THE HYBRIDITY OF HUMANITY: POSTHUMANISM WITHIN MARISSA MEYER'S *THE LUNAR CHRONICLES*

by

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ABSTRACT

JASMIN MARIE GONZALEZ CABAN. Analyzing contemporary science fiction narratives through a posthuman lens. (Under the direction of Dr. PAULA CONNOLLY)

In the twenty-first century, advanced technology has become an integral component to how humans interact with the world. Because technology is gradually transforming the lifestyles and compositions of humans, it is important to introduce the concept of posthumanism to current and future generations. Posthumanism questions the definition of "human" and strives to consider how humanity is changing through the exposure and usage of technology. While science fiction narratives commonly portray a posthuman reality as a dangerous and often apocalyptic scenario, recent novels have tried to approach the possibilities of posthumanism with a more optimistic frame of mind. This thesis will analyze Marissa Meyer's series *The Lunar Chronicles* through a posthuman perspective to show how her characters Cinder, Wolf, and Iko depict positive images of hybrid beings. Likewise, Meyer's series proves to be a hopeful introduction to the ideas of posthumanism that can encourage readers to redefine what being human is and contemplate the prospect of living in an inclusive posthuman society.

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INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has become an era of seemingly endless technological advancement. Technology is being used to enhance communication, cure illnesses, explore the marvels of outer space, even modify humans' biological composition. At its prime, technology is altering the way people interact with the world. As scholar Elaine Ostry says, humanity's future is "that of a science fiction novel come to life" and what we once considered to be only science fiction, such as "cloning, genetic engineering, [and] prolongation of life…are now realities, or possible realities" (222). The idea that humans are transcending their physiological compositions due to their fusion with technology is an essential focus of posthumanism.

Posthumanism is a broad term that consists of a multiplicity of approaches with both unique and conflicting perspectives. As author Victoria Flanagan discusses, posthumanism uses "technoscience as the impetus for a radical revaluation of human subjectivity, exploring the many ways in which technological innovations…have changed our understanding of what it means to be human in a modern era" (1). Some perspectives within the wide umbrella term of posthumanism include transhumanism and bioconservative posthumanism. Transhumanism is focused on how the human body can be technologically enhanced to physiologically surpass the traditional definition of "human". This ideology also questions the ethics of advancing an individual's body, meaning that a person should have the right to choose to purposely enhance their own body. Transhumanist scholar Nick Bostrom writes that "by responsible use of science, technology, and other rational means, we shall eventually manage to become posthuman,

beings with vastly greater capacities than present human beings have" ("Transhumanist Values," 1).

In contrast to Bostrom, Cary Wolfe's perspective of posthumanism opposes transhumanism, claiming that posthumanism "names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being" in both its biological and technological states, as well as "names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore" (*What is Posthumanism,* xv). Instead of focusing on the physiological enhancement of the human body, Wolfe would rather analyze the developmental essence of human existence. Similarly, Rosi Braidotti advocates for the end of "the categorical distinction between on the one hand human life—anthropos—and on the other, bios, as strictly policed prerogatives categorically distinct from the life of animals and nonhumans" arguing that the posthuman subject is "a composite assemblage of human, non-organic, machinic and other elements" (19). Braidotti's perspective focuses on the blending of living beings to advocate for less constraining categorical labels within posthumanism.

While these views of the posthuman condition embrace and portray a positive outlook of the advancement of humanity, bioconservative scholars such as Francis Fukuyama warn against the rapid advancement and usage of biotechnology, concerned that the human being will forever be altered in irreversible ways. Bioconservatives ultimately "oppose the use of technology to expand human capacities or to modify aspects of our [human] biological nature" (Bostrom, 18). Fukuyama, in his novel *Our Posthuman Future,* addresses some of the benefits biotechnology provides for humanity, but mainly focuses on the negative consequences that posthumanism can bring,

suggesting that biotechnological development should be regulated: “we need to start thinking concretely about how to build institutions that can discriminate between good and bad uses of biotechnology, and effectively enforce these rules both nationally and internationally” (Fukuyama, 10). Siding with the bioconservative perspective of posthumanism, Fukuyama believes that regulations will help humanity avoid the unequal distribution and implementation of biotechnology.

At its core, posthumanism questions the definition of “human,” avoiding an anthropocentric view of the world to accept other forms of being. In a world where cybernetics, biomedical engineering, and virtual reality are no longer a myth, posthumanism has become a popular framework for contemporary forms of entertainment such as literature (Ernest Cline’s *Ready Player One* 2011), video games (*Horizon Zero Dawn* 2017), and films (Walt Disney’s *Big Hero Six* 2014). Whereas the aforementioned examples strive to depict an optimistic view of a posthuman future, the concept of posthumanism is still viewed as a threat mostly within the humanities which focus on analyzing human nature and culture. The central fear creating resistance towards posthumanism is the idea that the human will become obsolete, which is a fallacy. Instead, posthumanism gives humanity a way to reconsider how humanism, which is generally the “ideological discourse that places the rational, autonomous and cohesive human self at its centre” (Flanagan, 12), is evolving and expanding into an existence that coincides with technological progression. Addressing these concepts can lead to a more educated view of posthumanism, especially for the younger generations whose lifestyles are already mediated by technology use, such as computers, tablets, and cellular devices.

A posthuman society can incorporate various components. One of the main elements found in literary works includes humanity interacting with advanced technology, including digital technology, and products of cybernetics or biomedical engineering. Many narratives will include characters such as cyborgs, androids, or genetically engineered beings. A popular series in the twenty-first century that fuses iconic fairy tales with posthuman elements is Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles*.

For centuries, humans have used stories to talk about the past, the present, and the future. Stories are useful tools for learning about the world and all of the marvels within it. In particular, fairy tales have become popular stories for both adults and children to understand how humans socialize with one another. Writers such as Charles Perrault, William and Jacob Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, and Jeanne-Marie LePrince de Beaumont have created and transcribed stories that are still retold in the twenty-first century. These stories are not only recognized for their characters (for example "The Little Mermaid," "Beauty and the Beast," or "Cinderella") and valued lessons (for example "be wary of strangers," "be kind to others," or "a person's true beauty is on the inside"), but also because they explore the nuances of the human condition, or in other words what it means to be human (morality, physicality, aspirations, emotional contentment, etc.). Because fairy tales have become so iconic over time, the framework of these narratives can be used to introduce humanity to new characters, values, and scenarios that the world could encounter—a modern world, a technologically advanced world, a posthuman world. Marissa Meyer's series, *The Lunar Chronicles,* presents a contemporary form of fairy tales that introduces readers to consider the possibilities of living in a posthuman world.

Although science fiction is the most commonly used genre to represent ideas of posthumanism, *The Lunar Chronicles* combines science fiction elements with fairy tale tropes to create hybrid fairy tales. Fairy tales are told, retold, and adapted in literature and entertainment for endless purposes. One prominent collection of well-known fairy tales are the stories transcribed by William and Jacob Grimm. As scholar Jack Zipes notes in his research of the Brothers Grimm's popularity, "It is virtually and realistically impossible to escape the Brothers Grimm and their folk and fairy tales in the twenty-first century. Whether we like it or not, especially in the western world, their tales have penetrated our lives through all sorts of media, and they tend to stick with us" (152). Each of the novels in *The Lunar Chronicles* adapts a particular fairytale from literary history: *Cinder* (Cinderella), *Scarlet* (Little Red Riding Hood), *Cress* (Rapunzel), and *Winter* (Snow White). *The Lunar Chronicles* presents a blending of sci-fi fairy tales that are far enough removed from reality by presenting fictional characters and events, but close enough that the narratives illustrate realistic metaphors that humans can relate to. Meyer's blending of sci-fi elements with previous fairy tales creates posthuman narratives that interrogate the human condition.

What is unique about these narratives is that Meyer creates complex and hybrid characters to represent the ideologies of posthumanism and challenge readers to consider other forms of beings. Harvey Hix discusses hybrid vs. metamorphosis, stating that "In a hybrid, two forms join to create a form that is neither the one nor the other; so three forms are involved or implied," whereas metamorphosis is a "substitution of one form for another, hybridity a combination of one form with another" (273). In this thesis I want to analyze Meyer's characters Cinder, Wolf, and Iko to show how their hybridity of being

(human-technology, human-animal, and technology-human) complicates the definition of humanity, thus introducing readers to the possibility of embracing a posthuman future.

Chapter one will focus on Meyer's first novel of the series, *Cinder*, based on the popular Cinderella fairy tale, highlighting the scenario of an orphaned girl being ridiculed by her step-family. However, Meyer complicates this scenario by expanding the issue of maltreating a family member due to jealously to maltreating another human being due to biological composition. The main protagonist of this series, Cinder, is a prime example of a hybrid human being because she is a cyborg—a combination of biology and technology—and is rejected as human by the majority of society within the novel's context. By rooting for Cinder's success, readers can contemplate the possibilities of accepting other types of beings in a technologically advanced world who are not considered traditionally "human". This novel serves as a metaphor for how humans are fusing with technology by utilizing it as a convenient tool in their everyday lives, showing how humans are not all that different from the cyborg "other".

Chapter two focuses on Meyer's second novel, *Scarlet,* which incorporates tropes from "Little Red-Cap" by Jacob and William Grimm. Whereas traditional narratives highlight the wolf's intentional maliciousness and reinforce the fatal outcomes of trusting strangers, Meyer's story encourages readers to be skeptical yet open-minded and sympathetic towards others who do not traditionally fit the expectations of being human. This chapter will critically analyze the character Wolf (a Lunar-wolf hybrid) to show how his hybridity complicates human nature due to the blending of human/animal. Additionally, the issues of agency and choice are discussed in regard to accepting a posthuman future.

While my previous chapters explore the maltreatment and cynicism towards cyborgs and genetically modified beings, chapter three will discuss the views that people have towards accepting machines as valued beings through analyzing the most complex character within Meyer's series, Iko. This character originates in Meyer's first novel, *Cinder*, as an android. Throughout the series Iko transitions into other states of being, embodying various forms of physicality: android, space ship, and escort droid. These transformations serve as a symbol of fluidity in states of being. By accepting herself and being mutually accepted by her built community of her equally nonconformist friends, Iko creates a scenario that exemplifies how humanity can become socially hybrid with technology by accepting a posthuman being.

Although some scholars argue that science-fiction genres are problematic due to their representations of posthuman scenarios, there are positive narratives that introduce and encourage audiences to consider a progressive technologically advanced world. *The Lunar Chronicles* is one such example that motivates readers to consider moving towards the posthuman future that has for so long been resisted but can hopefully in time become accepted. In becoming more open-minded for a future where "human" is not at the top of the hierarchy and can be redefined with more flexibility, generations to come can be more inclusive of others as well as embrace their technologically advanced future.

