be observed, the narrator first feels fury toward her mother as she resents her for being dead. For her, mourning her mother first takes the form of anger. She then writes: "Dying at forty-five had only been the worst thing she'd done wrong. As I hiked, I made a catalogue of the rest, listing them painstakingly in my head" (Strayed 265). This list only contains seven items, which testifies to the way the narrator holds her mother in high regard. Even in her anger, she cannot think of any additional flaws. Thinking of this makes her "wail" (Strayed 267) and express how unfair it is to have become an orphan so young. She states:

> [Her death] had forced me to instantly grow up and forgive her every motherly fault at the same time that it kept me forever a child, my life both ended and begun in that premature place where we'd left out. She was my mother, but I was motherless. […] She would always be that empty bowl that no one could fill. I'd have to fill it myself again and again and again (Strayed 267).

The narrator is still angry when she expresses this. The void that her mother left feels insurmountable. Her mother had evidently a special place in her life – a place that no one else can replace, not even herself. The narrator's rage only decreases when she spots crocuses, flowers that "grew in the dirt where [she]'d spread [her mother's] ashes" (Strayed 267). When she resumes walking, "[she] didn't begrudge [her] mother a thing" (Strayed 267). She explains: "The truth was, in spite of all that, she'd been a spectacular mom. I knew it as I was growing up. I knew it in the days that she was dying. I knew it now. And I knew that was something. That it was a lot" (Strayed 267-268). Despite her burst of anger, she recognizes how fortunate she was to have a mother like hers, which constitutes the second step of her mourning process. At night, the narrator "loved her again" (Strayed 269) and as she burns the pages of one of her

books, she says her name aloud "as if it were a ceremony for her" (Strayed 269). This makes her realize that her mother was more than that; she was also a woman. She also understands "[h]ow it was she belonged to [her] profoundly, and also how she didn't" (Strayed 270). This day is thus particularly emotional for the narrator. She needed to resent her mother for leaving her one last time before being able to let her go and accept that although she was not a perfect mother, she was a spectacular one. Similarly to her acceptance of her divorce, the narrator accepts the death of her mother on a second occasion, a few days before the end of her journey as well. As she is near a river, she writes: "Where was my mother? I wondered. I'd carried her so long, staggering beneath her weight. *On the other side of the river*, I let myself think. And something inside of me released" (Strayed 306, emphasis in original). It is interesting to notice that the narrator describes her memories of her mother and her feelings related to her as an actual weight, which "released," when she is finally ready to come to terms with her passing before completing her hike. This also highlights how traumatic the death of her mother was and how it haunted and followed her. As her mother's passing was the event that prompted her to undertake her hike, accepting it is evidently highly important regarding her depression and mental recovery. Letting her mother go is for her the last step in the acceptance of her death.

In addition to these two important realizations, the narrator also makes peace with her childhood and poverty, her addiction to heroin, her desire for intimacy, and the fact that her bond with Eddie, her stepfather, has become almost non-existent. Although the fact that she grew up poor does not seem to have a significant importance regarding her depression, her acceptance of it indicates nevertheless an acceptance of her past in general. As she is left with only two pennies after going to a restaurant near the trail, she observes "for the first time that growing up poor had come in handy" (Strayed 280). She explains:

> I probably wouldn't have been fearless enough to go on such a trip with so little money if I hadn't grown up without it. I'd always thought of my family's economic standing in terms of what I didn't get […]. But now I could see the line between this and that – between a childhood in which my mother and stepfather forging ahead over and over again with two pennies in their pocket and my own general sense that I could do it too (Strayed 280).

Although she underestimated the cost of her journey, the narrator feels happy to be here, "even though a reasonable person would have said [she] couldn't afford to do it" (Strayed 280). Being poor therefore constitutes an advantage, as it gives her the courage to undertake her project despite the fact that it is beyond her means. Accepting that aspect of her past is thus empowering as it illustrates how the narrator makes her own decisions and succeeds.

Her acceptance of her drug addiction happens when she realizes why she was using heroin. As she is thinking of the things that will be waiting for her in Portland in a week, after the end of her hike, it occurs to her that heroin will be there too. She writes: "But the thing was, I didn't want it. Maybe I never really had. I'd finally come to understand what *it* had been: a yearning for a way out, when actually what I had wanted to find was a way in. I was there now. Or close" (Strayed 290, emphasis in original). Heroin was thus an escape from her sorrow, or at least, this is what she expected from it. However, as she states it, she did not need an escape but rather to focus on herself and introspect her feelings in order to face her grief and depression. Recognizing this is therapeutic as she needed to confront her past and acknowledge, once again, that she made the right decision by hiking the Pacific Crest Trail.

