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The Modernization and Futuristic Take on Fairy Tales in a Dystopian Novel: Female Empowerment and Otherness in *The Lunar Chronicles* by Marissa Meyer

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The Modernization and Futuristic Take on Fairy Tales in a Dystopian Novel: Female Empowerment and Otherness in *The Lunar Chronicles* by Marissa Meyer



Gwenaëlle TORRES

Under the supervision of Dr. Gwenthalyng ENGÉLIBERT

Master 1 Arts, Lettres, Civilisation

Parcours Textes, Images, Langues Étrangères - Anglais

2021-2022

UBO

Université de Bretagne Occidentale



FACULTÉ
DES LETTRES &
SCIENCES HUMAINES

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Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Part 1. Once upon a Time... in the Future</i>	7
Chapter 1: A Traditional Fairy Tale Heritage	7
I. Origins of Fairy Tales	7
A. <i>The Folk Tale: the Oral Tradition behind the Fairy Tale</i>	7
B. <i>The Birth of the Fairy Tale as a Literary Genre</i>	9
C. <i>Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel and Snow White</i>	11
II. The Traditional Fairy Tale Structure	17
A. <i>A General Structure of Fairy Tales</i>	17
B. <i>Moral Lessons and Women's Place in Fairy Tales</i>	20
III. The Lunar Chronicles' Faithfulness to the Traditional Fairy Tale	22
A. <i>What Remains from the Original Fairy Tales</i>	22
B. <i>A Hero and a Villain</i>	24
Chapter 2: When Dystopia and Science-Fiction Have a Baby...	27
I. A Recipe for a Great Read	29
II. Dystopian Science Fiction in The Lunar Chronicles	31
A. <i>Technological advancements: the science fiction aspects</i>	31
B. <i>Rebellion against a Totalitarian Regime: the dystopian aspects</i>	34
Chapter 3: A Young Adult Novel	37
I. Literature for Teenagers... and Others	37
A. <i>Books for Teenagers</i>	37
B. <i>A New Kind of Literature</i>	39
II. By and About Women: Young Adult Literature as Centre Stage for Developing Strong Female Characters	41
A. <i>A very fruitful Female-led Genre</i>	41
B. <i>Contrasting Endings in YA and a new Happy Ending Way in The Lunar Chronicles</i>	43

Part 2. “The Future is Female”	47
Chapter 4: The Female Hero	47
I. Cinder, the Chosen One	47
A. <i>The Female Hero that is Cinder</i>	47
B. <i>The Hero’s Journey, Cinder’s Monomyth</i>	50
II. Why are Female Superheroes Necessary?	53
A. <i>The Female Superhero, and Can Cinder be Considered as a Female Superhero?</i>	53
B. <i>Reverse Misogyny?</i>	55
Chapter 5: Only Strong Women in the Building	59
I. Creation of a Sisterly Bond, and Strong Women Elsewhere	60
II. The Cyborg in Every Girl	61
Part. 3 Another One Bites the Cinder: Overcoming Barriers in The Lunar Chronicles	65
Chapter 6: Togetherness and Selflessness	65
I. Friendship and women supporting each other	66
A. <i>Iko and Cinder: Old Friendship, Anxiety and Confidence</i>	66
B. <i>Cress’ Courage and Devotion to the Good Guys</i>	68
II. Male Characters Supporting Female Characters	69
A. <i>Kai, the Emperor who Did Not Know It All</i>	69
B. <i>Of Thorns and Wolves: Apparently Unreachable Men Become Reliable Friends</i>	72
Chapter 7: Otherness, Being and Feeling Different	75
I. Being Unconventional	75
A. <i>An “Exemplary Model of Modern Science”</i>	75
B. <i>“You’re Linh Cinder? The Mechanic?”</i>	77
II. Being Alien, a Lunar	79
III. Being Said to be Mentally Challenged	81
A. <i>Calling People Crazy When You Do Not Understand Them</i>	81

<i>B. A Chosen Madness</i>	82
<i>Conclusion</i>	87
<i>Appendix</i>	93
<i>Bibliography</i>	117

Introduction

I have always loved fairy tales and fairy tale retellings. I read a billion of them when I was an aspiring writer. I'd always said to myself that I wasn't going to write a fairy tale retelling, in part because there were so many of them out there. I thought if I were to do it I would want to make sure that I had a something that would really set it apart from this really crowded marketplace and for years didn't think that I would have that idea. But then I had the idea to take fairy tales and set them in science fiction—I felt like that was my way.

- Marissa Meyer in a 2016 *The Washington Post* interview

Fairy tale retellings are a very large part of Young Adult literature (YA), there are countless novels based on fairy tales, and they keep on coming, so finding a way to be different and to offer something new to the readers must be a difficult task. Young Adult literature, as a category, is “dynamic, changing as culture and society—which provide their context—change” (YALSA¹ website), it is usually defined by the age group it is said to target—arguably² twelve to eighteen years old—but what really separates it from “adult” literature is accurately defined on the CSULB³ library’s website: “in YA, characters are discovering and pushing boundaries to discover themselves, in adult lit, characters tend to be constrained by those limits and are living within them”. YA novels are becoming the dominant category of the book industry in the US⁴ and a study⁵ recently showed that male leads were predominant in fiction bestsellers, as well as male authors. However, the YA novels we have heard the most about in the last decade or so were

¹ Young Adult Library Service Association

² Young Adult Literature is further discussed in Chapter 3

³ California State University Long Beach

⁴ Wood, Heloise. “Print sales in US boom with YA and graphic novels top performers”, *The Bookseller*, 2022 < <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/print-sales-us-boom-ya-and-graphic-fiction-top-winners-1298194> >.

⁵ “Strong Man; Beautiful Woman”, *SuperSummary* < <https://www.supersummary.com/strong-man-beautiful-woman/> >.

female-led, and written by female authors. These novels, which have been adapted into films and TV series, such as *The Hunger Games*⁶ or *The Mortal Instruments*⁷ series which are led by strong female characters, a change from the oh-so-famous *Harry Potter*⁸ and other male-led series like *Eragon*⁹ which used to dominate the scene.

The Hunger Games series started a new wave for YA literature, novels about young female teenagers breaking free from the norms of their societies and growing up to be strong women. Now, young girls and women can read stories about people who resemble them more, there is more representation. In the *Hunger Games* series, the main character, Katniss, is at first just a teenager, she is not “the most beautiful” girl you will have ever seen, her looks do not have anything special. What is special about her is firstly her courage and the importance family has for her, when she sacrifices herself to save her sister. Then, throughout her adventures, she evolves and grows up into a strong woman, but the qualities she has developed are not ones of the usual female character, and although there is some romance in the books, it is not what defines her, she is not defined by her love life or by any man, she is her own person and fights for what she believes in and for the people she loves. This example was followed by many writers after Suzanne Collins, and has led to series like Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* which started in 2011, and many others. This is what brings us to the series this paper is about, one that is

⁶ *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, a series of three novels published between 2008 and 2010, adapted into four movies by Lionsgate Entertainment (2012-2015).

⁷ *The Mortal Instruments* by Cassandra Clare, a series of six novels published between 2007 and 2014 by Margaret K. McElderry Books in the US. It was adapted into a movie *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones* in 2013 and then into a TV series called *Shadowhunters* which had three seasons (2016-2019 on Freeform).

⁸ A series of seven novels (1997-2007) by British writer J.K. Rowling, adapted into eight movies (2001-2011) by Warner Bros. Pictures.

⁹ The first of four novels in *The Inheritance Cycle* series by Christopher Paolini (2003-2011), adapted into a movie, *Eragon* in 2006, distributed by 20th Century Fox.

also led by a strong female character, but that brings about many more important matters.

The Lunar Chronicles is a series of four novels written by Marissa Meyer, an American novelist; *Cinder*, first volume of *The Lunar Chronicles* series, is her debut novel and made her a New-York times best-selling author. The series is a modern, twenty-first-century fairy tale; it has the backbones of the fairytales it is inspired from, but the author made them evolve to fit in our era and work together. The four novels¹⁰, *Cinder* (#1), *Scarlet* (#2), *Cress* (#3) and *Winter* (#4), are eponymous to their main character, even though the main character of the whole story is Cinder. They respectively are inspired from *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Rapunzel* and *Snow White*. We will focus primarily on *Cinder*, but the certain points will involve the other novels.

The story takes place in a dystopian world: in the future, the Moon has been colonized and its people—the Lunars, ruled by a powerful and merciless queen— have developed psychic abilities which allow them to control minds. On Earth, after a fourth World War, the population faces Letumosis, a highly lethal virus whose origins are unknown, and the planet is under constant threat of a Lunar invasion. Cinder is the adopted child of the Linh family, but her past is very vague. Her step-father is dead and Cinder has to live with her step-mother and two step-sisters. Unfortunately, Cinder is a cyborg, and cyborgs are not treated as equals to humans, they are pariahs. As she is a highly skilled mechanic, the girl's stepmother uses her to make money and barely treats her as a member of the family. However one day, Cinder meets Prince Kai, who comes to her because of a mysterious royal android which needs fixing, and her journey towards her real destiny begins.

Along the way, she meets new allies who become friends—among whom Scarlet, Cress and Winter—and help her become who she was always supposed to be, the rightful Lunar queen. Indeed, her true identity, that of Princess Selene of Luna, was kept

¹⁰ You will find summaries for each novel in the Appendix.

secret from her and everyone else in order to protect her from the Lunar queen, who tried to kill her when she was still very young.