CHAPTER 1: ACCEPTING THE CYBORG OTHER IN MARIISA MEYER'S *CINDER*

Throughout time, the tale of Cinderella has been widely recognized as a story about a girl who rises above her familial torments in order to obtain a more positive life and domestic situation. The Cinderella narrative has continued to be adapted for the public within film and literature, for example Charles Perrault's folktale "The Little Glass Slipper" (1700s), Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's "Cinderella" (1857), Walt Disney's animated film *Cinderella* (1950), John Steptoe's *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale* (1987), Adeline Yen Mah's autobiography, *A Chinese Cinderella* (1999), and Sesame Street's *CinderElmo* (1999), to name a few. While Cinderella has been re-imagined in multiple genres for a wide range of audiences, few adaptations have fused Cinderella's tale with science fiction elements. Marissa Meyer's first novel, *Cinder* (2008), is about an orphaned cyborg who dreams of escaping the miserable life she has with her stepmother. In relation to previous Cinderella tales, Cinder's existence as a posthuman being transcends the issues of the domestic sphere, affecting her life as a cyborg on both a societal and communal scale. Many scholars have already explored some areas of Cinder's character regarding material embodiment (Angela Insenga) and adolescent development (Ferne Merrylees). Nevertheless, it remains important to begin the discussion of posthumanism within Meyer's series, *The Lunar Chronicles,* with her character Cinder to situate the cyborg as not only a science fiction trope but also a realistic and significant posthuman being. Cinder's narrative establishes some of the anxieties that humans have about living in a posthuman reality and contextualizes both positive and negative aspects of hybridizing with technology.

Cinder is a sixteen-year-old adopted orphan who works as a mechanic, living in a future reality of Earth after the fourth world war. After a life-altering trauma that destroyed part of Cinder's human body, she was surgically transformed into a cyborg. In her world, cyborgs are seen as monstrosities, slaves, or objects to use as lab rats. When Cinder is not avoiding her vicious step-mother, Adri, she is hoping to evade the cyborg draft for Letumosis testing. Letumosis is a plague that has been killing the human race for years, and cyborgs are being used to find a cure in order to save humanity. Besides Letumosis, the only other threat to humanity is Lunars, a race of evolved humans who once colonized the moon and can now manipulate a person's bioelectricity, giving them control over the minds of others. In this reality, being a cyborg means living as a slave to the government, while identifying as a Lunar categorizes people as evil and manipulative. Unfortunately for Cinder, she is both a cyborg and a Lunar, soon to be outcasted by everyone.

As a genre, the themes of science fiction, like *Cinder*, focus on changes that might become possible in the future. These works describe either "the dangerous results of tinkering with the natural world, or the wonderful solutions to global problems made possible by human—or superhuman—intervention through technology" (Reid, 2). Meyer uses common science fiction tropes such as humans using advanced technology to colonize the moon and biomedical engineering to create a cyborg protagonist. The exact definition of cyborg has been debated and updated throughout the years, but cyborgs are generally "hybrids of biology and technology. More specifically, a cyborg is a person whose interaction with or experience of the world is mediated by technology" (Ellis). Feminist scholar Donna Haraway defines a cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of

machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (Haraway, 149). Because cyborgs are not fully human, but not fully technological either, this prompts humanity to question and redefine what it means to be "human".

The first step to understanding this story as a posthuman Cinderella tale is to acknowledge that the protagonist is not fully "human" in a traditionally defined sense. Meyer's first book begins by introducing Cinder, who is struggling to unscrew her foot from her leg:

> The screw through Cinder's ankle had rusted…her knuckles ached from forcing the screwdriver into the joint…Cinder gripped her heel and yanked the foot from its socket…leaving the foot to dangle from a tangle of red and yellow wires…A sense of release hovered at the end of those wires—freedom. Having loathed the too-small foot for four years, she swore to never put the piece of junk back on again (Meyer, *Cinder*, 3).

This initial image immediately situates Cinder as a cyborg. The rusty screw that is physically attaching the foot to the rest of Cinder's body proves that a significant amount of time has passed without Cinder being able to change her current state, thus falling into disrepair. The rustiness of the nail within Cinder's cyborg body can be connected to the way a human's body slowly degenerates over time if not repaired, making Cinder's physical struggle relatable to humans. Further, there is a sense of struggle in Cinder's actions but also forceful determination to reject part of her own body that no longer functions properly as Cinder "yanks" the foot, disconnecting it from the rest of her body. The fact that Cinder feels a sense of freedom after removing the foot insinuates that the

appendage was forced to remain a part of her body against her authority, thus physically oppressing her as a cyborg.

The isolated foot dangling on its own calls forth the image of the iconic glass slipper which Cinderella wears and accidentally leaves behind at the ball. However, in this story Cinder is intentionally removing the foot that metaphorically connects to the glass slipper. As Victoria Flanagan analyzes, Cinder is removing "the very foot that was responsible for her marriage to the prince in conventional versions of the fairy tale" thus performing a "feminist act" (62). Cinder describes the foot as "too small" and "a piece of junk" which while obviously referring to literal size and quality, these descriptors can also be connected to the traditional Cinderella narrative. Cinder's stance is not only challenging conventions of femininity and gender roles, but also the conventional definition of "human". By removing the foot Cinder's identity as a cyborg no longer physically adheres to the conventions of previous Cinderella tales, ultimately creating a new scenario for readers to embark upon with a posthuman Cinderella figure.

Another quality that makes Cinder's hybridity evident is the presence of her biological female organs within her cyborg body. When Cinder is examined by Dr. Erland for Letumosis testing, he notes "your reproductive system is almost untouched. You know, lots of female cyborgs are left infertile because of invasive procedures…I don't suspect you will have any problems" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 116). The fact that Cinder still has the ability to reproduce like any other female human being is powerful because she represents a form of being that can fuse with technology but still be part human. This blending of human and technology to create a cyborg Cinderella initiates acceptance and empowerment for posthuman beings. Authors Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti describe

cyborgs as “grotesque post-industrial boundary figures, questioning the boundaries between human, organism and machine, celebrated cornerstones of the modern, scientific world-view” (5). While the word grotesque can often pose a negative connotation, it can also be used to define a form “characterized by distortion or unnatural combinations” (“grotesque”, OED Online). Lykke and Braidotti seem to depict the cyborg being as the latter definition of grotesque. This formidable description establishes a bold view of a cyborg, promoting a progressive image of being a hybrid. While the images of Cinder’s foot being divorced from the rest of her body, along with her female organs residing in a partially mechanized body may seem a bit grotesque in the negative sense, they continue to situate Cinder as a cyborg for readers, as well as emphasize the aforementioned positive image of the cyborg.

Moreover, Cinder’s hybridity allows her to become a high-tech example of what a twenty-first century Cinderella can be. Peter Mahon, author of *Posthumanism for the Perplexed*, argues that posthumanism “takes its basic unit of analysis as humans + tools, where ‘tools’ would obviously include all forms of technology” (25). Aside from having a steel foot, leg, and left hand, some of Cinder’s technological gadgets and privileges include: a storage compartment in her left calf, a built-in lie detector, and an internal net system that allows her to access any information from the World Wide Web within her brain. The computer in Cinder’s brain can identify people quickly, like when she first encounters Prince Kai, “it took only 2.6 seconds for Cinder’s scanner to measure the points of his face and link his image to the net database” (Meyer, *Cinder,* 7). This technology puts Cinder at an advantage compared to humans because she can access information that others cannot at a faster rate. While possessing this type of ability could

be seen as dangerous because it is an invasion of privacy, Meyer does not depict Cinder's character as a threat. Cinder's upgrades function as a compensation for her biological physiology that was lost. What is important here is the relationship between Cinder and her hybrid body. Cinder is physically fused with mechanical and digital technologies that influence her functionality and interaction with her surroundings, making her a posthuman being.

Although being cyborg has its benefits, there are also physiological disadvantages that Cinder must accept and cope with. For example, if Cinder gets angry, excited, or overly stimulated in any way that would cause her body to rise in temperature or adrenaline, her body threatens to shut itself down. When Cinder's stepmother forces her to volunteer for plague testing, her system shuts down in the middle of her physical struggle with the med-droids, "red warnings flashed across her vision until, in an act of cyborg self-perseveration, her brain forced her to shut down" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 68). These obstacles that Cinder faces illustrate the point that although being a cyborg has its perks, her hybridity can also be debilitating. Because Cinder's body is so heavily dependent on her technological advancements, she inadvertently must relinquish her physical agency in order to continue functioning as a posthuman being. This provides a relatable commentary as to how humanity heavily relies on technology.

We see this dependence through Cinder's family. For example, when Cinder's stepsister, Pearl, suggests that they volunteer Cinder for cyborg plague testing to receive monetary compensation, Peony rebuttals "we can't volunteer Cinder…I need her to fix my portscreen" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 29). Peony uses her portscreen for school, entertainment, and keeping up with celebrity news on Prince Kai. Although Peony's complaint towards

Pearl's suggestion is mainly to advocate for Cinder's life, her excuse reinforces the essential connection people have to technology. Cinder also believes that her stepmother, Adri, would never volunteer her for testing because "that would be the end of her [Adri's] only income" certain that Adri had "never worked a day in her life" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 29). Adri is dependent on technology in the sense that she depends on Cinder, whom she views as a technological monstrosity and servant. Without Cinder, Adri would be forced to find a job for income and fix all of the mechanical equipment around the house, which Cinder is currently responsible for maintaining. Cinder's physical disconnect from the world due to her dependence on technology is equivalent to how her family would feel should they lose access to technology. The connection that humanity has to technology is a depiction of how humans function similar to cyborgs—without technology, they would be disconnected from their way of life.

One reason Meyer's adaptation of Cinderella is more relatable to twenty-first century readers is because of the connection to technology. In select earlier versions of Cinderella narratives, specifically Walt Disney's 1950 animation and Charles Perrault's tale, "The Little Glass Slipper" (1700), Cinderella was able to use magic to achieve her goals. However, similar to humanity, Cinder does not have the luxury of using magic to make her wishes come true—but she does have the convenience of technology. Instead of turning a pumpkin into a carriage, Cinder finds an old car in the junk yard and fixes it into working condition to attend the ball. Meyer even alludes to the iconic pumpkin carriage image in her narrative. Iko, claims that the car "looks more like a rotting pumpkin," and Cinder replies, "What was that about having a fantastic imagination? With some attention and a good cleaning, it could be restored to its former glory" (Meyer,

Cinder, 47). Cinder's cyborg gadgets, mechanical knowledge, and imagination become the magic to make her wishes come true, which positively reinforces the idea that technological advancement is not a threat to humanity's lifestyle, but a useful tool to help people achieve their goals.

Additionally, Perrault and Disney's depictions of Cinderella focus on the use of materialism for hiding appearance. In these narratives Cinderella uses a fancy dress to hide her poor status to attend the ball. Similarly, Meyer's Cinder uses a black work glove to conceal her identity as a cyborg, "her right palm began to sweat immediately inside the thick material, she felt more comfortable with the gloves on, hiding the plating of her left hand" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 5). Despite the uncomfortable heat from the glove, the security that comes from hiding her cyborg identity from the world is worth the sweat for Cinder. When Cinder is forced to wear Peony's dress to attend the royal ball, Cinder feels uncomfortable because it does not match her personality, "the silk dress felt like poison ivy…the silver bodice with its trim of delicate lace, the full skirt, the tiny seed pearls," made Cinder want to "shrivel inside the gown and disappear…she was a fake in it, an imposter" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 324). Not only does Cinder feel awkward wearing her deceased stepsister's dress, but she also would rather represent herself through her own image. In an ideal scenario, Cinder could attend the ball in a dress without having to hide her "eccentricities" as Adri tells her (Meyer, *Cinder*, 25). Regardless, in order for Cinder to survive safely in her environment, she must camouflage her physical appearance and hybridity, similar to how Cinderella must wear a dress to the ball to be accepted by those around her.