Her recognition that she does not need intimacy with strangers or a companion happens simultaneously to her acceptance of her divorce, i.e. in a car with her friend Lisa, Lisa's boyfriend, and the Three Young Bucks. As she talks to one of them, Rick, she thinks:

> […] though I realized that in spite of the fact that I liked him perhaps a thousand times more than a good number of people I'd slept with, I wasn't going to lay a hand on him, no matter how deeply I longed to. […] It was because for once it was finally enough for me to simply lie there in a restrained and chaste rapture beside a sweet, strong, sexy, smart, good man who was probably never meant to be anything but my friend. For once, I didn't ache for a companion. For once the phrase *a woman with a hole in her heart* didn't thunder into my head. That phrase, it didn't even live for me anymore (Strayed 299, emphasis in original).

Despite her evident attraction to Rick, the narrator does not feel the need to "lay a hand on him." She is not the "woman with a hole in her heart" anymore. This is again an important realization, as her infidelities had led to her divorce. Although she has already made peace with that when she wrote Paul's name in the sand and stated that she would not change the past, the fact that she actively recognizes that she does not need a companion and is fine on her own represents an important change for her.

Finally, she forgives her stepfather, Eddie, for not staying in contact with her. Staring at the campfire she has made makes her think of him because "[i]t had been he who'd taught [her] how to build one" (Strayed 303). She reflects on all the elements that she has learned regarding camping thanks to him, such as "how to pitch a tent and tie a knot in a rope" (Strayed 303). She then contemplates her feelings toward him:

> But I was pretty certain […] that if it hadn't been for Eddie, I wouldn't have found myself on the PCT. And though it was true that everything I felt for him sat like a boulder in my throat, this realization made the boulder sit ever so much lighter. He hadn't loved me well in the end, but he'd loved me well when it mattered (Strayed 304).

This quote shows the ambivalence of the narrator's feelings. She expresses her resentment over him, even at the end of her hike, after being at peace with other aspects of her life. Notwithstanding her bitterness, which takes the form of a weight, she realizes that Eddie was a loving stepfather and was there for her. The way she ends this realization implies that this is the most important and that she accepts his absence from her life. In addition, it should also be remarked that, here, the campfire acts as Proust's madeleine as well, as the campfire, an ordinary element necessary to make camp, is specifically linked to memories of Eddie. By contrast with the flashback and the role of the madeleine in Proust's novel, it however here only leads to an acceptance of their relationship and not to a flashback.

In conclusion, the narrator found on the Pacific Crest Trail an occasion to think and reflect on her past, which was her initial intention when she decided to undertake a long-distance hike. This is disclosed by the subtitle of the book – *A Journey from Lost to Found* – as pointed out by Brown (364), thus revealing the effect of walking on the narrator right from the beginning. As has been analyzed, she first needed to remember her past before being able to come to terms with it. Hiking facilitates both these mental processes and therefore ultimately has a highly positive effect on the narrator. Although it is impossible to tell whether she completely recovers from her depression following her mother's passing, it is hard to deny that walking tremendously helps her face the trauma that this difficult event caused.

Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to analyze the representation of a long-distance hike in Cheryl Strayed's memoir *Wild*, as well as highlight the healing aspect of walking regarding the narrator's depression. This study has shown that the narrator changes throughout her hike. While at first she is physically unprepared for the challenge of the trail, uncomfortable with being alone, not used to a slow pace, and unable to reflect on her past because of her painful body, the transformative impact of hiking is rapidly made visible in her descriptions of herself. She quickly becomes more muscular and able to hike almost as many miles a day as more experienced hikers. She also becomes used to the repetitive nature of her hike and to the time it takes her to reach campgrounds, for instance, making her more patient and appreciative of walking. Although solitude is first perceived as a negative aspect of her travel and despite the difficulty of being alone, she learns to tame it and embrace it, while feeling safe on the trail, although she is on her own. Finally, she comes to terms with her past, makes peace with herself, and accepts her mother's passing. Hiking for a long-distance is thus a transformative experience, as she ends her hike feeling different – a change in herself that she already witnesses during her journey.