In this series, very important features of the Fairy Tale remain: there is still a prince, there is still a very evil enemy—an evil queen, which really sounds like a fairy tale-y villain—, there is some kind of magic involved, there is a happy ending... However, the series of novels also rests on aspects drawn from Dystopia and Science Fiction, and raises important questions involving feminism and discriminations. By mixing the Science Fiction and Fairy Tale genres, bringing these old stories into the future, *The Lunar Chronicles* modernizes our childhood heroines and the Fairy Tale genre as a whole, making the reader reflect on the importance of accepting who they really are.

As every great construction needs a strong base, I thought important to start at the roots of *The Lunar Chronicles*, talk about the fairy tales which inspired the series and about the Fairy Tale genre in general. From that point on, I also wanted to understand what Science Fiction could add to such stories, and how it worked so seamlessly. So the first part of this paper is voluntarily very literary genre focused, ending on Young Adult literature, the literature category our novels belong to, which is no surprise considering the fact that fairy tales are renowned for being children's literature...but of course this is not so simple, and YA also is a great platform for developing strong female characters.

Cinder is the main character of the story, she is the hero, but does being a woman change anything to her hero status? The female hero, along with the female superhero has been theorized in order to answer that question, because of the female empowerment movement that has been slowly taking over the past decade. Following that stream of thoughts, what about the other female characters of the story? YA literature also provides us with many examples of this female empowerment movement.

Other than portraying strong female characters young women can look up to, the series bears important messages about acceptance and friendship. Acceptance of who

you really are, even though people might want to alienate you, and acceptance of others, which can create the strongest relationships.

Part 1. Once upon a Time... in the Future

Chapter 1: A Traditional Fairy Tale Heritage

I. Origins of Fairy Tales

Fairy tales are often linked to folk tales and even amalgamated as the same thing, or the first derives from the latter. To some extent, this is not totally untrue, because the folk tale is part of the oral tradition and fairy tales were inspired from tales orally transmitted through time. However, the two are not the same and cannot be mistaken.

A. *The Folk Tale: the Oral Tradition behind the Fairy Tale*

First and foremost, folk tales are part of the folklore.

Folklore, or popular knowledge, is the accumulated store of what mankind as experienced, learned and practiced across the ages as popular and traditional knowledge, as distinguished from so-called scientific knowledge. The distinction between the two is not always definite. The materials of folklore are for the most part the materials of social anthropology that have been collected from the barbarous and "uncivilized" regions of the world, as well as from the rural and illiterate peoples of the "civilized" countries. These materials have been obtained from the anthropological data of history or have been collected by anthropologists and folklorists in modern times. Specifically, folklore consists of the beliefs, customs, superstitions, proverbs, riddles, songs, myths, legends, tales, ritualistic ceremonies, magic, witchcraft, and all other manifestations and practices of primitive and illiterate peoples and of the "common" people of civilized society. Folklore has very deep roots and its traces are ever present even among peoples that have reached a high state of culture. Folklore may be said to be a true and direct expression of the mind of "primitive" man. (Aurelio M. Espinosa)¹¹

¹¹ Definition found in "Definitions of Folklore." *Journal of Folklore Research*, vol. 33, no. 3, Indiana University Press, 1996, pp. 255-64.

There is not just one folklore, there are as many as there are different cultures in the world. Folklore was created by and for the people, and although it may have served as a source of inspiration for more formal literature—as we will see next—, it is only about the people, and you will rarely hear about kings, queens or any upper-classes characters in folk tales.

In folk tales, you will find “husbands and wives, peasants, thieving rascals, or an occasional doctor, lawyer, priest, or preacher” (Bottigheimer, 2009: 4) dealing with the difficulties of their lives. These are short, simple story lines, reflecting “the world and the belief systems of their audiences” (*ibid.*). These tales were told by storytellers, usually nomadic travelers who would stop in villages and tell their stories during what the French called *veillées*, and this is how they were passed on through generations. The storytellers usually had heard the stories from someone else and then made up their own versions, so that we cannot know who was the original author of each story, making them anonymous stories, unlike fairy tales.

However, within folk tales, the wonder tale may be the prime source of inspiration for the more literary work that is the fairy tale. In wonder tales, the main protagonist is faced with an interdiction which they violate, thus leading to their exile or the accomplishment of a task which will later allow them to return to society a better person¹². On their journey, the protagonist gets in trouble and is helped by magical agents, who may give them gifts to help them forward. Oftentimes, they face a temporary setback and a “wonder or miracle is needed to reverse the wheel of fortune. The protagonist makes use of endowed gifts (and this includes magical agents and cunning) to achieve his or her goal” (Zipes, 2015: 123). The main theme that was passed on to fairy tales is the transformation, “generally a change in the social status of the

¹² When explaining Vladimir Propp’s structural approach to fairy tales in Zipes, Jack. “Introduction”, in (Zipes, Jack, editor) *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 118-161.

protagonists” (Zipes, 2015: 124). Transformation in wonder tales is usually accomplished through marriage, which a lot of fairy tales end with.

B. The Birth of the Fairy Tale as a Literary Genre

In truth, for the fairy tale as a literary genre to exist, it had to wait for the development of vernacular languages in each country and the invention of the printing press during the fifteenth century, which then allowed for the spread of literacy and the popularization of books. At the beginning, fairy tales were only written by men, since women often were not allowed to. The first authors of fairy tales were usually highly educated and used oral folk tales as well as literary material to create their stories. However, these first fairy tales were not particularly aimed at children, they were commentaries on the society the author lived in and how it could be bettered, but since many people could not read yet, their reach was quite minimal.

It is only at the very beginning of the eighteenth century in France that the fairy tale really started to get recognition from the educated classes. And this time, it was mostly through female writers. Indeed, upper-class women like Madame d'Aulnoy—a baroness—and her *Contes de fée* (1697) or Madame de Murat—a countess—and her *Les nouveaux contes de fée* (1710), put into writing stories they had heard of, as well as stories they wholly created, and introduced fairy tales into their literary salons. Interesting fact, they were the first to designate such tales as fairy tales—*contes de fée* in French—, which strengthens the fact that fairy tales really come from France.

Nevertheless, the birth of the fairy tales is not attributed to these women nowadays, but to men, especially the Grimm Brothers, Charles Perrault, and Hans Christian Andersen—less popular nowadays but a precursor to these three men,

Giambattista Basile published his *Tale of Tales* between 1634 and 1636, in which there are versions of the fairy tales we now know.

Charles Perrault is considered to be the father of fairy tales, and he is indeed the first who really managed to put his imprint on the genre and make it flourish. In his *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé*, published in 1697, he put together oral folk tales, a high quality writing, modern literary devices and didactical morals, creating a unique collection of tales still famous to this day.

Andersen and the Grimm Brothers lived during the nineteenth century and were the two other major sources of growth for the fairy tale as a genre. If the Grimm Brothers were mostly collectors of tales, which they nonetheless modified when they put them into writing, Andersen really was an author, getting inspiration from the oral tales from around the world of course, but his style and his very clever use of language differentiated his tales—"The Little Mermaid" certainly is the most famous—from his contemporaries' and predecessors'. At first, in both cases, and even more so for the Grimm Brothers' tales, the stories were not aimed at children, they were full of violence and cruelty. However, with their rising popularity and as they reached children ears, their authors had to alter them. Since then, fairy tales are categorized as children's literature, which proves to be quite diminutive, as we know that some fairy tales really should not be read to children.

C. *Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel and Snow White*

The series of novels this study is based on took great inspiration from four of the most famous fairy tales¹³: “Cinderella”, “Little Red Riding Hood”, “Rapunzel” and “Snow White”. It seemed appropriate to first present them and their origins before studying how they were modernized in Marissa Meyer’s novels.

• *Cinderella*

The “Cinderella” fairy tale certainly is the one that has inspired the most creativity in the cultural industry. There are plenty of “Cinderella” retellings in children’s literature and in Young Adult literature nowadays. How many animated movies or series for children have been made on “Cinderella”—apart from the most obvious Disney one—until now ? One could not even tell¹⁴. There is also an immense amount of “Cinderella” live-action movies on the market, such as the *A Cinderella Story* franchise—six films distributed by Warner Bros. between 2004 and 2021—or even the 2015 Disney live-action *Cinderella*. All relying on a combination of Perrault’s, the Brothers Grimm’s and Disney’s versions, they seem to portray more or less the same story.

However, the origins of the “Cinderella” story are a lot more ancient. Indeed, the oldest “Cinderella” story could very well come from China, during the Tang Dynasty: “Ye Xian”. The “Ye Xian” story comes from *The Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang*, a collection of folk legends written by Duan Chengshi in the ninth century. “Ye Xian”’s story is very similar to the “Cinderella” story we are used to, however there is no fairy-godmother and no romantic encounter with a prince; instead, fish bones grant her wishes and the King decides to marry her out of curiosity and greed.

¹³ Here, the versions used as base for study are the ones from Pullman, Philip. *Fairy Tales from the Brothers Grimm: A New English Version*, New York, Viking Penguin, 2012.

¹⁴ For examples: *Cinderella* (1994) by Jetlag Productions; *Shinderera Monogatari* (1996), a NHK Japanese animated series.

In several interviews¹⁵, Marissa Meyer herself said that *Cinder* being set in China—in the novel in New Beijing—was a direct link to the “Ye Xian” story, which she believes is the very first “Cinderella” story and helped fuel her imagination to create the world Cinder’s adventures take place in. It also created a sense of novelty and diversity, because we are so used to “Cinderella” stories taking place in European settings. Indeed, since Perrault’s and the Grimm Brothers’ versions took place in France and Germany, almost every retelling thus far seemed to have adopted the same setting, or else to be set in the United States, which still is a Western setting.