Although materialism continues to play a vital role for identity and social acceptance, in contrast to Disney and Perrault's Cinderella, Cinder is focused on practicality when prioritizing her goals. Cinder even comments on the typical Cinderella character who wants a dress for the ball, saying "I just spent my life savings on a new foot…if I did have money, why would I spend it on a dress…what a waste" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 31). As much as Cinder would like to attend the ball like the other citizens of New Beijing, she is realistic and puts practicality before frivolity. Cinder tells Iko that she would buy "a complete set of wrenches" or "a toolbox with drawers that don't stick" or "a down payment on my own apartment where I won't have to be Adri's servant anymore" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 31). These are all items that would practically ensure Cinder more income and an opportunity to escape her toxic domestic situation. The reality of Meyer's retelling is that Cinder does not have a fairy godmother or birds to bring her what she wants or needs. Instead of acquiring a new dress to dance with the prince, Cinder uses technology to enhance her style of living, as well as obtain freedom from her stepfamily.

While becoming a cyborg was a medical ultimatum to keep Cinder alive, there are people who refuse to accept Cinder's existence, such as her stepmother Adri, because she is a hybrid with technology. This relational conflict preserves the iconic tension between Cinderella and her evil stepmother in many traditional Cinderella narratives, such as Grimm, Perrault, and Disney. One of the main reasons the stepmother is so vile to Cinderella is to assert her dominion over Cinderella. Likewise, Adri exercises her power over Cinder treating her like property to be controlled rather than a person to be negotiated with, thus ultimately objectifying Cinder. For example, when Adri finds out

that Cinder purchased a new foot without her permission, Adri asserts her control over Cinder by taking the foot away, "you will leave your foot with me…I think it a fair solution. After all, you bought it with my money, therefore it is mine to do with as I please…You are *not* human, Cinder. It's about time you realized that" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 280). Adri forces Cinder to either use the undersized foot which she removed at the beginning of the novel, or hobble about with no limb at all, just because Cinder is a cyborg whom she blames for the death of her daughter and husband. Much like Sacha, Adri despises cyborgs because they are different from traditional human beings. Because Adri refuses to accept posthuman beings as her equal, she oppresses them as objects to control so that humans can remain at the top of their perceived hierarchy of power.

In addition to the domestic conflicts Cinder faces from her stepmother, she is at constant war with her community for existing as a posthuman being within her workplace in New Beijing's market. For example, another character within Meyer's narrative who rejects and maltreats Cinder for her hybridity is the market's baker Chang Sacha. When Sacha's son, Sunto, is playing too close to Cinder's booth at the market, "Sacha met Cinder's gaze, knotted her lips, then grabbed her son by the arm and spun away" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 5). Sacha's behavior publicly denounces Cinder as an equally welcomed citizen by reacting to her presence as grotesque to be around, in the negative sense. To this treatment, Cinder mutters to herself "It's not like wires are contagious" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 5). Cinder makes a valid point that her "condition" is not contagious, signifying that posthumanism is not a circumstance to simply be "caught." Citizens like Sacha fear cyborgs because they are not considered traditionally human, therefore other cyborgs for

being hybrids. This fear of the Other causes Sacha to lash out in an oppressive manner, rather than attempt to understand and accept Cinder as an equal being.

Moreover, Cinder's booth at the market is "squeezed into a shady cove between a used netscreen dealer and a silk merchant" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 4). The imagery here reflects how humans interact with Cinder as a posthuman being. The close proximity Cinder experiences with the two dealers highlights that she is uncomfortable and that there is no room for Cinder to fit in with her surroundings. Further, having the netscreen dealer on one side represents the technology that humans have already accepted. On the other end of the spectrum lies a silk merchant, representing naturally made material or in other words beings that biologically come into existence. Cinder is a hybrid of technology and natural composition, tightly compacted in the middle where very few citizens accept her. This scene serves as a visual representation of where Cinder is placed in her society, considering that she did not choose which booth to have or whether to be a posthuman being. Her position was decided for her, thus making her physically present but unacknowledged by others around her, tucked away in the darkness as society hopes that she will remain unseen.

Another image readers get from the marketplace is the people bargaining with "robotic shopkeepers, trying to talk the computers down from their desired profit margins," followed by "the hum of ID scanners and monotone receipts," as well as netscreens covering "every building and filled the air with the chatter of advertisements, news reports, gossip…" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 4). Citizens are surrounded and constantly interacting with technology that has come to be accepted among human lifestyle. The robotic shopkeeper is accepted because it is farther on the mechanical side of the

spectrum. The robot is controlled and managed by humans, therefore it is not seen as a threat, unlike Cinder who is a technology and human hybrid not easily controlled like other machines. ID scanners and netscreens are accepted because they are considered as tools that humans can utilize and manage to make their lives entertaining and convenient. Citizens can shop with their ID chips at the swipe of their wrists. Although these chips are embedded within each human, they do not consider themselves to be cyborgs, like Cinder.

Not only do Adri and Sacha view cyborgs as a monstrosity among humanity, but the government does not implement the same human rights for cyborgs. The main example of this within the novel is the cyborg draft. The cyborg draft was started by a royal research team to find a cure for the ongoing pandemic, Letumosis:

> Every morning a new ID number was drawn from a pool of so many cyborgs who resided in the Eastern Commonwealth…it was made out to be some sort of honor, giving our life for the good of humanity, but it was really just a reminder that cyborgs were not like everyone else. Many of them had been given a second chance at life by the generous hand of scientists and therefore owed their very existence to those who had created them. They were lucky to have lived this long, many thought. It's only right that they should…give up their lives in search for a cure (Meyer, *Cinder*, 28-29).

Cyborgs are literally picked randomly like objects with numbers on them, disassociating them from their humanity. As scholar Angela Insenga points out, this societal practice highlights "philosophical and ethical concerns about transhumanist exploration and eventual implementation" (59). Transhumanists advocate for the transformation of the

human condition by developing technologies that are available for all of humanity and enhance human intellect and physiology. Cyborgs are not given the same respect or status as humans because they do not have 100% biological make-up and, similar to Cinder, are treated as property rather than individuals. Because the government portrays the cyborg draft as an act of nobility, citizens believe that there is nothing wrong with treating cyborgs as disposable. We see this paradox illustrated between Adri and Cinder. After Peony is infected with the Letumosis plague, Adri volunteers Cinder for the cyborg draft without her permission, "we all have a duty to do what we can, and you know what a high demand there is for…your type…we can still help Peony. They just need cyborgs to find a cure" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 66). Adri's usage of "we" throughout this statement denotes a sense of unity and collaboration in working "with" cyborgs toward saving humanity. However, Adri's idea of "we" is undercut by her personal separation from Cinder by saying "your type," consequently othering cyborgs as a group. In the end, the government's support of the cyborg draft encourages human citizens to believe that by sacrificing cyborgs, they too share in the righteous honor of helping to save humanity, rather than find an alternative to curing the plague. As a result, the draft also reinforces mankind's power over posthuman beings. Therefore, Cinder must not only overcome the stigmas toward cyborgs within her domestic environment, but within her communal and societal settings as well.

Moreover, viewing technology as a threat in Meyer's narrative can be seen as hypocritical. Cinder is marginalized and maltreated because she is a cyborg, but the rest of humanity has technology physically imbedded within them as well. Cyborg anthropologist Amber Case argues that human beings are all cyborgs now; she states,

"you're cyborgs every time you look at a computer screen or use one of your cell phone devices" ("We are all cyborg now"). Even if humans do not resemble the iconic cyborg—both man and machine physically fused together—humans utilize technology to interact more efficiently with their world, which is one definition of being a cyborg. In *Cinder*, for example, all civilians on Earth contain ID chips in their wrists to function as birth certificates, grant access to buildings, manage bank accounts, and administer payment transactions. Regardless of the fact that humans have technology in them, they do not consider themselves to be cyborg, for that would be categorizing themselves as "inhuman". Clearly in Cinder's world there is a gauge for humanness that humanity dictates, labeling Cinder and other posthuman beings as simply not human enough to be treated equally or acknowledged as valuable. This gauge is partially physical, for example, when Cinder's body is scanned during plague testing the results indicated that her inhuman/human ration is 36.28%, "she was 36.28 percent not human" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 82). Another aspect of defining humanness is emotional capacity, such as feeling love or sadness. For example, when Cinder says that she loves Peony too, Adri is angered by the thought of a cyborg feeling the same emotions that a human being can feel, "Don't insult me…do your kind even know what love is? Can you feel anything at all, or is it just…programmed?" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 63). In Cinder's society, posthumans are seen as objects to be used and thrown away as humans see fit because their human qualities are not viewed equal to that of traditional humanity, reinforcing an anthropocentric among the world.

While some scholars believe that technological hybridity, such as being a cyborg, will lead to an apocalyptic takeover of humanity as humans currently know it, others

consider that "…a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (Haraway, 154). The political and individual struggle is in acknowledging both the detrimental and the optimistic perspectives. *Cinder* is a prime example of a narrative that pushes readers to consider both sides of the same coin. With progression there are always dangerous consequences to consider, however, there can be a beneficial outcome if humanity is willing to enter a future that transcends its current status. The issue with many science fiction narratives is that they often highlight the most extreme political dangers that come with scientific advancement, permeating the public with not an impossible outcome, but usually an irrational fear of progression. *The Lunar Chronicles* balances the science fiction scenario with a tinge of fantasy from tales that empower readers to be cautious while also encouraging readers to confront their seemingly treacherous journeys. Although not all fairy tales conclude with a positive ending, the themes that Meyer chooses to highlight incorporate scenarios of humans learning to create their own positive realities in situations that seem impossible. The blending of both science fiction and fantasy creates a sense of seriousness but also hope, depicting a positive scenario of a posthuman future.

Scholar Ferne Merrylees argues that "posthumanism is a mode of thought which, when applied to themes of identity creation in young adult dystopian literature, suggests that adolescents need to cultivate a form of hybridity to negotiate our increasingly technological world" (76). While I agree with Merrylees' analysis, I would argue that Cinder's narrative is an opportunity for all audiences because fairy tales have become stories for everyone. Meyer's Cinderella story is a posthuman fairy tale that will

hopefully inspire any reader to consider progressive forms of technological hybridity, starting with the cyborg. Cinder's sci-fi narrative is a captivating and more realistic depiction of a modern-day Cinderella tale. By creating a character who embraces and has become hybrid with technology, Meyer creates a narrative that comments on both positive and negative views of technological advancement in the twenty-first century. As Lykke and Braidotti note, "A conspicuous characteristic of the great modern divide between human and non-human is that its construction is accompanied by strong hostility to monsters and hybrids in their capacity as boundary figures which adhere to neither the human nor the non-human sphere" (Lykke & Braidotti, 15). This narrative allows readers to see the divide between what is considered human, non-human, and monstrous and demystifies the fear of becoming a posthuman being.

CHAPTER 2: HUMAN-ANIMAL HYBRIDITY: THE HUMAN NATURE WITHIN POSTHUMAN BEINGS

Chapter one focused on Cinder's narrative discussing societal perspectives on the fusion of human and technology, providing a metaphor that represents humanity's skepticism toward the human composition being altered by biotechnology. This chapter will build on those posthuman concepts by focusing on Meyer's second novel within the series, *Scarlet*, interrogating the compatibility of human and animal, thus considering the position that human nature has within the posthuman character. As defined by scholar Francis Fukuyama, human nature is "the sum of the behavior and characteristics that are typical of the human species, arising from genetic rather than environmental factors" (*Our Posthuman Future*, 130). By critically analyzing the character named Wolf (a Lunar-wolf hybrid), this chapter will discuss how the blending of human, Lunar, and animal creates a hybrid being and interrogates the constraints of human nature. This chapter also considers the importance of choice and agency when it comes to accepting and becoming hybrid with technology in order to form a functional posthuman body and society. By blending popular tropes from the Grimm tale of "Little Red-Cap" with posthuman elements, *Scarlet* becomes a recognizable and entertaining narrative to represent hybridity and discuss the realms of posthumanism.