The fact that *Wild* is a memoir makes it highly interesting as the narrator engages with her identity, her sense of self and agency, in a very intimate way. Furthermore, the reader is able to learn about her most private thoughts and feelings because Strayed decided to write a memoir. As mentioned in Chapter 2, memoirs contain a "personable voice," as Larson calls it, meaning that a self-introspection from the author is to be found, as well as an impression of intimacy with him/her. This is especially noticeable in *Wild*, with its highly personal and informal style and the use of slang words such as "fuck," "motherfucking," "idiot," or "shit," to name but a few. Contracted forms, for example, are also present throughout the book, as well as colloquial expressions, such as "a roll in the hay" (Strayed 69). The result is an impression of closeness, identification, and authenticity.

Numerous elements in Strayed's *Wild* could still be analyzed in the future. It would be interesting, for example, to draw a comparison between long-distance hikes undertaken by men and women. Throughout her journey, the narrator of *Wild* comments on the lack of female walkers on the Pacific Crest Trail. For instance, as she signs the trail register at the very beginning of her hike, she notices that she is the only female solo hiker (Strayed 50). She later encounters female hikers, but women remain a minority on the trail. The masculinity of an

experience in the wild that the narrator observes is perfectly exemplified in Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*, and it would be interesting, for example, to compare the two works. As he explains at the beginning of his biography, Christopher McCandless "[wandered] across North America in search of raw, transcendent experience" (Krakauer ix) and actively wanted to isolate himself in the wild. By doing this, he "participated in the cult of frontier masculinity" (Kam 4). Although the idea of "rugged self-sufficiency, courage, masculine physical strength, [and] autonomous individualism" (Kam 3) is to be found in the book, emphasizing the survival aspect of McCandless's experience, deeper topics are addressed by Krakauer as well, such as "the grip wilderness has on the American imagination, the allure high-risk activities hold for young men of a certain mind, the complicated, highly charged bond that exists between fathers and sons" (x).

A first observation is thus that *Into the Wild* addresses more philosophical subjects than *Wild* and this constitutes one of the latter's weaknesses. Strayed offers a more down-to-earth account of a wilderness experience. As pointed out in this dissertation, the physicality of her hike is foregrounded, as well as its practical aspect, such as "what a long-distance hiker eats, what gear s/he should bring, how to keep a backpack at a reasonable weight" (Brown 364). Although the book also addresses more complex issues, such as continuing living after the death of a loved one and accepting one's past, the psychological aspect and the personal impact that walking has on the narrator's mental recovery is given more attention. By contrast, other non-fiction travel works, such as *Into the Wild* and Anik See's *Saudade: The Possibilities of Place*, which was referred to in Chapter 1, engage with deeper topics and are more philosophical. For instance, See, who is highly observant of her surroundings, of people, and of their culture and lifestyle, not only describes the place she travels to, but reflects on death (see the chapter entitled "Rainy Summit," See 37), on "doing something just for the sake of doing it" (See 45), and on the value of family (See 21), to name but a few examples. However, the narrator of *Wild* provides the readers with a nuanced view of her hike, which can be observed in the way physicality, solitude, and repetitiveness are described as ambivalent, as obstacles at first and eventually as restorative. Although *Wild* is not perfect and although it can be argued that it fails to go beyond the practical aspect of hiking a wilderness trail, a more thorough comparison with Krakauer's *Into the Wild* and See's *Saudade* might show that these works share a similar style and content and that an analogous ambivalent perspective on some aspects of a journey can be found, such as its pace or solitude.

Furthermore, the fact that Strayed narrates her experience of hiking more than a thousand miles by herself sets *Wild* apart from masculine stories, such as McCandless's, or Brill Bryson's, which was mentioned in the introduction of this study, although similarities can be found between the latter and Strayed's memoir. Both Bryson and Strayed hiked a long-distance trail in the United States and they both comment on the history of the trail they hike, as well as provide practical details of their experiences in a wilderness area. However, Bryson hiked with a friend and did not walk as much as Strayed. He also offers more commentary on the history of the Appalachian Trail and the natural landscape around him (see for example Bryson 127-135) and, most differently, writes in a funny, tongue-in-cheek style. It seems that *A Walk in the Woods* and *Wild* are not meant for the same audience, as Strayed focuses on the psychological aspect of her journey and on the therapeutic value of hiking. The extent to which Strayed's experience differs from that of a man would thus be interesting to analyze in depth. Such a study would probably emphasize the gendered aspect of *Wild* – which Kam already discusses in her article – as the narrator's search for her identity is connected to an exploration of gender roles and breaking away from the typical roles that are associated with women.