• ***Little Red Riding Hood (LRRH)***

“LRRH” must be, at least as much as “Cinderella”, one of the most known fairy tales. There are two main versions of the fairy tale, one by Charles Perrault—“Le petit chaperon rouge”, in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, Contes de Ma Mère l’Oye*, 1697—and the other by the Grimm brothers—“Rotkäppchen”, in *Kinderund Hausmärchen*, 1812. The main difference is that in Perrault’s version, the girl dies at the end, eaten by the wolf, whereas in the Grimm version, the wolf eats alive both the grandmother and the girl, but they are rescued by a hunter, and put rocks in the wolf’s belly, who dies shortly afterwards and gets skinned by the hunter. In this second version, LRRH goes back home having learnt a very frightening lesson, that she should never trust a stranger ever again. The Grimm Brothers were collectors and they heard this story from a French upper-class girl, so maybe this is why their version has a happy ending for both LRRH and her grandmother. However, there are plenty of other versions that stayed oral accounts. In most of them the grandmother dies, and in some, cannibalism plays a part, as the wolf makes LRRH eat the flesh of her grandmother in various dishes.

¹⁵ “CINDER!! Interview with Marissa Meyer” on the *Enchanted Inkpot* website in 2012, “Marissa Meyer: The world isn’t made of only white people, so fictional worlds shouldn’t be either” on the *The Guardian’s* website in 2016, “INTERVIEW WITH MARISSA MEYER” on *The Book Wars* website in 2013.

If Perrault's version was considered to be first written one for a long time, there is now evidence that he might not have invented every detail from thin air after all. Indeed, a Latin poem, "De puella a lupelis seruata" ("About a Girl Saved from Wolf Cubs"), written by Egbert of Liège¹⁶ in 1022, contains certain details of the story that cannot be ignored: a little girl wearing a red tunic with a hood, the fact that she is alone and unaware of the danger, and a wolf which abducts her. Even though this short poem is mostly religious—the wolf abducts the girl for its cubs to eat her, but as she is baptized, the cubs do not harm her—it is highly possible that it had an influence on the oral versions told afterwards and thus on Perrault's version.

It is very well known that the moral of this tale is that children should never talk to strangers and be careful around them. "LRRH" is also a flagrant cautionary tale, in the sense that it warns its reader/listener about pedophilia. Indeed, the choice of the wolf as the villain of the story is not innocent. Wolves are beautiful wild animals, they are very smart and when they hunt, they often ambush their prey using ruse. Children thus must be careful when crossing paths with adults they do not know, especially when they try to persuade them of doing something with their suave voice and seducing manners, as the 'wolf' in "LRRH" does to the girl.

• *Rapunzel*

It is in *Kinderund Hausmärchen* or *Children's and Household Tales*, by the Brothers Grimm, published in 1812, that we find the version of "Rapunzel" we know best. This tale is not as famous as the other three we are studying, but it still got its Disney and Barbie films. It has two major written antecedents: the Italian "Petrosinella" in Giambattista Basile's *Il Pantamerone* (1634-1636) and the French "Persinette" by Charlotte-Rose de

¹⁶ Egbert of Liège was a teacher at the cathedral school in Liège. He wrote a collection of moralizing and educational poems for his pupils, *Fecunda Ratis*, of which "De puella a lupelis seruata" is a part.

Caumont La Force (1698). “Persinette” sure is the sweetest of the three versions, ending with the fairy—a witch in the Grimm version and a ogress in Basile’s—repenting when she sees how much Persinette and the Prince love each other and helping them get back to the Prince’s realm where they live happily ever after. The three have a happily ever after ending, however what happens of the witch/ogress and of the parents of the girl is not told the same way, or not at all.

In every version though, there is the theme of the “adoption” of a child by an older woman, which was more and more common at the time, when children often died young and illegitimate children were abandoned by their mothers, who were afraid of the shame they would bring them. The other important “lesson” the tale brings to light, is that sometimes, sheltering young girls from reality, from men, and never telling them about sex is not the best idea, it can even lead to rebellion; this is shown by the fact that having never seen a man in her life, Rapunzel falls in the arms of the Prince and quickly gets pregnant, not even knowing what is happening—in the Grimm version, she unknowingly reveals her secret affair to the witch when she tells her she does not understand why her clothes are getting tighter and tighter.

- ***Snow White***

“Snow White” was the first fairy tale to be adapted into a Disney film, back in the 1930s, and was a tremendous success, followed by many more fairy-tale-inspired Disney films. Once again, the best-known and first written version of the fairy tale was the Grimm Brothers’, from 1812. However, there is evidence that this story might have been inspired from the life of a real person, Margaretha von Waldeck (1533-1554), a German countess. When she was very young, her mother died and her father married a beautiful woman, who was obsessed with her appearance. Jealous of her step-daughter’s beauty, she got her husband to agree to send the then sixteen-year-old girl at the royal court of Brussels so that she would find a suitable husband. She and the future king Philipp II of

Spain fell in love, but before it could get any further, she died of a mysterious illness. As her stepmother was still jealous of her beauty and of her possible better position in society, some say she may have found a way to poison her, or maybe it was the Spanish authorities—Margaretha was not their first choice.

To add to the fairy tale elements of her life, Margaretha was from a region in Germany where there were lots of copper mines; the children who worked in the mines did not grow a lot and their backs were curved, so that they were called ‘dwarves’. Speaking of dwarves, they were seven in the Grimm fairy tale; the number seven is often linked to the Bible—God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh—or is given meanings of completeness and perfection: Snow White is perfection, she is the most beautiful woman, and she seeks completeness, wishing to find love—as shows the “Someday my prince will come” song in the 1938 Disney movie. Snow White seeks the presence of a man to complete her life, this is one big theme of the tale, but another theme is even more flagrant, the woman’s place in society¹⁷: in the house, keeping it clean, cooking and doing everything to make the “man of the house” feel more at ease and make his life more comfortable; this is what the dwarves ask of Snow White in order for her to stay in their cottage. At the time, it was the ‘normal’ life of a woman, who was supposed to be the perfect housekeeper, mother and wife—even more so in the 1930s, when the Disney film came out. However, twenty-first-century minds find it very diminishing and a reflection of the long way women have come since then, even though there certainly is, still, a long way to go.

In a 1957 collection of tales, *Italian Folktales* by Italo Calvino, you can find a very interesting tale: “Girococcola”¹⁸. Even though posterior to the Grimm’s “Snow White”, I thought it was interesting to mention, in connection to Marissa Meyer’s novels, which

¹⁷ See Chapter 1-II-B for more on the place of women in fairy tales.

¹⁸ Talked about in Seal, Graham. “Giricoccola”, *Encyclopedia of Folk Heroes*, Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO, 2001, pp. 88-89.

this paper is about. Indeed, “Girococola” is a mix of “Cinderella” and “Snow White”, and the moon¹⁹ is mentioned; from “Cinderella”, it takes the two jealous sisters, but for the most part it is inspired from “Snow White”. In this tale, it is the moon who tells the girls which one is the prettiest, not a mirror, and when the girl is exiled, the moon—personified—takes Girococola to their house. The two sisters send an astrologer to hunt down and kill Girococola, who the moon saves twice and begs to pay more attention in the future. The third time—in the Grimm “Snow White” version, the queen tries to kill Snow white thrice too—, the moon sells Girococola—who has become a statue—because they are tired of saving her. A prince buys the statue. Eventually Girococola becomes human again, marries the prince, and the two sisters die of rage.

Overall, the Fairy Tale does have some roots in the Folktale world; the Grimm Brothers, Perrault, Andersen, Basile, etc., all took their inspiration from tales transmitted orally. The Grimm Brothers even purposely went to people to hear their stories and collect them for their *Kinderund Hausmärchen*, first published in 1812, and revisited seven times until 1857, as Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm wanted their tales to fit to their audience’s expectations and society’s changes. Hence, other elements went into account when writing fairy tales. As said in the part about “Snow White”, sometimes, even history played a part in these tales. History, mythology, other kinds of literature, like the Latin poem spoken about in the part about “LRRH”.

Borrowing from multiples sources, fairy tales are now known all over the world and fascinate people. Nowadays, they are a great imagination starter for authors like

¹⁹ The Moon’s role here is interesting, as it shows how important a role it plays in folklore. Legends and myths have always existed about the Moon, making it a deity and personifying it, or attributing it the “power to disturb the mind”: “The Moon of Myth, Folklore, and Wisdom”, *Fly Me to the Moon*, 2018 < <https://flymetothemoontravel.com/moon-myth-folklore-wisdom/> >.

Marissa Meyer to write incredibly creative stories. Let us see now what really makes a fairy tale, what are the typical tropes and structures constructing and defining them.

II. The Traditional Fairy Tale Structure

As for any other genre, the Fairy Tale has its particularities, which make a text belong to the category 'Fairy Tale' or not. When analyzing the structure of a text, it can be tempting to take a descriptive angle, but, as Tzvetan Todorov says:

One can contrast two possible attitudes toward literature: a theoretical attitude and a descriptive attitude. The nature of structural analysis will be essentially theoretical and non-descriptive; in other words, the aim of such a study will never be the description of a concrete work. (Todorov: 70)

If describing the text is not the point, then what is it? Here, the point is to understand the structure of the text, in order to be able to recognize it in other similar works:

To propose a theory of the structure and operation of the literary discourse, to present a spectrum of literary possibilities, in such a manner that the existing works of literature appear as particular instances that have been realized. (Todorov: 71)

This is why studying the plot of a work seems to be the best angle of analysis.