The tale of "Little Red-Cap" by the Brothers Grimm warns readers against trusting strangers. In the story, a little girl named Little Red-Cap travels through the woods to deliver "a piece of cake and a bottle of wine" (Grimm, 139) to her sick grandmother. Little Red-Cap's mother advises her to stay on the clear path to avoid getting hurt or breaking the bottle of wine. However, Little Red-Cap is tempted by a wolf

who convinces her to wander off into the woods and view the pretty flowers, while he runs ahead to devour Little Red-Cap's grandmother and waits to do the same to Little Red-Cap. The character of the wolf in this tale is seen as an untrustworthy, manipulative, and overall "wicked creature" (Grimm, 140). In comparison, *Scarlet* incorporates tropes of the Grimm tale "Little Red-Cap," specifically the danger and fear associated with trusting the ominous wolf character. In this adaptation, a teenage girl named Scarlet lives on a farm with her grandmother. When her grandmother goes missing, Scarlet must learn to trust and collaborate with a supposed gang member who goes by the name Wolf. Wolf is actually a genetically engineered Lunar-wolf soldier who is a hybrid of three separate identities: human, Lunar, and wolf.

In regard to the symbolism of a wolf, scholar Debra Mitts-Smith has researched and analyzed the representation of the wolf based on how it is depicted by nature, society, and within children's literature. She believes that no matter how many times "Little Red Riding Hood" is adapted, "the wolf, as the villain, remains the same: dangerous. What changes is the type of danger he represents" (15). The Grimm wolf represents the danger of trusting strangers. In relation to hybridity, Meyer blends stranger danger, depicted in the Grimm tale, with the danger that comes from simply rejecting "othered" or misunderstood characters to create a commentary that correlates to posthumanism. Wolf's physiological and behavioral hybridity creates a complex example of a posthuman character that challenges the parameters of humanity and inspires readers to accept other forms of beings. As readers learn to sympathize with Meyer's Wolf, they begin to move past the basic portrayal of the untrustworthy wolf character and accept Wolf as an equal posthuman being.

One reason the Grimm wolf is so feared and othered is because he takes the form of an anthropomorphized animal who can speak and dress like a human. For example, in Grimm's tale of "Little Red-Cap", after the wolf eats the grandmother, "he put on her clothes, dressed himself in her cap, laid himself in bed and drew the curtains" (Grimm, 141). By looking like the grandmother, the wolf is able to visually manipulate Little Red-Cap. When Little Red-Cap arrives and critiques her fake grandmother's ears, hands, and teeth, the wolf speaks like a human, responding "the better to hear you…hug you…eat you" (Grimm, 142), aurally deceiving Little Red-Cap. Ultimately, the wolf's ability to impersonate a human being while being biologically unassociated with the species is frightening. To assuage this fear for readers, Meyer makes her wolf character more relatable by making him biologically part human. As previously mentioned, Wolf is a Lunar Soldier Operative. Within the story's context, Lunars are an outcasted race of beings that evolved from humans who once colonized the moon. Lunars, as explained in the first novel of this series are:

> a society that had evolved from an Earthen moon colony centuries ago, but they weren't human anymore. People said Lunars could alter a person's brain—make you see things you shouldn't see, feel things you shouldn't feel, do things you didn't want to do. Their unnatural power had made them a greedy and violent race, and Queen Levana was the worst of all of them (Meyer, *Cinder*, 43).

From this description, one can assume that humans view Lunars as a dangerous species because of their greed, violence, and ability to manipulate other beings, similar to the Grimm representation of the manipulative and predatorial wolf. This portrayal of Lunars

causes readers to automatically assume that Meyer's Wolf will naturally be a villain. By villainizing Lunars, humanity is othering a race that has evolved from themselves. Although there is a stigma toward Lunars in this narrative, the fact that this species is an evolved form of humans makes it impossible to separate the association between humans and Lunars. This forces readers to connect with the Lunar counterpart because of the biological origins that humans and Lunars share. The fear that humans have developed toward Lunars symbolizes real world fears of technological progression that could alter humanity's original nature.

In addition to blending Meyer's Wolf's identity to form a human/Lunar hybrid, the appearance of this character blends with that of Lunar and animal. Unlike the wolf in the Grimm version of Little Red Riding Hood, or other visual depictions throughout literature, Meyer's narrative does not obviously portray the wolf as an animal physically. Instead, Meyer's Wolf's appearance is a blending of human/animal. In the beginning of the story, Scarlet's friend tells her about a mysterious street fighter new to town. Scarlet recognizes Wolf immediately, "partly due to an array of scars and bruises on his olive skin…with hair that struck out every direction in messy clumps and a fresh bruise swelling around one eye" (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 13). Wolf's wounds coincide with his chosen profession, reinforcing a normal human appearance. In contrast, the image of his hair sticking out in messy clumps plays into the representation of an actual wolf's appearance, thus blending the human with the animal in appearance.

Another physical trait that specifically exemplifies the animal nature of a wolf is the character's eyes and teeth. Scarlet describes Wolf's eyes as "unnaturally green, like sour grapes still on the vine" (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 13) and his teeth as "almost fang-like, with

sharp, elongated canines" (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 203). This is not to say that a wolf's eyes are typically green, however, the unnatural brightness of wolf's eyes suggest a type of glow, like an animal's eyes in the dark. Wolf's eyes and teeth were made to reinforce appearing as an animal. More importantly, Meyer could have chosen to have a character that morphs into a wolf and then shifts back into a Lunar, however, by Wolf physically embodying a hybrid Lunar-wolf he is constantly a representation of both identities. By genetically representing physical attributes that are both human and animal, readers are forced to question whether Wolf is a human or an animal, when in reality he is neither one or the other, but a hybrid of both.

Aside from physical characteristics, there is constant blending of Wolf's behavior portraying him as both human and animal through his interactions with Scarlet, making it difficult for readers to separate the humanlike qualities from the animal image. Scarlet's perspective thus functions as a vessel for readers to understand and question who or what Wolf is. Mitts-Smith notes that in depictions of wolves in literature, like the Grimm tale of "Little Red-Cap," the wolf is "…always the same: he is hungry" (30). For example, Scarlet notices that there are three empty plates at Wolf's table. Astounded by Wolf's appetite, Scarlet asks "Are you sure you don't want us to just bring you the whole pig?" (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 13-14). Here, Scarlet is noting Wolf's voracious appetite, similar to the Grimm wolf when he eats both Little Red-Cap and the grandmother. However, just as the Wolf's ravenous animal nature is starting to emerge for the audience, it is undercut by a timid personality uncharacteristic of the traditional Grimm antagonist. When Scarlet delivers a plate of food to Wolf's table, he thanks her, but his voice startles her, "not by being loud or gruff as she'd expected, but rather low and hesitant…maybe he really was

shy" (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 13). Wolf's behavior challenges the expectations of being loud, manipulative, or confident like readers might assume the supposed villain of the story should be by being demure and humble. The blending of behavioral characteristics makes it difficult for readers to categorize Wolf's as animal or human, instead making him a hybrid of both.

The narrative continuously jumps back and forth between depicting Wolf as human and animal, purposely complicating the human/animal binary for readers to form a hybrid character. In regard to behavior, Mitts-Smith claims that in literary narratives, "the wolf's predatory nature defines not only the wolf's behavior but also his character. The wolf's tactics and choice of victims render him a dangerous and immoral predator…Using lies, threats, and the power of his size, he preys on humans and livestock" (29-30). We see this tension of human/animal behavior when Scarlet visits Wolf at the morels and witnesses him fighting against a human being. Both Wolf and his opponent are undefeated among the fighters, showing the equality in status between the two characters, but Wolf's predatorial instincts give him the advantage to overpower his opponent. The more Wolf engages with his animal side, the easier it is to subdue his moral compass. The narrative describes Wolf indulging in his animal instincts when fighting against Hunter, noting that "There was a new glint in Wolf's eye, like he was enjoying this, and when his tongue darted out to lick the blood from his mouth, Scarlet grimaced" (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 81). The connotation of "dart" here suggests that Wolf suddenly and sharply directed his tongue to the blood, enjoying the taste much like an animal. Scarlet is repulsed at seeing what appears to be a human act in such an

uncontrollable animalistic manner, depicting Meyer's wolf as a wild predatorial beast, similar to stereotypical representation that Mitts-Smith highlights.

Just as Meyer's Wolf is about to fully convert over to his animal nature and become monstrous by snapping his opponent's neck, he regains control of his moral senses and flees, "Wolf froze and blinked at [Scarlet]. His eyes flickered, empty and mad one moment, then almost dazed. His pupils widened...Then Wolf leaped back, letting Hunter slump to the stage…sprang up, using his hands and feet to propel him forward" (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 81-2). In this scene, Wolf appears human but is behaving like an animal, thus reinforcing his Lunar-wolf hybridity. His actions are described as leaping, springing, and propelling which are all normally descriptors of speed and measure of length in animalistic actions. Furthermore, he uses his hands and feet to flee and leave the scene, creating an image of Wolf having four paws which also reinforces an animal image. Wolf utilizes his animal instincts to win the fighting match, but also manages to control the animal in him. By not killing his opponent, Meyer's Wolf goes against the stereotypical representation of the immoral wolf, like the Grimm wolf. By embodying both the human and animal in this binary, the narrative creates a hybrid character, asking readers to question the conventions of wolves depicted in literature, as well as Meyer's Wolf's character. If he is not human and he is not fully animal in appearance and behavior, then what is he? How do we define Wolf? It is asking this question that introduces the idea of posthumanism to readers.

We see this inquiry commence through Scarlet when she is trying to decipher who or what Wolf is. After witnessing his fight at the morels, Scarlet begins researching wolves and their behavior to try and make a connection between Wolf's name and his

nature. As Scarlet notes during her online research, wolves are a complex symbol, "To some, a wild beast, a predator, a nuisance. To others, a shy animal who was too often misunderstood by humanity" (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 113). Research also shows that "Wolfish behavior is typically perceived as cruel and untrustworthy" (Mitts-Smith, 3), which continues to reinforce the Grimm wolf character. Similar to the posthuman body, Wolf is misunderstood by humanity due to stereotypes and fear of the other. Throughout their journey, Scarlet slowly starts to trust and understand Wolf's character the more that they get to know each other. Scarlet, functioning as the voice of reason between the readers and Wolf, says "I try to think for myself once in a while, rather than buy in to the ridiculous propaganda the media would have us believe…People are just so quick to accuse and criticize…" (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 164), encouraging readers to not submit to societal or the media's presentation of what is "othered" in the world, such as cyborgs and Lunars. Scarlet consistently defends Cinder, the Lunar-cyborg fugitive who is the main protagonist of the series, challenging society's views about the posthuman and further argues that "we shouldn't judge her, or anyone, without trying to understand them first. That maybe we should get the full story before jumping to conclusions" (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 164). By Scarlet advocating for understanding and acceptance of other beings, she challenges readers to think for themselves and have an open mind towards Wolf's character. Scarlet's form of thinking metaphorically parallels with the need to logically consider technological advancement and posthumanism without stereotypes creating misguided fear.