I hope that the readers wish to reconnect with the topic of walking after reading this dissertation. Although it is often an unconsidered means of transportation, as explained in Chapter 1, it deserves to be given more attention as it is more complex than it first seems. As shown in the present study, walking is a fascinating topic. It helps clear the mind, gives time to think, helps reconnect with one's body and senses and with the natural landscape, and alters the perception of one's surroundings, among others. The benefits of walking seem endless. I personally began to make long walks since engaging with this topic and I can only hope to have aroused a similar interest in this act by analyzing its depiction in Strayed's *Wild.*

Bibliography

Amato, Joseph A. *On Foot: A History of Walking*. New York/London: New York University Press, 2004. Print.

Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich. "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992. 84-258. Print.

Bassnett, Susan. "Introduction." *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia. Volume One: A to F*. Ed. Jennifer Speake. New York/London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003. xi-xv. Print.

Benesch, Klaus, and François Specq. "Modern(s) Walking: An Introduction." *Walking and the Aesthetics of Modernity: Pedestrian Mobility in Literature and the Arts*. Ed. Klaus Benesch and François Specq. New York/London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. v-xi. Web. 23 Oct. 2016.

Brodsky, Claudia. "Remembering Swann: Memory and Representation in Proust." *MLN* 102.5 (Dec. 1987): 1014-1042. Web. 11 Jul. 2017.

Brown, Megan C. "Learning to Live Again: Contemporary US Memoir as Biopolitical Self-Care Guide." *Biography* 36.2 (2013): 359–375. Web. 17 Nov. 2015.

Bryson, Bill. *A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail*. New York: Anchor Books, 2007. Print.

Carver, Stephen J., and Steffen Fritz. "Introduction." *Mapping Wilderness: Concepts, Techniques and Applications*. Ed. Stephen J. Carver and Steffen Fritz. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2016. 1-16. Print.

Connor, Steven. "Slow Going." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 30 (2000): 153-165. Web. 20 Oct. 2016.

Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Environmental History* 1.1 (1996): 7-28. Web. 12 Feb. 2016.

Crust, Lee, et al. "Walking the Walk: A Phenomenological Study of Long Distance Walking." *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology* 23 (2011): 243-262. Web. 25 Mar. 2017.

Csordas, Thomas J. "Introduction: The Body as Representation and Being-In-The-World." *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*. Ed. Thomas J. Csordas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. 1-24. Print.

de Certeau, Michel. *L'invention du quotidien. 1, Arts de faire*. Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1990. Print.

Edensor, Tim. “Walking in Rhythms: Place, Regulation, Style and the Flow of Experience.” *Visual Studies* 25.1 (Apr. 2010): 69-79. Web. 14 Mar. 2017.

Edensor, Tim. “Walking in the British Countryside: Reflexivity, Embodied Practices and Ways to Escape.” *Body & Society* 6.3-4 (2000): 81-106. Web. 13 Mar. 2017.

Forsdick, Charles. “Travel and the Body: Corporeality, Speed and Technology.” *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*. Ed. Carl Thompson. London/New York: Routledge, 2016. 68-77. Print.

Gilmore, Leigh. “American Neoconfessional: Memoir, Self-Help, and Redemption on Oprah’s Couch.” *Biography* 33.4 (2010): 657-679. Web. 20 Mar. 2016.

Gros, Frédéric. *Marcher, une philosophie*. Paris: Flammarion, 2011. Print.

Grossin, William. “Les bienfaits de la lenteur.” *Information sur les Sciences Sociales* 39.2 (2000): 219-232. Web. 15 Feb. 2017.

Hammitt, William E. “Cognitive Dimensions of Wilderness Solitude.” *Environment and Behavior* 14.4 (July 1982): 478-493. Web. 10 May 2017.

Helmers, Marguerite, and Tilar Mazzeo. “Introduction: Travel and the Body.” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 35.3 (2005): 267-276. Web. 9 Mar. 2016.

Ingold, Tim. “Culture on the Ground: The World Perceived Through the Feet.” *Journal of Material Culture* 9.3 (2004): 315-340. Web. 13 Mar. 2017.

Ireton, Sean. “Nature as Therapy: Case Studies from Austria (Adalbert Stifter) and North America (Doug Peacock).” *Pacific Coast Philology* 46.2 (2011): 122-138. Web. 19 Nov. 2016.

Jacks, Ben. “Reimagining Walking: Four Practices.” *Journal of Architectural Education* 57.3 (Feb. 2004): 5-9. Web. 5 Nov. 2016.

Jarvis, Robin. “Walking.” *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia. Volume Three: R to Z.* Ed. Jennifer Speake. New York/London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003. 1260-1263. Print.