Here are going to be explained the usual types of plot that can be found in a fairy tale. As we will see, there are a few, however the four fairy tales this paper is based on answer to one in particular, a more general one.

A. A General Structure of Fairy Tales

In 1910, a tale classification system was created by Antti Aarne, a Finnish folklorist, and was later revised by American folklorist Stith Thompson in 1928 and 1961, and eventually by German folklorist Hans-Jörg Uther in 2004. It is now called the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) classification, and regroups similar tales in categories, to facilitate their study. There are Animal Tales (1-299), Tales of Magic (300-749), Religious

Tales (750-849), Realistic Tales (850-999), Tales of the Stupid Ogre (Giant, Devil / 1000-1199), Anecdotes and Jokes (1200-1999), and Formula Tales (2000-2399); each title of category is self-explanatory. As an example, “Little Red Riding Hood” is codified ATU 333 ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, in the category ‘Tales of Magic’ and in the sub-category ‘Supernatural Adversaries’, with other similar tales like “Little Red Cap”, “True History of Little Golden Hood” or even “Uncle Wolf”; “Cinderella” is part of the tale type ATU 510 ‘Cinderella and Cap o’ Rushes’, in the category ‘Tales of Magic’ and the sub-category ‘Supernatural Helpers’. However, the ATU classification does not regroup only fairy tales, it is a classification of all folk tales, and even though it was discussed earlier whether or not fairy tales belong to folk tales, here they are classified together, as being a part of, or at least coming from the oral tradition.

Generally, fairy tales are short stories—usually three to four pages long—, with a good hero(ine), evil villain(s), some magical help, a morale and a happy ending, although the happy ending part is not always present²⁰.

In almost every fairy tale, the main protagonist is a good person, a hero or heroine. Usually, it is a simple naive boy or girl who is not especially in a good place in life, but will get opportunities and use them to evolve. Jack Zipes describes fairy tale heroes quite accurately:

Most of the male heroes are dashing, adventurous, and courageous. Most of the female protagonists are beautiful, passive, and industrious. Their common feature is cunning: they all know how to take advantage of the rules of their society and the conventions of the fairy tale to profit. (Zipes, 2015: 146)

If there are heroes, automatically there are villains too. The hero has to fight or outsmart the villain, which Zipes describes as follows:

The villains are those who use their status, weapons, and words intentionally to exploit, control, transfix, incarcerate, and destroy for their benefit [...] They have no respect or consideration for nature and other human beings, and they actually seek

²⁰ As in Perrault’s version of “Little Red Riding Hood”

to abuse magic by preventing change and causing everything to be transfixed according to their interests. (*ibid*, 127-128)

Magic is a big trope of the Fairy Tale, and most fairy tales are set in a magical, wonderland kingdom, which makes the reader's experience easier and more enjoyable, because it is always more entertaining to read adventures that take place in an other world than your own for a change. Magic almost always has a role to play, either to help the hero, or as a weapon the villain uses to try and destroy them. It often takes the form of a talking animal or it has to do with the transformation of an animal into a human and vice versa.

Restoration vs. Rise fairy tales

There are two major kinds of fairy tales, the ones we hear about the most are restoration and rise fairy tales.

A restoration fairy tale is one in which the hero's journey starts on a high note, they are usually from royalty or at least belonging to one of the highest social classes. But something happens and they have to face hardships and tasks to get back to their original status. Examples of restoration fairy tales would be "Sleeping Beauty" or "Snow White", in which a princess has to go into hiding—or in Sleeping Beauty's passive case, endure it all without doing anything—and overcome hardships to one day get back to her royal status.

Rise fairy tales are different, in the sense that the hero starts his or her journey from the very bottom of the social ladder:

Rise fairy tales begin with a dirt-poor girl or boy who suffers the effects of grinding poverty and whose story continues with tests, tasks, and trials until magic brings about a marriage to royalty and a happy accession to great wealth.

(Bottigheimer, 2009: 11-12)

For example, "Cinderella" is a rise fairy tale, a poor girl living a maid-like life who meets a prince at the royal ball, with magical help, and ends up marrying him—in Cinder's case however, the story is more one of a restoration fairy tale, because from the very start she

was the heir to the Lunar Throne. The rise fairy tale was very popular in the 1800s, because it showed that anyone could improve their life if they really wanted it.

B. Moral Lessons and Women's Place in Fairy Tales

Fairy tales were used to educate children at some point in History, telling them what not to do, what was right and what was wrong, which examples they should follow and what kind of person they should strive to become, creating models of what children should be like as they grew up, depending on their gender²¹. They also served as social commentaries from the 1800s on, when daily life became more structured and amusement was given less and less space. As Zipes put it:

The classical tales were turned upside down and inside out to question the value system upheld by the dominant socialization process and to keep wonder, curiosity, and creativity alive. [...] By the 1860s numerous writers continued the 'romantic' project of subverting the formal structure of the canonized tales (Perrault, Grimm, Bechstein, Andersen) and to experiment with the repertoire of motifs, characters, and topoi to defend the free imagination of the individual and to extend the discursive social commentary of the fairy tale. (Zipes, 2015: 148-9)

For many years and in most fairy tales we grew up with, there mostly was an example to follow for young girls. This is what is explained here:

As Lieberman²² concluded, "We must consider the possibility that the classical attributes of 'femininity' found in these stories are in fact imprinted in children and reinforced by the stories themselves. Analyses of the influence of most popular children's literature may give us an insight into some of the origins of psycho-sexual identity" (395). There was—and still is—widespread agreement with Lieberman's argument that fairy tales "have been made the repositories of the dreams, hopes and fantasies of generations of girls" and that "[m]illions of women must surely have formed their psycho-sexual self-concepts, and their ideas of what they could or

²¹ Read *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* by Jack Zipes for more on the subject.

²² In Lieberman, Marica. " 'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale." *College English* 34 (1972): 383-95. Rpt. in Zipes, Doni Bet on the Prince 185-200.

could not accomplish, what sort of behavior would be rewarded, and of the nature of reward itself, in part from their favorite fairy tales” (385). (Haase: 17)

Indeed, many fairy tales portray women as either beautiful, naive young girls who always need saving, or as wicked, sour, witch-like women; whereas men are always handsome and heroic. One of the most flagrant example of this would be Snow White, who was made to portray the perfect housewife in the eponymous Disney movie, while also flagrantly showing the lack of concern shown to sexual consent. Indeed, the prince kisses her to wake her up—in the 1959 film *Sleeping Beauty* this happens too—but if the girl is asleep or unconscious, she surely could not have agreed to be touched in that way, and that showed boys that it was okay, when it was—and still is—really not. Of course, not all fairy tales were that misogynistic but most of them and most of the ones we know, that were collected by the Grimm Brothers or Perrault—fairy tales written by men are the ones that are the most famous even today, whereas versions written by women are rarely heard of—, portrayed a patriarchal society with patriarchal norms.

The Fairy Tale has its own structure, based on plots, motifs and topoi, that reoccur in most occurrences. There are different types of fairy tales, that were classified by scholars—UTA classification for example—, to help people studying them find their way through them. They can even be classified under the terms Rise or Restoration fairy tales, which are the most common patterns. Except for “LRRH”, which is a little different in the sense that it does not involve royalty at all, the tales we are interested in here correspond to these patterns. It is now time to see how Marissa Meyer incorporated all these themes and motifs in her *The Lunar Chronicles* series.

III. *The Lunar Chronicles*' Faithfulness to the Traditional Fairy Tale

In her *The Lunar Chronicles* series, Marissa Meyer used four of the best known classic fairy tales in the popular culture to create an extraordinary universe, with characters whose adventures gave new perspectives on old stories. How much of Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel, and Snow White is there in Cinder, Scarlet, Cress, and Winter, is the central theme of this sub-part.

A. *What Remains from the Original Fairy Tales*

A fairy tale rewriting has to keep at least some of the main elements of the original fairy tale it is inspired from, to qualify as a rewriting. In *The Lunar Chronicles*, although the four girls are very different from their traditional fairy tales selves, elements of their lives are echoing them.

The “Cinderella” heroine is a young girl whose father has died after marrying a woman who already had two daughters, while Cinder was adopted by a couple who already had two daughters, and the father has died, leaving her with her stepmother and two stepsisters. In the two stories, Cinderella/Cinder is mistreated by her stepmother and stepsisters—although Cinder’s youngest stepsister Peony actually loves her and they have a very good relationship—and her role in the household is not one of a member of the family, but rather one of a maid. Indeed, Cinder is the only money-earning person of the household, she works as a mechanic and all the money she makes goes directly into Adri’s pockets—her stepmother. Just like Cinderella, Cinder goes to the ball without her stepmother’s knowing and dances with the prince. When she has to run away, she loses her cyborg foot, which the prince picks up, reminding the reader of Cinderella losing her glass slipper when she has to run away when midnight strikes.

Little Red Riding Hood wears a red cape, she is seduced out of her way by a wolf, which attacks her grandmother. These elements are present in Scarlet's story. Indeed, she has red hair and wears a red hoodie, her grandmother disappears and the reader learns that she has been kidnapped by wolfish Lunar soldiers—a genetically modified unit of the Lunar army. Scarlet is also seduced by one of these soldiers who calls himself 'Wolf'.