To build a bridge of sympathy and understanding between readers and Wolf, Scarlet aligns herself on the same level as Wolf regardless of his posthuman being noting

that they are both viewed by society as "outcasts. Unwanted. Crazy" (Meyer, *Scarlet,* 21). Scarlet and her grandmother are recognized as outcasts among the small town of Rieux because they support a posthuman society. Scarlet's grandmother is othered by the town because, as one of the townspeople claims, "…she keeps herself holed up in that old house" and "talks to animals and androids like they're people…" (Meyer, *Scarlet,* 18). Scarlet's grandmother would rather interact with beings viewed as "nonhuman" than socialize with humans. Similarly, Scarlet is deemed crazy by the town because she defends Lunar rights. For example, when the townspeople at the bar are ridiculing Cinder, the Lunar fugitive under government custody, Scarlet says "You should all have some respect! That girl's going to be executed!" (Meyer, *Scarlet,* 17). Scarlet and her grandmother acknowledge and sympathize with beings that are not necessarily defined as "human" because they themselves are othered by their own kind. By comparing herself to Wolf as an outcast, Scarlet normalizes the "other" and accepts the outlier among society, normalizing the idea of posthuman beings.

Scarlet also accepts the future of her farm fusing with technological advancement. She explains that "Soon the farm would be filled with life—androids and workers and genetically enhanced honeybees" (Meyer, *Scarlet,* 113). This shows that Scarlet is not afraid of a posthuman future, but embraces the possibilities of biological and technological hybridity, not only among beings but also within the environment. Ostry explains that "Posthumanism poses a challenge to the human body, and humanity, as we know it" (224). What is essential to take away from this statement is that posthumanism poses a challenge, not a threat. By Scarlet welcoming the prospect of technological advancement, she assuages the apprehension that readers might have towards a future of

technical and biological progression. Whereas the Grimm narrative highlights the wolf's intentional maliciousness and reinforces the fatal outcomes of trusting strangers, Meyer's story encourages readers to be skeptical but open-minded and sympathetic towards others who do not traditionally fit the expectations of being human.

Although throughout most of the series Wolf's physical hybridity is concealed to humans, in Meyer's fourth novel, *Winter*, Wolf is captured once again by the queen's guards and genetically manipulated to further appear identical to a wolf. Wolf describes his appearance after the procedure:

> He could feel the difference in his protruding mouth, his enlarged teeth, his malformed jaw. They'd altered his facial bone structure, making way for the row of implanted canine teeth. There was a new curvature to his shoulders and an awkward flex of his feet, which looked more like paws now, made for running and bounding at great speeds. His hands were enormous, now fixed with reinforced, claw-shaped fingernails…he wondered when the new fur would start sprouting over his skin, completing the transformation. He was miserable. He was everything he had never wanted to be (Meyer, *Winter*, 561).

Even though wolf is still a hybrid, the scales of Lunar-animal hybridity at this point of his character development have tipped more toward the animal binary, causing him to become imbalanced as a hybrid. At first, Wolf was considered an Alpha officer among the pack, but now his status has been reduced to not only a slave of Levana's army but also being revered as nothing more than a dog; as one of the thaumaturges in charge of controlling him says "you're nothing but an animal now" (Meyer, *Winter*, 563). Whereas

before Wolf was regarded as partially human/Lunar with wolf genetic enhancements, he is now viewed as simply an animal since his wolf genetics were increased within his composition. It is important to note that Wolf was never given a choice to become a Lunar-wolf hybrid. This issue of choice addresses the fear that some individuals experience at the thought of posthumanism. As Fukuyama argues, "the most significant threat posed by contemporary biotechnology is the possibility that it will alter human nature and thereby move us into a "posthuman" stage of history" (*Our Posthuman Future*, 7). However, it is not the alteration of the human composition that should worry humanity. The removal of an individual's choice to become posthuman is the real issue when moving toward a posthuman society.

Wolf's narrative depicts the bioconservative point of view reflecting the anxiety of the upper-class having power over the distribution and manipulation of biotechnological advancements. Here, the upper-class would be Queen Levana who controls almost everyone on Luna and has ordered the creation and enslavement of the Lunar-wolf soldiers. Because of Levana's tyranny, the citizens cannot control what becomes of their inherent biological natures, thus creating a fear toward biotechnology. In order for people to learn to accept the advancements that posthumanism has to offer and not fear their enslavement or demise from biotechnology, individuals must be able to choose whether or not to become hybrid or even simply utilize the tools that come with posthumanism. Without individual agency, posthumanism will continue to be feared rather than accepted, much like how people fear Wolf. By appearing more animal than hybrid Lunar-wolf, Wolf represents the fear of biotechnology taking control over one's original state of being, one's nature, forever.

While the lack of agency is one factor in fearing biotechnology, fear of losing control of the products created from biotechnology or the control of oneself is also why individuals are skeptical in accepting posthumanist progression. We see this loss of control reflected through Wolf when he confronts Scarlet the morning after his victorious fight at the morels. After giving into his engineered animal instincts he explains to Scarlet that "It's been a long time since I lost control like that" (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 121). Although his animal instincts can be beneficial for overpowering opponents and survival, Wolf is ashamed of his loss of control over his genetically modified enhancements. As Wolf is trying to figure out why he lost control over his behavior, Scarlet suggests, "Perhaps you should go back to the moment you decided that street fighting was a valid career choice" (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 122). Wolf agrees with Scarlet but hides his identity of being a Lunar-wolf soldier, instead telling Scarlet that he is a part of a gang, noting his membership as "the biggest mistake I have ever made" (Meyer, *Scarlet,* 123). Here Wolf makes it seem like becoming part animal was his own choice, when in reality he had no control over becoming genetically engineered. What is important here is that Wolf is constantly trying to hide his true identity from Scarlet and personally represses his animal instincts. Perhaps his loss of control is rooted in his need to constantly separate the animal form of himself from the human part of his identity. Instead of suppressing and fearing his animal side, Wolf must learn to accept both parts of his identity and find a balance in order to develop as a posthuman being. Wolf is afraid that by accepting his animal nature, he will lose the connection to his human self. Similar to the fear of posthumanism, the fear of automation is the fear of progress and, like most fear, is rooted in something real that has expanded to be unrealistic. It is normal to be skeptical of change, but to outright reject

such a future out of fear would be refusing humanity's progression. Scarlet's character throughout the series continues to be a prime example of a person who both questions and gradually accepts a posthuman reality.

Although Wolf has a difficult time accepting his genetically manipulated enhancements, Scarlet's acceptance and acknowledgement of Wolf as his own hybrid person encourages Wolf and readers to logically come to terms with hybridity. For example, in the end of the second novel, Scarlet tells wolf, "no matter how much control that thaumaturge had over you, it was still you in there" (Meyer, *Scarlet,* 444). Even though Wolf feels he lacks control at times, Scarlet's faith in his individuality encourages him to keep moving forward with who he is. In *Winter,* when Scarlet first encounters Wolf after he is further modified to look more animalistic, instead of being afraid or disgusted, Scarlet just asks "It is still you, isn't it? They haven't…changed you?" (Meyer, *Winter*, 712). Scarlet moves past appearance and fear of the other and logically accepts Wolf for who she knows he really is. Scarlet thinks about their future interaction in a positive way instead of creating anxiety, noting "she wasn't quite sure what a kiss would be like…but she was confident they could perfect it later" (Meyer, *Winter*, 713). Even when Wolf is afraid of himself and warns Scarlet that he is "dangerous," she responds, "You have always been dangerous. But you're my alpha and I'm yours and that's not going to change because they gave you a new jawline" (Meyer, *Winter*, 713). Scarlet does not fear Wolf's physical or behavioral modifications because it does not change who they are together. Regardless of his animal hybridity, Scarlet accepts Wolf for his personal individualism. Society is often so worried that humanity will cease to exist,

when really humanity is simply progressing their way of life by becoming hybrid with technology, not replacing their existence.

Even though the genetic mutations never stripped Wolf of his humanity, he continues to believe that his hybridity is monstrous rather than simply another way of life or being. In Meyer's graphic novel additions to this series titled *Wires and Nerve,* readers get more of Wolf's perspective and can witness his journey to self-acceptance. In the beginning of volume two, Wolf cannot find the courage to ask Scarlet to marry him because he "can't ask her to spend her life tied to a monster" (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 2,* 9). Shortly after, Wolf joins a rebellious group of former Lunar-wolf operatives who want revenge on the Lunar queen if their humanity is not returned. In their perspective, science made them "monsters," so science should be able to make them "human" again. Although Scarlet accepts Wolf as a hybrid, "I love Wolf no matter what body he's in" (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 2,* 26) Wolf believes he is being given the chance to become human once more. Appearing and behaving human is a preferred state of being simply because any other state of being is rejected by society.

In reality, the only reason the outcast wolf soldiers want to become human again is because they are seen as monsters and are not accepted within society. In other words, posthuman beings, such as Cinder, Wolf, and Iko would be able to live harmoniously with humanity if they were accepted as equals just the way they are. For example, when the antagonist Alpha Lysander Steele claims that Luna's government can make them "human again, 'normal' again" Winter says "we would gladly return your humanity if we could, but it cannot be done" instead she offers the Lunar-wolves rehabilitation, "we can help you become part of our society once more. After all, we are all learning our place in

this new world" (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 2*, 157). Winter, as the ambassador between Lunar and Earthen affairs, acknowledges the frustration that the wolf soldiers feel toward their genetic mutations. Instead of shunning them for being a different type of being or viewing them as monsters, Winter wants Earthens, Lunars, and the wolf soldiers to learn to live together as one society. In other words, instead of fearing the change of human nature, humans can learn to accept all forms of beings, in this case posthuman beings, and live together in peace instead of in fear or discrimination. Although Scarlet's acceptance encourages Wolf to obtain a higher level of self-worth, it is by accepting his identity as a human-Lunar-wolf hybrid, regardless of how he came to fruition, that Wolf can truly live as an equally valued posthuman being.

Whereas Lysander Steele believes that they are monsters because they were made into monsters, Iko, who is disguised as Cinder, points out to humans, Lunars, and the wolf soldiers that "…ultimately it's our actions that turn us into monsters. Just as our actions determine our humanity" (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve vol. 2*, 194). This perspective of accepting posthuman beings supports Tarr and White's position on posthumanism, claiming that "We do not define who we are by what we are (animal, machine, monster). In general, posthumanism rejects androcentric ideology in order to embrace all forms of beingness" (p.x). Instead of a hierarchical view of beings, with humans automatically assumed to be at the top of status, it is our actions as a species that define our nature. Just because one does not appear to be human does not mean that their character cannot be revered to uphold the values of human nature. The wolf soldiers who have accepted themselves for who they are, regardless of appearance, became "farmers and machine

workers and builders" (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve vol. 2*, 270); they became people again because they, as well as Luna's citizens, stopped viewing posthuman beings as monsters.