Johnson, Mark. *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987. Print.

Johnson, Mark. *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008. Print.

Kam, Tanya Y. “Forests of the Self: Life Writing and ‘Wild’ Wanderings.” *Life Writing* (2015): 1-21. Web. 5 Nov. 2015.

Krakauer, Jon. *Into the Wild*. London: Pan Books, 2007. Print.

Larson, Thomas. *The Memoir and the Memoirist: Reading and Writing Personal Narrative*. Athens: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 2007. Print.

Le Breton, David. *Éloge de la marche*. Paris: Éditions Métailié, 2000. Print.

Lee, Jo, and Tim Ingold. "Fieldwork on Foot: Perceiving, Routing, Socializing." *Locating the Field: Space, Place and Context in Anthropology.* Ed. Simon Coleman and Peter Collins. Oxford/New York: Berg, 2006. 67-86. Print.

Lee, Sunwoo, and David Scott. "Natural Environment Influencing People's Affinity for Solitude." *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 21 (2017): 235-238. Web. 21 May 2017.

Lewis, Neil. "The Climbing Body, Nature and the Experience of Modernity." *Body & Society* 6.3-4 (2000): 58-80. Web. 13 Mar. 2017.

Long, Christopher R., and James R. Averill. "Solitude: An Exploration of Benefits of Being Alone." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 33.1 (2003): 21-44. Web. 10 May 2017.

Lumsdon, Les M., and Peter McGrath. "Developing a Conceptual Framework for Slow Travel: A Grounded Theory Approach." *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 19.3 (Apr. 2011): 265-279. Web. 3 Oct. 2016.

Manning, Robert E. "Long Walks, Deep Thoughts." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (15 Dec. 2012): B12-B13. Web. 19 Nov. 2016.

McQuillan, Gene. "Backpacking." *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia. Volume One: A to F.* Ed. Jennifer Speake. New York/London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003. 57-58. Print.

Michael, Mike. "These Boots Are Made for Walking…: Mundane Technology, the Body and Human-Environment Relations." *Body & Society* 6.3-4 (2000): 107-126. Web. 13 Mar. 2017.

Montiglio, Silvia. "Wandering Philosophers in Classical Greece." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 120 (2000): 86-105. Web. 20 Nov. 2016.

Nicholson, Geoff. *The Lost Art of Walking: The History, Science, Philosophy, and Literature of Pedestrianism.* New York: Riverhead Books, 2008. Print.

Overall, Sonia. "Walking against the Current: Generating Creative Responses to Place." *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice* 8.1 (2015): 11-28. Web. 17 Oct. 2016.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Les Confessions. Tome I.* Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1972. Print.

Saayman, Melville, and Armand Viljoen. "Who Are Wild Enough to Hike a Wilderness Trail?" *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism* 14 (2016): 41-51. Web. 3 Feb. 2017.

See, Anik. *Saudade: The Possibilities of Place.* Toronto: Coach House Books, 2008. Print.

Siddall, William R. “Transportation and the Experience of Travel.” *Geographical Review* 77.3 (Jul. 1987): 309-317. Web. 3 Dec. 2016.

Solnit, Rebecca. *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. New York: Penguin Books, 2001. Print.

Strayed, Cheryl. *Wild: A Journey from Lost to Found*. London: Atlantic Books, 2013. Print.

Taddeo, Julie. “Gender and Sexuality.” *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia. Volume Two: G to P*. Ed. Jennifer Speake. New York/London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003. 477-479. Print.

Tesson, Sylvain. *Géographie de l’instant*. Paris: Pocket, 2014. Print.

Vest, Jay Hansford C. “The Philosophical Significance of Wilderness Solitude.” *Environmental Ethics* 9.4 (1987): 303-330. Web. 10 May 2017.

Walker, Steven F. “The Name of the Madeleine: Signs and Symbols of the Mass in Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*.” *Religion and the Arts* 7.4 (2003): 389-411. Web. 11 Jul. 2017.

Wylie, John. “A Single Day’s Walking: Narrating Self and Landscape on the South West Coast Path.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30.2 (Jun. 2005): 234-247. Web. 19 Nov. 2016.

Yamagishi, Takeshi. “Landscape and the Human Being.” *Human Studies* 15 (1992): 95-115. Web. 18 Nov. 2016.

Youngs, Tim. *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Print.

Place Blaise Pascal, 1 bte L3.03.11, 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgique **www.uclouvain.be/fial**