From her very early childhood, Cress was excluded from Lunar society and held captive alone in a satellite orbiting the earth, receiving regular visits only from Sybil, the queen's Head thaumaturge²³. This is very similar to Rapunzel's story, who was also held captive alone in a tower by a witch since she was a baby: both Cress and Rapunzel were taken away from their parents very young by a mean lady with magical abilities. They also share the common trait of having extremely long hair. Just like Rapunzel, Cress yearns for freedom. She wants to discover the world she has been kept away from for all her life, and in a sense, she also meets her 'prince' when escaping—Thorne, a thief helping Cinder, who might remind the reader of Flynn Rider, the man who helps Rapunzel escape and becomes her prince in the Disney movie.

Snow White is hated by her stepmother the Evil Queen because she is known to be more beautiful than her. Winter is Levana's stepdaughter, and from early on, people started to notice how beautiful the princess was and how her beauty was going to surpass the queen's. However Levana did not try to have Winter killed, she scarred her face—which made her beauty even more striking according to the other characters in the book. There are no dwarves in the story, but maybe they are represented by the people on Luna who love and support her. Winter has a menagerie, with at least a white wolf, a white stag and albino rabbits, which she often speaks to and considers her

²³ A thaumaturge is a Lunar working for the queen, who has heavily trained on mastering their lunar gift of mind control. They use it to do the queen's bidding, usually torturing people into saying or doing things.

friends—reminding the reader of Snow White’s capacity to communicate with birds and other animals in the Disney movie for example.

B. A Hero and a Villain

It is quite easy to distinguish heroes from villains in this story; the obvious main heroine being Cinder and the obvious main villain being Levana—though Cinder’s stepmother Adri would have been the first logical villain of her story, she does not compare to Levana.

Every fairy tale has its hero, and this rewriting does not disobey the rule. Cinder is the epitome of the hero, she has a good heart, good intentions, she is really nice, a good friend, and from the very start she is really likable. The reader sympathizes with her from the first lines of the book, she is hardworking and funny, but most importantly, she is relatable, because she is not the perfect pretty princess we are used to²⁴.

The villain of Cinder’s story is her aunt Levana, but she is also everyone’s villain in the novels. Levana is the queen of Luna, the tyrant of an absolute monarchy. She masters her lunar gift like no one else and uses it to make her people love her and avoid rebellions. Described in the books as pure evil, the very mention of her name makes people tremble. She is the perfect fairy tale villain. Nevertheless, like every villain, she is more ambiguous than that.

In a novella²⁵ she published after *Cress*, Marissa Meyer explained why Levana is the way she is in the main novels. The reader learns that before being a villain, Levana herself had a villain, her own older sister Queen Channary—Cinder’s biological mother.

²⁴ See Chapter 7 on Otherness in *The Lunar Chronicles*.

²⁵ *Fairest*, New York, Feiwel & Friends, 2015.

Channary bullied and tortured Levana when they were children, and was responsible for Levana's face being disfigured by fire. This event led to the building of Levana's resentment and of her psychopathic personality. The reader cannot help but feel pity for Levana, even though this feeling soon goes away, as Levana's despicable actions in the novella get crueler and crueler. This trend of rewriting the story through the villain's point of view²⁶ appeared around the year 2015 and offered a new and very interesting view on villains, because no one was ever born evil.

Marissa Meyer succeeded in her rewritings because when reading the first lines of introduction of each of the fairy tale-inspired heroines, the reader directly understands and does not need further explanations. The world the author created is both magical and real, it allows for the development of each character's arch and makes it easy for the reader to immerse in it. The next two chapters will concentrate on this dystopian world Cinder and her friends evolve in, while also exploring the Young Adult genre *The Lunar Chronicles* is a part of.

²⁶ Many were published, by writers such as Serena Valentino (*Mistress of All, Fairest of All, The Odd Sisters*, and others) and Marissa Meyer later published *Heartless* in 2016, her version of the Queen of Hearts' story before the events of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll (1865). In 2014, a new live-action Disney movie was released, *Maleficent*, on Maleficent's—from *Sleeping Beauty*—side of the story, with actress Angelina Jolie.

Chapter 2: When Dystopia and Science-Fiction Have a Baby...

Even genres like science fiction, initially informed (especially in America) largely by optimistic visions of the possibilities inherent in technological progress, have taken a dystopian turn in recent years with works (like the cyberpunk fiction of William Gibson and others) that show an attitude toward future technology that is ambivalent at best. (Booker: 17-18)

The dystopian genre is very prolific nowadays, but the fact that its beginning dates back from early twentieth century is widely accepted, with novels such as *Brave New World* (Aldous Huxley, 1931). The twentieth century witnessed the rise of the nationalists, communism, the beginning of consumerism, and the development of new technologies. All these elements made people fear the near future, the drifting of the contemporary world, and the changes on the political scene (Bazin: 10).

Etymologically, a dystopia is the contrary of an utopia, a bad utopia—*dys-* means ‘bad, ill, difficult’ and *utopia*²⁷ means ‘nowhere’. A Utopia is an ‘imaginary perfect world where everyone is happy’ according to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, or as Laurent Bazin says: ‘lieu du mieux-être idéal où une communauté ordonnée organise le bonheur de chacun’ (11). Nevertheless, utopias are eventually always flawed, because this ‘happiness’ always comes at a price²⁸. In a dystopia then, the illusion of happiness present in utopias is nowhere to be found, and as Laurent Bazin says, a dystopia is: ‘une utopie qui a mal tourné’ (11), it is constructed on good ideas but their incorporation and realization into the society are usually where the problems stem from. The word ‘dystopia’ is also used in the medical world, indeed it refers to an eye problem, an orbital imbalance. The fact that dystopias are also linked to vision explains the role that

²⁷ Term coined by Thomas More in 1516, which he used to title his book *Utopia*. The Latin word *utopia* comes from Greek *ou* “not” and *topos* “place”. Another close interpretation is possible, since the very similar Greek word *eu-topos* means “better place”.

²⁸ Read *Candide* by Voltaire, or *Gulliver’s Travels* by Jonathan Swift for example.

surveillance often plays in dystopias²⁹. Laurent Bazin cites Foucault about the Bentham panopticon³⁰: ‘le contrôle des masses passe par la capacité à les avoir en permanence dans sa ligne de mire’ (16), showing how close to reality dystopias can be.

At the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first, dystopias are about new collective fears, linked to several traumatizing events—diplomatic, economical, societal, environmental, cultural. They are everywhere, from best-sellers to blockbusters, and show that this era is the era of *souçon* (36).

A literary genre or verbal construct whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the *presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition*, and whose main device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment.³¹

Many are those who have tried to define Science Fiction (SF), and whether or not they are right is not of our concern here, but each can help the Science Fiction novice better understand what they are reading. To begin with a very simple and straightforward description of what SF is, we could say that it involves scientific innovations and that it happens in a fictional world. Of course, it is not so simple.

For a long time³², SF was not considered as a true literary genre, it was more seen as sub-literature, in comparison to the great Classics, which ‘deserved’ being studied and talked about by scholars. SF was seen as literature for teenagers³³, full of stereotypes, an

²⁹ In the *Handmaid’s Tale*, by Margaret Atwood, the agents of Gilead’s secret police are called The Eyes. In *1984* by George Orwell, ‘Big Brother is Watching You’.

³⁰ A prison model imagined by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham, a circular construction making the surveillance of the inmates by a central tower permanent and intrusive. Go to <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bentham-project/who-was-jeremy-bentham/panopticon> for more on the subject.

³¹ Darko Suvin’s definition of Science Fiction, in “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre.” *College English*, vol. 34, no. 3, National Council of Teachers of English, 1972, p. 375.

³² The history of SF is not going to be detailed here, but Irène Langlet’s *La Science Fiction* (2006) or Adam Roberts’ *Science Fiction* (2006), for example, both have dedicated parts on it.

³³ Read Chapter 3 on Young Adult literature.

outlet for their fantasies, and a way to connect with each other through online communities—fandom. However, this is only a small part of SF, and this vision of the genre has changed and is still changing. Scholars like Darko Suvin wrote on SF and theorized it³⁴; he found that for a text to be SF, there had to be a cognitive movement from ordinary references to imaginary references, which he called ‘cognitive estrangement’. Cognitive estrangement implies that the reader is not used to what the text describes and has never encountered it, it not being explainable by any given belief—a god, a legend (Langlet: 24). The thing that creates estrangement is called a *novum*, it is usually the scientific innovation that changes and affects everything in the novel, as time travel often is. Sometimes, the cognitive operations the reader has to make to understand the text are so dense and difficult, that the SF author has to use various didactic strategies, leaving clues in the text, or explaining the *novum* in a paragraph dedicated to it. Those signs to decipher create a sense of wonder, which is paramount to any SF novel. The reader has to imagine a lot of things that are not part of their empirical paradigm, and the author has to make sure they give enough clues for the reader not to be overwhelmed or discouraged.

I. A Recipe for a Great Read

‘Clearly, there is a great deal of overlap between dystopian fiction and science fiction, and many texts belong to both categories’ (Booker: 19). As dystopias usually make social commentaries, and our society is ever more connected to science, the link between Dystopia and SF is clearly obvious, even though they are not always paired together. All SF novels take place in a more-or-less distant future, in societies that have greatly improved their technological and scientific skills compared to ours—meaning the

³⁴ As in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, that he published in 1979.

author's and certainly also the readers'. These technologies and scientific advances usually are completely integrated to the society's dynamic, and are used in order to better it. It is easy to see how a dystopian narrative could take place in such a setting. In Huxley's *Brave New World*, one's place in society is determined before one is even born and babies are no longer created inside women's wombs, but they are artificially fecundated and grown in incubators, in which they are formatted into the humans they will be later.