Posthumanism is already happening within human society today. It is not a question of "when will we become posthuman", it is a question of "when will we accept posthumanism?" Marissa Meyer shares in an interview that in creating this series, "I wanted the technology in my books to have a foundation in reality. To feel, not only possible, but inevitable. Like this is the direction that humanity is heading" (The Guardian). Although posthumanism can be a challenging ideological framework to understand, let alone accept as a part of our progressive thinking as humans, it is essential for humanity to be introduced to the concept because, in reality, "What it means to be human has never been more flexible, manipulated, or in question" (Ostry, 222). If we hope to continue advancing as a species, humans must not only physically evolve, but also mentally transform by questioning what it means to be human and critically contemplating where humanity is going. Many science fiction and fantasy narratives function as useful tools in understanding posthumanism because, as scholar Jen Harrison analyzes within the *Harry Potter* series, these narratives portray "just how pervasively posthuman issues have crept into the story, inviting audiences to consider the possibility that the divisions and hierarchies that we take for granted in liberal humanist societies may be illusory" (340). Meyer's narrative challenges readers to question human nature in order to accept another form of being, such as Wolf. The lesson to be learned from Meyer's novel *Scarlet* is that it is natural for humans to be skeptical of change, but it is dangerous to reject the possibilities of a posthuman world because at the end of the day, "to be human is just one of many powerful possibilities" (Harrison, 340).

CHAPTER 3: THE METAMORPHOSIS OF A POSTHUMAN BEING: IKO'S RISE TO INDIVIDUALITY

A common trope in Cinderella narratives, specifically Disney and Perrault's versions, is the protagonist's connection to nature. Cinderella's relation to nature is often depicted through her animal allies who embody the role of the "helper" archetype, such as birds, mice, and dogs. Cinderella relies on the assistance of these secondary characters for moral support and to achieve her goals. However, in Meyer's tale of Cinderella the animal companions are replaced by Iko, a spunky android with a supposedly "glitched" personality chip. This chapter will look at the fluidity of Iko's various states of embodiment with other forms of being analyzing her performance of servitude, gender, and human actions. With each physical metamorphosis, Iko continues to evolve as an individual, gaining agency and learning to accept herself as a valued posthuman being in the process.

When trying to understand how agency is obtained for a posthuman being, scholar Victoria Flanagan writes that agency can be achieved "through embodiment, in that material bodies…that have traditionally been 'othered' in dominant social paradigms are, in posthuman narratives, resignified and become the means through which such individuals achieve empowerment" (5). This chapter will illustrate how Iko gains agency through the embodiment of various physical states, including the android body, a spaceship, and an escort droid. Although othered by most of society within the narrative, Iko gains empowerment by gradually developing her own sense of individuality and through overcoming her role as a servant in order to perform as a humanized female escort droid.

Judith Butler says that "identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (308). Instead of gender being simply a social construct, Butler argues that "gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express" (314). Because Iko is viewed and treated as an object to most of society rather than a posthuman female figure, she is forced to perform not only her gender, but also as a posthuman being who can both relate to humankind and technological beings, such as Cinder. Iko's performances are not a façade, for she is not trying to manipulate anyone, rather her performances are a way of developing a sense of identity. Only through repetition of gender and human traits can Iko claim her identity as a gendered posthuman being.

In *The Lunar Chronicles* series, Iko begins her journey as a servant android for the Linh family. Androids of Iko's older model are built to look like inhuman robots, meaning they do not resemble the physical features of a human being. For example, Iko has pincers for hands and fingers, a bulbous mechanized head with one circle lens in the middle for an eye, and conveyer belts for feet and mobility (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 2*, 95). From this image Iko is displaced from the human being and also gender due to her physicality. The human qualities as well as gender that she embodies are programmed into her behavior, making both gender and humanity performative roles.

Iko is purchased for a low price because she was an older android model and has a unique personality from other androids. For example, she is infatuated with prince Kai like most of the girls living in New Beijing, she loves fashion, she bluntly speaks her mind, and has a sense of humor. These character traits are at first considered to be an error in Iko's programming, but as her story continues, it becomes clear that Iko is

gradually building a personality of her own. We learn that Cinder's stepdad, Linh Garan, programmed Iko with specific character traits to make an ideal playmate for his youngest daughter, Peony. He notes that Iko's behavioral "symptoms" are only found in ".003 percent of AI systems, in which they develop unpredictable and sometimes irrational responses," thus Garan begins a trial on Iko to "test if an android already preinstalled with artificial intelligence and cognitive thinking, can develop modified personality traits through the introduction of controlled stimuli" (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve vol. 2*, 95). The list of traits that Peony wants Iko to perform are (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve vol. 2*, 96-97):

- Enjoy playing dress-up
- Be able to help me pick out school clothes
- Like to play make believe
- Like the same net-dramas I do
- Make me laugh
- Never get tired of talking about prince Kai, but
- Must accept that prince Kai is my soul mate and mine alone
- Will always be loyal

While several of these traits can be seen as gender specific to a feminine figure, what stands out most is that Peony is not asking for a playmate who is necessarily feminine, she is asking for a playmate who is relatable to a human. Peony is trying to create human interaction with a posthuman being. By formatting Iko to embody these humanistic traits, she is gradually becoming a hybrid with machine and human intellect. However, while Iko is being taught to become human and a valued member within Peony's life, she is also being programmed to be a servant to the Linh household. By Peony choosing what

Iko's personality embodies, Iko is being stripped of her developmental agency. Unfortunately, this concept works like a double-edged sword. When Garan received Iko, she was already a unique AI who was showing signs of developing her own frame of mind, but who knows how long it would take for Iko to continue to develop her own independent personality. Programming Iko to have specific unique behavioral characteristics is scaffolding Iko into forming a specialized identity as an android.

Even though Garan is interested in furthering his scientific knowledge by helping Iko advance as a being, she is still being confined to a specific compliant role. For Garan, Iko is a science experiment, whereas Peony views Iko as a companion, and Adri only views Iko as a robotic slave. Regardless, Iko is a servant to each person's needs and desires. One could argue that Iko is accepted as a unique form of evolving AI solely because she is developing within controlled parameters, whereas posthuman beings such as Cinder are less accepted because they cannot be controlled in the same way. Further, Iko is required to serve others in specific ways but is denied the very performances that she is supposed to carry out. For example, as previously noted, Peony wants Iko to love talking about prince Kai but accept that prince Kai is only Peony's soul mate. Iko is predetermined to be infatuated with Kai but can never allow herself to actually have him, reinforcing Iko's role as an obedient servant to the Linh family.

In addition to performing as a playmate for Peony, after Garan's death Iko is a servant for his wife Adri. Iko is forced to do household chores and is constantly threatened to be sold off for parts by Adri for extra money. But as cruel and heartless as Adri is, Iko cannot help but have sympathy for her after Peony is infected with the fatal Letumosis plague and quarantined. Iko tells Cinder, "I'm supposed to be dusting the air

vents, but Adri was in the bath…I could hear her crying…it was making me feel useless" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 193) Cinder acknowledges Iko's feelings, noting that as an android "uselessness was the worst emotion they knew" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 193-194). Iko is not only a servant physically, but also emotionally. Although within this narrative uselessness is a terrible feeling specifically for androids, it is important to note that uselessness is a human emotion. Through Iko's perspective, readers can relate to the feeling of uselessness, thus creating empathy toward posthuman beings.

A character trait in which Iko gradually develops that is not a part of her original programming is the need to be accepted by others. This is also a common trait among humans that is now being seen in an android. For example, when Peony and Cinder are talking about attending the ball, Iko says, "I want to go to the ball…It's prejudice not to let androids attend" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 40). Iko enjoys dressing up and being with prince Kai, which reinforces her gender performativity, but more than anything Iko wants the freedom to engage with everyone else around her as an equal individual. Because legally and socially Iko is viewed as inferior to the majority of the human population, she repeatedly tries to perform as a human being to create a sense of belonging. One of the human qualities that Iko performs is humor. Although she is originally programmed to make Peony laugh, Iko separately develops a sense of sarcasm. When Cinder tells Peony that she and Iko are going to the junkyard, Iko replies, "It's going to be a bundle of fun," then later honestly admits that the trip will be "dirty and stinky" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 36). Cinder points out to Iko, "You don't have scent receptors," and Iko retorts, "I have a fantastic imagination" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 36). Iko's imaginative personality most likely comes from her programmed trait of playing pretend. In comparison, her sarcasm and

ability to read comical situations is personal development that continues throughout the series for Iko. Although Iko is slowly beginning to embody the personality of a human, by performing as human Iko is suppressing her identity as an android. As her journey continues, Iko learns to combine both of her identities to become a cohesive posthuman being.

Another way Iko tries to be accepted as human is by performing gender. Although Iko's programmed traits are not inherently gender specific, the other characters in the series have chosen to impose a female gender onto Iko by referring to her pronouns as "*she"* and *"her"*. Because Iko is an android often objectified by those around her, it is easier for characters within the narrative to impose a gender upon this being. Further, Iko's performance of her programmed traits reinforces femininity. For example, in one scene, "Iko had draped a strand of Adri's pearls around her bulbous head and smeared cherry lipstick beneath her sensor in a horrible imitation of lips," and says, "I was imagining going to the ball and dancing with the prince" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 192-193). Also, her constant infatuation with prince Kai shows her similarity to the majority of female civilians in New Beijing. For example, when Cinder is trying to fix Kai's android, she asks Iko if it could have a virus, and Iko responds, "maybe her programming was overwhelmed by Prince Kai's uncanny hotness" (194). While Iko's response provides comedic relief, typical of the secondary characters in Disney's Cinderella, her programming and performance confines Iko's identity to reinforce feminine values.

At the end of the *Cinder* narrative, Iko's body is deconstructed and sold for money by Adri. When Cinder finds Iko's remains she sorts through the pieces, "One by one. Her fingers trembled over every mangled screw…With a dry, grateful sob, she

crumpled over her knees, squeezing Iko's worthless personality chip against her chest" (Meyer, *Cinder*, 282). This scene symbolizes Iko's first physical death. Moreover, it shows the emotional connection that Iko and Cinder share. Whereas Adri abused Iko as a servant, Cinder mourns the loss and disembodiment of her best friend. Iko and Cinder both endured Adri's abuse and objectification as mechanical hybrids. Together, Cinder and Iko made life bearable, safe, and somewhat enjoyable for one another. The impact that Iko's absence has on Cinder's character supports the fact that Iko had a human connection with Cinder that is now lost with Iko's death.

In the following novel, *Scarlet,* Iko undergoes a type of metamorphosis when her personality chip is inserted into the Rampion spaceship. Whereas Iko has physical freedom to perform her roles as an android in the first novel, as the Rampion, Iko is more physically confined as a servant and her gender performance is limited to expression through vocal sounds, temperature, and lighting. Once Iko awakens as the auto-control system of the Rampion, she is shocked by her new physical form, "Something's wrong with my vision sensor. I can't see you…I'm enormous…no hands, no visual sensor, humongous landing gear—are those supposed to be my feet?" (Meyer, *Scarlet,* 155-156). Iko can no longer see the way she used to. Instead, she can only feel the different parts of the ship, which is the closest Iko can come to touching or seeing her own body and her surroundings. She must now use the web feeds as her eyes to visualize what others looks like. In a sense, Iko is still a servant because she cannot leave the containment of the spaceship until Cinder finds her an individual body. In the meantime, Iko must take care of the ship by running diagnostics and monitoring the internal systems to keep everyone

safe. By having to submit to a servant role once more, Iko is taking a step backward in her development of human identity.