Even though at first they do not have the same aim—a dystopia usually criticizes society, politics, and a science fiction novel usually centers on the development of science and technologies—the two genres converge in many places, and it is not rare to read a dystopian novel in which science has a very important role. As is the case in *The Lunar Chronicles*.

When you research *The Lunar Chronicles* on the internet, it is always associated with SF and Dystopia. As we have just seen, these two genres pair very well together, and Marissa Meyer's novels are not an exception. The novels are full of technologies, but not unimaginable advancements, not light-years away from our current-early-2020s technology level, so that they are not difficult to picture in our minds and blend easily into the dystopian atmosphere, which brings back the major tropes of the totalitarian regime and the division by sectors of the society, which will be discussed next.

II. Dystopian Science Fiction in *The Lunar Chronicles*

A. *Technological advancements: the science fiction aspects*

First and foremost, post-humanism has a great role in the series. N. Katherine Hayles gives a very full definition of what is the posthuman in her book *How we Became Posthuman*:

First, the posthuman view privileges *informational pattern* over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman view considers *consciousness*, regarded as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition long before Descartes thought he was a mind thinking, as an epiphenomenon, as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that *extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born*. Fourth, and most important, by these and other means, the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with *intelligent machines*. In the posthuman, there are *no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation*, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals. ([emphasis mine] Hayles, 1999: 2-3)

Cinder, the main character, is a cyborg, she has been for as long as she remembers. The changes in her body had had to be made in order for her to survive a terrible incident she went through when she was still very young—a fire. Here is a description of her body, when it is scanned in a lab by Dr. Erland:

A girl full of wires. It was as if someone had chopped her down the middle, dividing her front half from her back half, and then put her cartoonish image into a medical textbook. Her heart, her brain, her intestines, her muscles, her blue veins. Her control panel, her synthetic hand and leg, wires that trailed from the base of her skull all the way down her spine and out to her prosthetic limbs. The scar tissue where flesh met metal. [...] She had not known about the metal vertebrae along her spine, or the four metal ribs, or the synthetic tissue around her heart, or the metal splints around her bones in her right leg. [...] She was 36.28 percent not human. (Meyer, *Cinder*: 82)

This description is far from 'seamless', in great contrast with Hayles' definition. Indeed, the imagery is that of a butcher's work with the expression 'chopped her down the middle'. The accumulation of her humans organs (heart, brain, intestines, muscles, blue

veins) next to the accumulation of her cybernetic parts (control panel, synthetic hand and leg, wires, prosthetic limbs) both create a sense of cognitive dissonance. The lack of harmony and empathy showed here puts the emphasis on her dehumanization, dehumanization confirmed by the 'she was 36.28 percent not human' at the end of the extract.

Still in the posthuman theme, in this world, there are androids playing housekeeper, nurse, or even policeman; escort-droids looking exactly like humans; AIs (Artificial Intelligence) like Iko, Cinder's friend, who was put into an escort-droid body; ID chips in every earthen's wrist, to be able to locate and identify them anytime, anywhere. Technological advancement also takes the form of comms, direct messages people receive on their devices, from private conversations to governmental alerts and notifications of hospitalization. Cars are ancient artifacts in this society, they have been replaced by hovers... A basic of SF novels, spaceships are seen multiple times in the novels; a spaceship is the headquarters of our heroes for most of the story, and generally spaceships are needed to go from Earth to Luna and vice versa.

Experiments and genetic mutations play a role in categorizing *The Lunar Chronicles* into the SF genre too. A special unit of the Lunar army has been genetically modified, wolf DNA was added to their human original DNA, so that these soldiers have wolf canines, a lot more strength, speed, and wolf instincts—being part of a pack with an alpha, omegas, betas and in general having beast-like behaviors. Another even more special unit of wolf soldiers was also created, but this time, the soldiers do not look like humans, they have become real beasts, barely think like humans anymore and look like these old-school werewolves you could see in the *Underworld*³⁵ movies for example. There surely is a lot to say about genetic mutations such as this one. Creating a species that is evidently capable of annihilating the human race if not under tight control is a big

³⁵ *Underworld* by Len Wiseman in 2003 (Lakeshore Entertainment), four other movies complete the franchise. The movie centers on the secret war between vampires and lycans (werewolves).

risk to take, and we can only hope that this stay in the fiction realm, because people “have argued that the human species may one day be replaced by a superior artificial race of its own creation. If this were to happen, it would likely be the result of our having modified ourselves out of a sustainable biological existence” (Haney: 19).

Another big SF trope, is the alien, the other, the estranged species coming from another planet:

The importance of the figure of the alien for the genre can hardly be exaggerated. Since H. G. Wells’ ground breaking *The War of the Worlds* (1897), innumerable novels and stories have been written featuring “SF’s most versatile metaphor, its signature trope, the Alien” (Monk 186). (Gomel: 2)

Here, the alien was and still is human, but living on the moon has changed its DNA and given it the power to control minds. Indeed, humans have colonized the moon centuries ago; a dome makes it possible to live on and a whole new society was created. Lunars are almost considered as aliens to Earthens—and the fact that there is a distinction in the book between these ‘Earthens’ and ‘Lunars’ through these names accentuates the otherness of Lunars—and they terrify them. SF readers can

Encounter “alien constructions”—metaphors and concepts specific to the genre, such as the cyborg, human/alien hybrids, aliens—that provide unfamiliar images for familiar identities and concepts and explore the implications of theories within a (pleasurable) narrative framework. These alien constructions, embedded within a narrative context that enables identifications, can provide us with empowering metaphors that allow critical evaluations of the theories we rely on to explain our social realities. (Melzer: 11)

It is interesting to see that the main protagonist, Cinder, is a Lunar too, and that will contribute to her feeling of alienation³⁶ to the world she evolved in.

³⁶ See Part 3 Chapter 7 on Otherness.

B. Rebellion against a Totalitarian Regime: the dystopian aspects

As Philip Stoner says in his article on dystopian literature, “The single most defining attribute of dystopian literature is the presence of an oppressive government body” (Stoner: 2-3). On Earth, after four World Wars, all the countries and communities have managed to find peace and to live with each other, through cooperation and “team-work”, as every head of State regularly reunite via video-chat to discuss international matters. Presidents, Prime ministers, Queens and Emperors rule the Earth, but they are all more or less liberal³⁷ with different degrees of democracy. Whereas on Luna, things are a lot different. Luna is an absolute monarchy, but surely worse than Louis XIV’s, as Queen Levana—a cruel, power-hungry, and vindictive tyrant—manipulates and constantly threatens her population to keep them from rebelling, which she does during a visit in New Beijing, at Kai’s Imperial Palace, when the crowd protests against her being on Earth:

The queen’s success at calming the crowd had been far too easy; Kai had hoped for at least a hint of struggle from the citizens. [...]

“It is a most useful trick”, said Sybil, sitting on the edge of the chaise lounge by the holographic fire. “Particularly when dealing with unruly citizens, which are never tolerated on Luna.”

“I’ve heard that when citizens are unruly, there’s usually a good reason for it,” said Kai. Torin flashed him a warning frown, but he ignored it. “And brainwashing doesn’t exactly seem like the proper solution.”

Sybil folded her hands politely in her lap. “*Proper* is such a suggestive word. This solution is *effective*, and that can hardly be argued with.” (*Cinder*: 207)

Propaganda and royal messages are regularly broadcasted through the entire country, and the population is under video surveillance, each person being identified by facial recognition, their movements traced and recorded.

³⁷ Liberalism is a “political doctrine that takes protecting and enhancing the freedom of the individual to be the central problem of politics. Liberals typically believe that government is necessary to protect individuals from being harmed by others, but they also recognize that government itself can pose a threat to liberty” (*Britannica* website).

Along with manipulating her population, Queen Levana has committed genocide³⁸. Indeed, among Lunars, not all have the gift of manipulating bio-electricity; those who do not are called ‘shells’, they cannot manipulate people, but they also cannot be manipulated, and this is why Levana hates them, mainly because they can see her real face behind the façade. Thus, every child born on Luna who is considered to be a shell is taken away from their parents, never to be seen again. Later, the reader learns that the children were not killed right away. They were experimented on, their blood taken away, to produce Lethumosis—a highly deadly virus which would get used to weaken Earthens in order to, at one point, bargain whatever the queen wanted in exchange for a miraculous cure—and its cure. Here is an excerpt which also shows the explanation Levana gives her population to keep on taking away shell babies:

“Did you not think,” said Levana, her voice loud and crisp, “there might be a reason your queen has chosen to keep your son and all the other ungifted Lunars separate from our citizens? That we may have a purpose that serves the good of *all* our people by containing them as we have?”

The man gulped hard enough that Winter could see his Adam’s apple bobbing. “I know, My Queen. I know you use their blood for ... experimentation. But ... but you have *so many*, and he’s only a baby, and...”

“Not only is his blood valuable to the success of our political alliances, the likes of which I cannot expect a janitor from the outer sectors to understand, but he is also a shell, and his kind have proven themselves to be dangerous and untrustworthy, as you will recall from the assassinations of King Marrok and Queen Jannali eighteen years ago. Yet you would subject our society to this threat?” (*Winter*: 5-6)

Levana speaks to her people in a demeaning way (‘did you not think’) and uses rhetorical questions to make their worries sound silly. She justifies her horrible actions with a pseudo-scientific reason (the shells’ blood is ‘valuable’), and uses an isolated incident (her parents’ assassination) to incriminate a entire group of people. She makes it so that shells are a threat to peace and are dangerous, so they should be kept away from society.

³⁸ A genocide is “the deliberate and systematic destruction of a group of people because of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, or race. The term, derived from the Greek *genos* (“race,” “tribe,” or “nation”) and the Latin *cide* (“killing”), was coined by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-born jurist who served as an adviser to the U.S. Department of War during World War II.” (*Britannica* website)

Another element that could be considered as a trope in dystopian literature would be a division of the population and of the “country” by sectors, each producing something for the Palace, for the rich, while living in total poverty. This trope can be found in the *Hunger Games*³⁹ series for example, set in the fictional world of Panem—twelve districts plus the Capitol where the elite lives—where each district has its speciality and make the economy work, at the advantage of the privileged Capitol population. The situation is very similar in *The Lunar Chronicles*: “Most of the paper goods available in Artemisia’s shops were made from pulped bamboo, which was one of the few resources that grew with abundance in the *agriculture sectors*.” ([emphasis mine] *Winter*: 197), for example here are mentioned “agriculture sectors”. On Luna, the capital city Artemisia—where the queen’s palace is—has everything one could ever dream of; all the goods come by maglev⁴⁰ from the other sectors on the moon.

The Lunar Chronicles is undeniably a dystopian science fiction series of novels; it uses all the major tropes of both genres. Dystopian science fiction is, since the 1990s, more and more part of the wider Young Adult genre, and was at its peak during the 2010s, flooding the librarians’ shelves. Now, evidently, *The Lunar Chronicles* is part of the Young Adult Literature, and it is what is going to be discussed in the next chapter.

³⁹ Collins, Suzanne. *Hunger Games, Tome 1 : Hunger Games*, Paris, Pocket Jeunesse, 2009.

⁴⁰ A maglev (magnetic levitation train) is “a floating vehicle for land transportation that is supported by either electromagnetic attraction or repulsion” (*Britannica* website). Here on Luna, the maglev network is underground. Maglevs exist in real life and are not just a thing of the future, they have been conceptualized in the early 1900s by American inventor Robert Goddard and Americano-French engineer Emile Bachelet and have been in service for commercial use since 1984, their use is set to expand greatly in the future.

Chapter 3: A Young Adult Novel

I. Literature for Teenagers... and Others

The Young Adult (YA) genre is one of the most successful kinds of literature nowadays, and one that keeps rising⁴¹ on the book market. The YA book is aimed at young adults (late teens to early twenties) and teenagers (approximately from twelve to eighteen years old even), and tells the story of and through the eyes of teenagers. Our novels—*The Lunar Chronicles* by Marissa Meyer—correspond to this description, and so it seemed interesting to dive a little into what YA literature really is and what kinds of topics it brings about, in order to better study them.

A. Books for Teenagers

It is in the name “young adult”, this literature is meant for young people. The characters in these novels go through things teenagers can relate to, they experience their parents’ divorce, are bullied in school, discover their sexuality, go through terminal illnesses like cancer⁴². They also live in dystopian worlds trying to rebel against a totalitarian regime, discover their strengths and weaknesses, or even encounter paranormal individuals. YA literature thus uses lots of tropes from literary genres like the Fairytale, Science Fiction, Dystopia, Fantasy, and so on; it is a type of literature, so it contains all sorts of genres.

⁴¹ “The number of Young Adult titles published more than doubled in the decade between 2002 and 2012 — over 10,000 YA books came out in 2012 versus about 4,700 in 2002.” Peterson, Valerie. “Young Adult and New Adult Book Markets, Facts and Figures to Know About the Young Adult Book Market”, *Live About Dotcom*, 2018 < <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/the-young-adult-book-market-2799954> >.

⁴² Gayle Forman’s *If I Stay* (2009), Holly Smale’s *Geek Girl* (2013), Ann Brashares’ *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (2001), or John Green’s *The Fault in our Stars* (2012) for examples.

The novel which is said to be the first to specifically target teenagers is 1942's *Seventeenth Summer* by Maureen Daly⁴³, on the theme of first love, and an other contender⁴⁴ for this title of first would be *Catcher in the Rye*⁴⁵ (1951) by J. D. Salinger, but the expression "young adult" was coined in the 1960s by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA). During the 70s, YA Literature knew its first golden age with novels about high-school dramas like *The Chocolate War*⁴⁶ (1974) by Robert Cormier.

However, it surely is with the Dystopian genre that Young Adult literature flourished the most. It is said to be *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry, published in 1993, which opened the highway to success of this collaboration (Stoner: 15); and from its publication, the majority of the dystopian novels published were part of the YA literature. Indeed, thanks to the invention and increasing use of the internet and the prevalence of technology, teenagers gained access to a lot more of information and became more aware of what was happening in the world. Thus, their involvement into politics increased, and their interest into dystopian fiction followed the same wave. The devastating events of the 9/11 are also said to have awakened the youth to politics and influenced authors to write YA dystopias (Ames: 3), even though the Millennial generation (1980-2000) was often said to be apolitical because they would not vote as much as they should:

Teens are now entrenched in the culture of the 24-hour news networks and connected to social media, which constantly expose them to depictions of terror, extremism, and violence. Arguably, the cultural "mood" created by the above-

⁴³ Strickland, Ashley. "A Brief History of Young Adult Literature", *CNN*, 2015 < <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/15/living/young-adult-fiction-evolution/index.html> >.

⁴⁴ Doll, Jen. "What Does 'Young Adult' Mean?", *The Atlantic*, 2012 < <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2012/04/what-does-young-adult-mean/329105/> >.

⁴⁵ The novel details two days in the life of a teenage boy who has just been expelled from prep school.

⁴⁶ The novel is about a teenager whose mother just died and whose father handles grief very badly. He refuses to participate in his school's fundraising chocolate sale and starts a war with the school's secret society.

mentioned factors influences their literary choices. Although teens may not be conscious of fears related to 9/11, they are a part of the social and political climate—a climate that provides a ripe context for these dystopian texts. (Ames: 7)

Now, teenager's interest in politics cannot be the sole factor for the boom in YA dystopias. They like reading YA dystopias simply because “they serve as powerful metaphors for their current developmental stage” (Ames: 9), their chaotic vision of the world as they grow up and have little control over their lives, having to abide by their parents’ or their teachers’ rules.

YA literature may very well be intended to teenagers, but it is not restricted to them, as adults make a huge part of the readership too. The stories related in YA novels are not childish and the emotions they convey reach adults’ hearts as much as they can reach teenagers’. For example, when Dr. Erland apologizes to Cress (Cress: 473) for not being there for her as her father: “Then you were born, and you were a shell. [...] And Sybil came, and I begged—I begged her not to take you, but there was nothing...she wouldn’t...and I thought you were dead”, the experience of losing one’s child is certainly not only aimed only at young people, mature adults can relate to it too.

B. A New Kind of Literature

The problem with YA literature, is that it is often not taken seriously. Scholars study YA novels and YA as a literary category more and more every year, but at school or at home, it is still seen by many teachers or parents as entertainment, reading material for leisure. Though this is true and escapism and entertainment are the main features teenagers seek in the activity of reading, it can also be used as a very powerful teaching tool. Many scholars have urged—and still urge—teachers to use more Young Adult novels in their classes, to encourage reading among the youth, because:

Young adult literature can be a vehicle that allows teachers to present the same literary elements found in the classics while engaging adolescent students in stimulating classroom discussions and assignments. Unlike classic literature, it can

foster a desire to read. Because it: a) employs the literary elements of the classics, b) engages adolescent students in analyzing literature along with themselves and their principles, and c) promotes and encourages lifelong reading habits. (Santoli: 66)

The problem, with the classics, is that “they are about adult issues and are written for well-educated adults who have the leisure time to read or who are university literature students” (*ibid*: 67). This makes it difficult for teenagers to relate to the stories they are reading or to understand them, so they are more likely to find them boring, and in extension, to find literature boring, thus closing the door on a whole world of exciting adventures which could have better cultivated their taste for literature and helped them get ready for the classics.

This more teenager-friendly, relatively new kind of literature contains the same “elements of literature found in the classics: character and characterization, setting, conflict, theme, point of view, plot, style, crisis, climax, foreshadowing, flashback, figurative language and so forth” (69), those that a teacher would like to study in class. In that sense, they are not so different from the classics. John Bennion declared⁴⁷ that “young people need to read contemporary and young adult literature that maintains the traditions of the classics because they are bridges of understanding to the stories, values, and culture of the greatest writers in Western tradition” (72), enforcing the fact that they deserve the same attention given to the classics, maybe even more.

Young Adult Literature, very influential nowadays, has recently gained scholars’ recognition and its readers’ loyalty. It regroups many different genres, which explains the hybridity found in *The Lunar Chronicles*, which is a YA novel using Dystopia, Science Fiction, the Fairy Tales and even a little bit of Romance. In many YA novels from the

⁴⁷ In “Austen’s granddaughter: Louise Plummer re(de)finer romance”, *English Journal*, 91(6), 2002, pp. 44-50.

2000s onwards, female characters are central, this is the case in our novels, and what is about to be discussed now.

II. By and About Women: Young Adult Literature as Centre Stage for Developing Strong Female Characters

Among the most successful YA novels, most were written by women and tell the stories of very strong female characters. There are tropes which come back in each of them, but let us not over-simplify the plots of these novels, and that of the novels our study is based on. Indeed, and thankfully, some elements differ from novel to novel, such as the ending, which sometimes can prove itself to be quite the anti-climax.