Moreover, even though Iko's consciousness in housed within the Rampion, Captain Carswell Thorne still claims ownership over the physical vehicle, which insinuates that Iko's new body is not truly hers to fully control at all. While Iko has been physically freed from being Adri's servant as an android, she is being physically placed into another servant role as the spaceship. Being a spaceship has its pros and cons. For example, as the auto-control system Iko technically has the freedom to fly where she pleases. On the other hand, Cinder and Captain Thorne can manually pilot the ship or control the inner systems, such as temperature and lighting, which is basically physically controlling Iko. Therefore, although she is consciously free, she remains physically confined. For instance, a major downside to being a spaceship is that Iko cannot follow Cinder and Thorne when they travel outside of the Rampion, which leaves Iko lonely and makes her feel left out. When Cinder and Captain Thorne have to leave Iko hidden in a crop field while they go inspect Scarlet's house, Iko says sarcastically, "You two go off and have fun now. I'll be sitting here, by myself, all alone, checking for radar interference and running diagnostics. It's going to be *fantastic*" (Meyer, *Scarlet,* 314). Thus, in this form, Iko is given more agency while also more physically restricted into servitude.

Even though Iko is still providing services for others, her close mutual relationship with Cinder, as mentioned earlier, and Cinder's ability to sympathize with Iko's experience makes Iko's confinement as a spaceship more bearable. Cinder understands what Iko is feeling as the Rampion because when Cinder and Captain Thorne

first entered the ship, Cinder had to function as the auto-control system for the Rampion temporarily:

> It had seemed like her brain was being stretched in every direction. Like she'd lost touch with her physical body, had detached her brain and was hovering in a nonexistent space between the real and the digital. Pity welled up in her for Iko, who had never wanted anything but to become more human (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 248).

Cinder can physically, mentally, and emotionally relate to Iko because they both want to be valued and accepted by humanity. Neither of them chose to exist as a cyborg, android, or ship, but without these forms they would cease to exist. Although Iko is still confined to a particular space and must perform for others, she does so more willingly as a ship because she is a part of a group who cares about her well-being. Additionally, the fact that Cinder and Iko feel uncomfortable at all proves that they have a connection to human feelings. In reality, even though Iko has lost her more "human" form, she is treated more like a human because of her freedom from Adri.

Once again, as a spaceship Iko is embodying an object which has no gender specific representation. Nevertheless, vehicles are often referred to with a female pronoun of "she" and "her", which is how Captain Thorne refers to the Rampion regardless of Iko's presence, enforcing gender onto a physical object. As mentioned before, Iko's new body is huge, debilitating, and far from Iko's preferred image. Considering that Iko was able to perform as a female in her android body, now she has no control over her physical representation, "Oh, what's to become of me? I'm hideous" (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 156). Iko is distressed over her appearance, however, Captain Thorne

quickly steps in to boost her confidence, “Now hold on just one minute there, little miss disembodied voice…you, my fine lady, are the most gorgeous ship in these skies, and don’t let anyone ever tell you different” (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 157). What is nice about this interaction is that Captain Thrones acknowledges Iko as her own consciousness, accepting that Iko is replacing the essence of the ship instead of the ship overtaking Iko.

Directly after Captain Thorne’s comment, Cinder notices the temperature within the ship rise and asks, “Iko, are you *intentionally* blushing?” (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 157). Even though Iko cannot control her appearance to reinforce feminine qualities, as she would prefer, she is able to communicate and perform through temperature to show she is flattered by the Captain’s comment. When Iko searches an image of Captain Thorne, she responds “you’re…rather handsome” (Meyer, *Scarlet*, 157). Here we start to see Iko developing her own ideas of attractiveness towards others. It would seem that as a result of Peony’s death, her programmed traits are able to expand beyond her original settings. For example, when Iko is first programmed, she is defaulted to like prince Kai. Now that Iko is being introduced to other male characters, such as Captain Thorne, and is not confined to her original environment, she is able to expand and deliberate her own preferences of physical attraction. It is clear that through her second embodiment Iko is gaining more agency over her own cognitive and emotional development, thus continuing to evolve as a posthuman being.

As a spaceship Iko is clearly limited in physical movement but gains behavioral agency as she begins to remove herself from her role of servitude. In the subsequent novel of this series, *Cress*, Iko gains physical freedom when she switches places with an escort droid named Darla. Darla becomes the spaceship’s auto-control system and Iko

becomes one step closer to being human. One of the aspects that Iko loves about her new physical form is the many options she has to personalize her appearance, "…I am gorgeous. Plus I checked the manufacturer's catalogue and I can upgrade to forty different eye colors!" (Meyer, *Cress*, 387). As a spaceship, Iko viewed herself as hideous because of her size and lack of humanization, but now Iko views herself as beautiful due to her control over her new body and physical appearance. Further, as an escort droid Iko is able to have more of an active role among the group as they try to save Earth from Queen Levana's tyranny. Iko's dreams of having human privileges are finally coming true, "As it turned out, being human was every bit as much fun as she'd always thought it would be" (Meyer, *Cress*, 408). Here, being human is referring to freedom. Iko is still physically an escort droid, but now she has complete mental and physical agency.

Although Iko still identifies with the other escort droids, calling them her "brethren" and "distant cousins" (Meyer, *Cress*, 408), she also identifies with being human because of her gain in agency and personal individuality apart from the rest of the servant escort droids. Iko does show sympathy towards the other escort droids in the sense that she is saddened by their obedience and mindlessness, "the rental escorts said nothing, only blinked at her lazily as she pushed her way into their midst" (Meyer, *Cress*, 408). However, regardless of her sympathy towards her fellow escort droids, Iko still views herself as different from the rest because of her personality, newfound agency, and freedom.

Iko's freedom as an escort droid allows her to experience having control over other androids instead of being the one controlled by others. In order to infiltrate the upcoming royal wedding, Iko plans to blend in with the rest of the escort droids that will

be attending the royal event as staff members. When Iko arrives at the warehouse containing the shipment of escort droids, she distracts the human employees by overriding a servant escort droid's behavioral programming, "I command you to stand up, scream, and run for the exit" (Meyer, *Cress*, 408). Even though Iko is using the servant escort droid to avoid being caught and reprogrammed into a subservient android, Iko is asserting her control over one of her own kind similar to how humans treat technological beings within this narrative. Iko does this again later during her covert operation, noting that it was "all too easy to command another android to switch clothes so that she could fit in with the rest of them in their staff uniforms" (Meyer, *Cress*, 413). Iko is finally getting to experience the convenience of having control over her own kind.

Although Iko has power in performing as a human by being able to manipulate the other androids, Iko is forced to perform as a brainless android to fit in discretely. Considering that Iko has broken free of her servant role throughout her development, she finds it difficult to revert her behavior to perform like the other escort droids:

> standing in perfect unison with the others. Blinking precisely ten times a minute. Keeping quiet while the human catering staff chatted…Iko was forced to bite her tongue, allowing her programmed instincts, the instincts she'd spent her whole life trying to keep buried…to keep her expressionless (Meyer, *Cress*, 413).

Here we see Iko having to repress her individual personality. It is ironic that in order to become more human, Iko must perform less human. Iko cannot become more human without accepting her android identity because she will be reprogrammed and cease to continue developing as an individual.

It is important to note that Iko does not aspire to identify as completely android nor entirely human, but instead a hybrid posthuman being. Iko is aware that as a mechanized being, there are physical advantages. For example, later in the series Iko mentions that she pities humans because of "…how fragile their bodies are. So many injuries that are minor annoyances to me would be fatal to my friends" (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 1*, 110). As an android, Iko physically feels invincible. However, she wants to embody the lifestyle and feelings of a human being. Understanding that both identities have their benefits and flaws, Iko tries to embrace hybridity. Ultimately, Iko understands that she is programmed differently from the rest of the escort droids but remains mindful of their existence. Iko tells one of her android counterparts:

> "I want you to know that I hold nothing against you…I understand that it isn't your fault your programmer had so little imagination…in another life, we could have been sisters, and I feel it's important to acknowledge that…but as it stands, I'm a apart of an important mission right now, and I cannot be swayed from by goal by my sympathy for androids who are less advanced than myself" (Meyer, *Cress*, 416).

While still identifying as an escort droid, Iko is aware that she has evolved into a being that is more progressed than former androids. After experiencing what it is like to be conscious and free to make your own decisions, Iko cannot go back to her former way of life as a servant escort droid. In order to achieve android-human hybridity, Iko acknowledges that her evolution must continue by progressing, not regressing or remaining developmentally stunted as a mindless and subservient android.

Through the embodiment of the escort droid, Iko is able to further explore the nuances of being human and actively become a hero as the narrative continues in the fourth novel of the series, *Winter*. Once the characters have saved Earth and liberated the citizens of Luna from Levana's reign, the narrative continues with a shift in plot and perspective in the additional graphic novels *Wires and Nerve*. This graphic series is mainly from Iko's perspective as she struggles with accepting the fact that she is not biologically human but learns to value herself as an equal posthuman being. This first-person perspective is vital to further developing the posthuman experience, as Flanagan writes:

> The decision to allow non-human characters to narrate or focalise their own experiences…allows for the 'otherness' of robot or cyborg subjects to be textually mediated (through the act of reader alignment, for example) and critiques the processes of exclusion that is inevitably invoked in the production of (white, male) humanist subjectivity (41).

When readers experience Iko's struggles of objectification and marginalization from society through Iko's viewpoint, they become intertwined with Iko as a posthuman being and are hopefully able to gain a sense of sympathy about the reality she faces. Iko's journey to individuality is best understood through the first-person lens provided by this narrative. While Iko continues to perform her gender role as a female, she realizes that performing as a human being is the most challenging identity construction to embody.

Volume one of *Wires and Nerve* begins with Iko explaining that she is working as an undercover agent for Cinder to detain the Lunar wolf soldiers that were attacking earth in the previous novels. Iko encounters a pack of wolf soldiers and is injured in hand-to-

hand combat, causing the soldiers to escape. As Iko attends to her wound of wires and nerves dangling out of her stomach, she says "I know I'm not flesh and blood. No nerve endings. No heartbeat. Just a robot with artificial emotions and a disposable body. I know I'm not really human. But aces and stars, I wish that I was" (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 1,* 44). Although Iko has disembodied and embodied various forms thus far throughout the series—an older android model, a spaceship, and now an escort droid—this statement shows that even with Iko's acquired agency and freedom, she lacks self-acceptance because she is still not biologically human. Throughout the series, it seems that Meyer is trying to depict the flaws of the real-world hierarchy, specifically the issue of humans placing themselves at the top of the hierarchy. If Iko were to accept herself as posthuman (technology-human hybrid) she would destabilize the construction of the traditional hierarchy humans have created, thus forcing humanity to reconsider their place in the world.

Iko's lack of self-confidence is enhanced when she is not accepted by other humans as an equal being. When Iko visits a store with Cress and Carswell Thorne to buy parts to mend her damaged body, the sales woman insists that Iko's entire body be replaced. Iko refuses to replace her body, telling the saleswoman "You don't think of your body as being disposable or replaceable, so why should I?" (Meyer, Wires and Nerve Vol. 1, 86). Even though Iko defends her physical existence, the woman's comment further damages Iko's emotional well-being. After witnessing Iko's unique and defiant personality, uncommon to the majority of programmed androids, the saleswoman further insists, "I must recommend a new personality chip as well. This one seems to be faulty" (Meyer, Wires and Nerve Vol. 1, 86). To make matters worse, the saleswoman

directly addresses Cress assuming that she is the owner of Iko, which pushes Iko to express her frustration and assert her presence, “I’m not faulty! And stop talking to her [Cress]. I’m your customer. Me” (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 1,* 86). Although Iko gets the attention she is demanding, the saleswoman simply views her as an item, “But you’re just an escort droid. You’re…merchandise” (86). This interaction shows that although Iko appears more human as an escort droid and can perform human actions, she is still not acknowledged as a living or free being. Society continues to oppress Iko’s existence as a posthuman being.

Lastly, the saleswoman proceeds to show the group the newest escort-droid fashion line called the heroes line, which contains replicas of the main hero characters in the series thus far. Iko is insulted that she is not acknowledged as an equal hero of the group, “Where’s Iko, the bold but lovable sidekick? This is a horrible oversight” (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 1,* 100). This interaction with the saleswoman makes it clear to Iko that even if she learns to accept who she is (an evolving A.I), the majority of mankind will continue to see her as a commodity, “I’m an escort-droid. I am the definition of objectified” (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 1,* 100). I find it telling that Iko is content with being the “lovable sidekick” as long as she is accepted by the public as a part of the group. This absence of recognition is what propels Iko to strive to be seen as human in the eyes of humanity. To do this, Iko continues to perform gender and, with resilient courage, become the hero of her own story.

Iko continues to reinforce her gender through repeated performance when she attends a gala with Carswell Thorne. Iko attends the event in a fancy dress and notes that “there were handsome men to dance with…even more handsome men to flirt with…and

plenty of designer shoes to admire" (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 1*, 148). Although she is performing gender here, more importantly Iko is performing everyday human actions. None of the guests can tell that she is an escort-droid, therefore she is treated as an equal being who can partake in the evening's activities without judgement. Iko even gets to perform as a hero when the gala is attacked by Lunar wolf soldiers, validating her role as more than an android or "merchandise" despite how most humans view Iko.

Although Iko is successful in performing gender and heroism as an escort droid, being validated as a posthuman being becomes a challenge when Iko gains a partner for her heroic mission. Cinder assigns her personal body guard, Sir Kinney, to protect and assist Iko on her mission to extract the Lunar wolf soldiers from Earth. However, even though Kinney states that he is "not worried about average citizens who are made uncomfortable by a cyborg Lunar queen" (Meyer, Wires and Nerve Vol. 2, 45), Kinney does not feel as accepting toward androids like Iko. It is interesting that Kinney has come to accept Cinder as a cyborg and a Lunar, both beings so despised and villainized throughout the series, however, he cannot accept Iko as a posthuman being. In reality, Kinney is just another average citizen who misjudges technologically advanced individuals, in comparison to Cinder and her crew.

Sir Kinney's hostility toward artificially intelligent beings is constantly directed at Iko as she performs human actions. For example, when Iko begins popping her knuckles for dramatic effect, Kinney undercuts her attempt at embodying a human action by responding "Doesn't that require having fluid in your joints? Or at least bones or ligaments or something?" (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 2*, 46). Frustrated by his obvious need to ridicule her performativity Iko retorts, "I downloaded a program for physiological

sound effects…not that it's any of your business" (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 2*, 46). It seems that Kinney's hostility toward Iko comes from the denial of accepting that even though Iko is physically a robot, she resembles and embodies the behavior of a human being. As Pramod K. Nayar writes, "it is not in its radical difference from the human body or form that horror lies but in its similarity to the human, being taken for and passing as human" (55). Iko's female-human subjectivity pushes Kinney to confront the fact that the relationship between human and machine has been blurred and hybridized to create a posthuman being like Iko.

While bothered by Kinney's judgmental perspective, Iko tries her best to ignore his ignorance and work together as a team. But once again, during a friendly dinner with the emperor, Kinney points out that Iko is drinking from a tea cup that is empty so she can fit in with the group. Iko responds, "Do you think I'm not aware of the fact that I'm not capable of imbibing fluids and food like everyone else at this table? Why do you insist on pointing out these differences at every possible opportunity?" (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 2*, 87). By constantly voicing the fact that Iko is not human, Kinney is allowing himself to believe that a being like her does not truly exist, that Iko is not an important part of a posthuman society. Also, by pushing Iko away emotionally, Kinney can continue to suppress his developing compassion toward Iko as an individual.

Although Kinney originally dislikes Iko, he begins to notice her complex personality and truly care about her well-being. When Iko discovers that her personality was programmed by Linh Garan to become Peony's playmate, Iko is devastated and begins questioning her identity, "Every one of my emotions, my thoughts, all those traits I thought were so human and so advanced…were nothing but programmed responses

after all. I'm nothing but a fancy computer just pretending to be human" (99). Iko now believes that her ability to love is simply programmed instead of a part of her learned development. Seeing Iko saddened over believing her love for others is not genuine, Kinney finally defends her humanity, "I don't believe love and friendship can be programmed, maybe you were wired to like certain things or act a certain way, but love…it can't be manufactured or implanted. It has to grow naturally" (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 2*, 137). Kinney's compassion toward Iko grows the more he interacts with and understands her, which validates Iko's ability to naturally develop feelings of love and friendship. As readers witness Kinney's struggle to accept Iko and then come to an equal respect for her as a posthuman being, Kinney demonstrates the steps that come with welcoming other forms of being.

As Iko's journey progresses, she unfortunately undergoes another "death" during battle when one of the Lunar wolf soldiers destroys Iko's personality chip. The entire group mourns Iko's death, including Kinney who has grown to cherish his partnership with Iko. Luckily, Cress is able to copy Iko's personality chip and bring her back to life, although she is missing weeks of knowledge from her life. Seeing all of her friends excited to have her back and noticing that Kinney is accepting of her as a partner now, Iko realizes that the only true acceptance she needs is from herself and her loved ones. Iko debates reviewing Garan's files, since she has no recollection of what she learned about her identity, but decides it is not necessary:

> I'm not sure if it matters to me anymore. If I was programmed to be the way I am. If my humanity was the result of a clever experiment. Peony saw me as a person long before I had a body to match. She and Cinder taught me

> about friendship and love, and I know those feelings are real, no matter what anyone else believes. And what could be more human than that? (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 2*, 250).

Iko learns to accept herself for who she is regardless of her initial programming or the world's views of androids. Throughout her life so far, Iko has embodied and disembodied various forms of physicality, ultimately evolving and transcending her original programming to become a hybrid posthuman being.

As posthumanist scholar N. Katherine Hayles writes, the nature of posthuman subjectivity is "an amalgamation, a collection of heterogenous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction" (3). Iko's journey to individuality is such a process of physically embodying forms and roles, as well as deconstructing what she has learned about her original identity in order to reconstruct herself as a posthuman being. In addition to Iko's physical evolution, her cognitive ideologies mature through her fluctuating interpersonal relationships and surroundings, highlighting the ever present nature versus nurture dichotomy. As Kinney says within Meyer's narrative, "Scientists have been debating nature and nurture for ages. But what is nature other than being predisposed to be a certain way, to like certain things, or have certain strengths? Is it really that different from being designed?" (Meyer, *Wires and Nerve Vol. 2*, 136-137). Like androids, humans are "programmed" to abide by societal expectations due to the pressures of needing to conform and be accepted by others. Our performances as beings are influenced by factors such as gender norms, class norms, and behavioral norms; these factors are then reinforced by both nature and nurture. Similarly, to our performances as humans,

mankind is also programmed in their ideology as a species. Humans continue to believe that as a species we are at the top of the hierarchy because we are more intelligent and civilized than other beings. However, like Iko, we must learn to reprogram ourselves, to transcend our current forms of thinking and be open-minded to other forms of beings. In accepting posthumanism, we are accepting the progression of our existence as humans.

CONCLUSION

Ideas regarding posthumanism are commonly illustrated in a negative light within science fiction narratives, often depicting a technologically advanced future as the end of the human species. This negative portrayal can be detrimental for readers, especially children and young adults because the future of generations to come will most likely be living in a posthuman world. The purpose of this thesis was to define some of the perspectives of posthumanist theory and illustrate how *The Lunar Chronicles* series is a specific narrative that addresses the various nuances of posthumanism, ultimately providing a positive outlook for a progressive reality. In doing so, I hope that my analysis was able to assuage some of the exaggeratory stigmas associated with science fiction narratives in connection to posthuman concepts and promote a more anthropocentric view of technologically manipulated or hybridized beings, such as the cyborg, the genetically modified human-animal, and the android.

One of the more commonly recognized hybrid figures of human-technology is the cyborg. By beginning this thesis with Cinder's analysis, readers can begin to interrogate the definition of "human" through the struggles of a cyborg Cinderella figure. Cinder invites readers to witness both the privileges and the obstacles that come with being a cyborg, providing a sympathetic and realistic view of what it is like for a posthuman being to be marginalized by society simply because hybridity with technology is feared. Additionally, Cinder's character helps readers humanize and situate the cyborg as a realistic figure within twenty-first century culture, rather than a science fiction creature. Cinder's entire experience throughout the series is mediated by technology, which in turn

serves as a relatable lifestyle for current society, showing how humans are already in some sense functioning as cyborgs due to their constant interaction with technology.

While the cyborg is the most popular example of a posthuman hybrid, other types of posthuman beings are explored within this series. By analyzing Wolf's character, readers hopefully can continue to broaden their definition of what it means to be "human", or simply what it takes to be accepted as a "human being". Wolf's chapter interrogates the compatibility of a human-animal hybrid, thus considering the position that human nature has within a character who is biogenetically modified by technology. Humans have formed a hierarchy that separates themselves from animals, although in reality humans are still animals who interact with the world differently from other species. Similarly, posthuman beings are another type of life form that engages with the world a bit differently than humans, due to technological dependence or enhancement. Wolf's character blurs the construction of mankind's perceived hierarchal status and renegotiates the placement of posthuman beings.

Once the cyborg and wolf-human hybrid are contextualized as posthuman beings, Iko's narrative depicts the hybridization of humanism in reverse. Although she does not start out physically humanized, she becomes more human in other ways with the help of technology. The other characters are posthuman for being influenced by technology, whereas Iko can be seen as posthuman by interacting with technology as well as human nature. Iko's chapter analyzes the fluidity of various states of embodiment (robot, spaceship, escort droid), as well as her performance of servitude, gender, and human actions. Through Iko's narrative, readers can witness how a sentient being can gain its own agency and evolve into a valued posthuman being. Moreover, by experiencing this

narrative through Iko's first person perspective, readers become intertwined with Iko's gradual development into individuality, which builds an understanding toward robotic, sentient beings. Ultimately, "by aligning readers with posthuman characters, "novels raise genuine questions about the nature and status of humanity in technologically advanced, futuristic worlds" (Flanagan, 42).

The Lunar Chronicles teaches readers that "To be posthuman does not mean to be indifferent to the humans, or to be de-humanized" (Braidotti, 190), but rather to redefine what "human" means to both the individual and society. As technology continues to become more integrated in the human lifestyle, perspectives toward posthumanism will continue to change. Thus, further analysis of literary works can help us continue to apply posthuman theory through various standpoints. In the meantime, Marissa Meyer's unique characters serve as metaphors for the multiplicity of sections associated with the field of posthumanism and can build a bridge for readers to enter a new reality that is more accepted rather than rejected. Hopefully in time, more narratives that highlight the complex nuances of posthumanism in a realistic manner will continue to educate readers of the plethora of possibilities that the future holds for humanity's progression.

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