A. A very fruitful Female-led Genre

The Young Adult Dystopia really was at its best at the end of the 2000s and during the 2010s, with series of novels such as *Hunger Games* (Suzanne Collins, 2009-2011), *The Selection* (Kiera Cass, 2012-2014), *The Young Elites* (Marie Lu, 2014-2016), or *Divergent* (Veronica Roth, 2011-2013); *Hunger Games* and *Divergent* have both very successfully been adapted into movies⁴⁸. What these all have in common, is that they take place in a dystopian or fantasy world, were written by women, and that their main character is also a woman—this is also the case of *The Lunar Chronicles*.

Marcy Kennedy describes a strong female character in her *Strong Female Characters: a Busy Writer's Guide*; she must be smart: “her intelligence makes her competent, able to help others, and not totally dependent on another person for her entire existence” (Kennedy: 10), be able to escape on her own and make decisions, and

⁴⁸ There were four *Hunger Games* movies, from 2012 to 2015, and three *Divergent* movies, from 2014 to 2016 (there was supposed to be a fourth one, however as the third movie did not interest people as much as the two priors, it was cancelled).

stand up for her ideas and beliefs: “a strong female character, like a strong woman, can stand side-by-side with a man, confident in the knowledge that they are different but nevertheless equal” (*ibid.*: 13).

In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss takes her younger sister’s place in a yearly deadly competition organized by the government, which serves as entertainment but also as a threat to make the population more obedient. During the Games, she discovers her strengths and becomes the symbol of the rebellion to come.

In *The Selection*, America participates in a broadcast contest to win the prince’s heart, she is in competition with many other girls. Now, this series is a bit of a counter-example to the others, because even though the main character is a girl and stands for herself, there is no real evolution or character development, and she is really not that interesting of a character. This is a rags to riches story, entertainment for the young reader, but no great literature, if honesty is required here.

In *The Young Elites*, Adelina survived the plague and her physical appearance has changed. As for all children who survived the plague, she is considered as dangerous and an abomination by her family and most of the population. She has been hurt, used, and alienated because of her differences, and as she discovers she has gained immense dark powers, she decides to use them to avenge herself. Adelina’s evolution throughout the books is very impressive, but she is also a very dark character who struggles to be good.

In *Divergent*, Tris discovers she is different during a test everyone has to take when they are sixteen, that determines their future. Her adventures will lead her to becoming a brave and strong young woman, and to be part of the rebellion which will shake her world.

B. *Contrasting Endings in YA and a new Happy Ending Way in The Lunar Chronicles*

Let us now compare the endings of several female-led Young Adult novels, which often involve either the death of the heroine or her getting married and having children. It will be interesting to see how Cinder's happy ending in *The Lunar Chronicles* remains happy without being in the two extremes; Marissa Meyer seems to have found a good middle ground.

In YA novels, and in many novels containing romance in general, the traditional fairy tale-like happy ending makes an appearance: marriage and children.

In *The Hunger Games*'s epilogue, Katniss and Peeta have two children, they are very happy and the world they have helped bettering is safer, but Katniss worries about the future and when she will have to tell her children what their parents have been through and why she will forever be mentally scarred. In the one hand, this is a traditional happy ending, because Katniss and Peeta are together and have children, however, the twist is in the fact that psychologically, Katniss—and surely Peeta too—is not and will never be completely fine, because there are things that even the sweetest memories will not erase, and this brings reality into the picture.

In *The Selection*, America marries prince Maxon at the end. He chooses her after hesitating and having considered other girls, but tells America he loves her and that she has always been the only one, while America has been keeping her ex-boyfriend close in case Maxon did not choose her. This certainly is the most 'cheesy' and 'fairy tale-y' ending among the ones that have and will be mentioned here, and there is nothing else to this ending than the 'love conquers all' type of 'morale', nothing else to give more meaning.

Other times, and maybe in some cases this is just to stand out in the vast ocean that has become YA Literature, the heroine's story ends in death and sacrifice.

In *The Young Elites*, Adelina dies to resurrect her sister Violetta and let her be a better queen than she was. She becomes a constellation, and the epilogue is a folk tale, “a story to tell around the fire” (Lu, 2016: 279) about a girl and a boy riding at night, the girl vanishing into stardust at dawn, only to return to the boy at dusk. This girl who had had a very difficult start to her life and had become a wicked queen, terrorizing her people in revenge for all she had been put through, at last showed remorse and proved she still had some good in her heart; a beautiful ending for a troubled soul.

In *Divergent*, many were those who did not understand why Veronica Roth killed Tris at the end of the last book. After surviving a death serum, she is shot by David, the leader of the Bureau—a governmental organization leading genetic experiments on Chicago, where the story takes place. The author later explained her decision by saying that Tris dies to save her brother Caleb—who was supposed to be the one to sacrifice himself—and the whole world, as an act of selflessness.

While in both cases, there is an acceptable explanation, was it really necessary to go that far, does it really have to be black or white?

The Lunar Chronicles shows us the ending can be grey. Cinder does not put everything away for love. She does not get married with Kai, even though they talk about maybe getting married one day, but her focus at the end is on Luna, she wants to make it a better place, and even one day renounce her throne and turn Luna into a democracy. This is a nice ending romantic-wise, but also and most of all, Cinder keeps her word, her aim is to rule Luna fairly and help make it a better place to live for her people. All this character development is not shadowed by marriage and children, and she is still alive at the end to keep making good.

Cinder is different from most strong female characters in Young Adult novels, she shows that there are other acceptable outcomes than marriage or death to make the story worthwhile. Young Adult Literature written by women often stage naive girls becoming strong women, and sure aim at influencing the young girls who will read the novels. This is why our study will now focus on female empowerment in *The Lunar Chronicles*, how it is portrayed and what it means.

Part 2. “The Future is Female”

Chapter 4: The Female Hero

In our novels, the trope of the Chosen One is engraved in Cinder’s character. The Chosen One, or *l’élue*, usually is the hero of their story⁴⁹. From the moment they were born, their destiny was to save the world from some kind of threat they were the only one capable to stop. This trope, very present in Fantasy, now also has a prominent place in many SF novels, mostly YA, because it usually is a young character who will evolve and mentally grow during their journey. This hero often is very common at first and sometimes they do not even want the fate that was chosen for them, however, it always seems to impose itself into their lives. The fact that here, the hero is a woman, gives a new perspective on what women can be, and offers new role models for young girls to follow.

I. Cinder, the Chosen One

A. *The Female Hero that is Cinder*

On the back-cover of *Cinder*, two phrases immediately set the tone and designate Cinder to be the hero of the story: ‘Earth’s fate hinges on one girl...’ and ‘[...] she must uncover secrets about her mysterious past in order to protect Earth’s future.’ To hinge on something means to depend on it completely⁵⁰, so only by reading this, it is easy to understand how big of a deal Cinder’s role is going to be. She is expected to ‘protect’

⁴⁹ The most famous “chosen one” in pop culture certainly is Buffy, from the late 90s TV Show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Joss Whedon, The WB (1997-2001), UPN (2001-2003)). Every generation, a Slayer, only one, is born, and her destiny is to kill vampires and creatures alike, and protect humans from them.

⁵⁰ *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 6th edition, Pearson Education Limited, 2014.

Earth's future, so she must not be an ordinary girl, and her past is 'mysterious', meaning that even *she* does not know it, and it potentially is shocking and calling for great character development.

Being heroic, being a hero, was traditionally only attributed to men⁵¹, in Greek mythology for example—here, the interest on mythological heroes is very minimal, as our hero, Cinder, is the main character of a novel, not a myth, but is still worth mentioning. Indeed, when searching for words such as 'hero' or 'heroic' in dictionaries—even contemporary ones—, all definitions usually include expressions such as 'a man who...'⁵². Now, of course, the word 'heroine' exists, however, even though in dictionaries⁵³ 'hero' and 'heroine' are perfect equivalents, in real life and in usage, they mean different things. This is what Terri Frontgia explains in an article she wrote, the difference that has been put on male heroism and female heroism is actually more based on role than gender (18). Citing Lee R. Edwards⁵⁴, the role difference of these traditional archetypes is explained: a hero is the primary character, inspiring others, while the heroine is a secondary character, following the hero. Traditionally, the heroine's heroism often seemed to include motherhood, the heroism of giving life (16). However, Edwards observes that "any action [...] is potentially heroic. Heroism thus read and understood is a human necessity, capable of being represented equally by either sex"⁵⁵. To conclude, Frontgia says that without the long-lasting archetypes on gender and cultural

⁵¹ (term|Antiquité) "Nom donné dans Homère aux hommes d'un courage et d'un mérite supérieur, favoris particuliers des dieux, et dans Hésiode à ceux qu'on disait fils d'un dieu et d'une mortelle ou d'une déesse et d'un mortel" (on dicocitations.com: <https://www.dicocitations.com/dico-mot-definition/71436/heros.php>).

⁵² "A man who is admired for doing something extremely brave.", *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 6th edition, Pearson Education Limited, 2014.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Lee R. Edwards, *Psyche as Hero: Female Heroism and Fictional Form*, Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1984, p.4-11.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

expectations, “heroic being and heroic action may finally and more readily express not only the integration of the individual's self, but also the unique contributions of that self to the larger community of humanity”. Therefore, this is why the term *female* hero is used here rather than heroine, as demeaning and sexism are embedded in the latter, and because “‘female hero’ is a positive term in its ability to highlight and celebrate her femaleness in tandem with her heroism—and with heroism more broadly” (Campbell, Lori M.: 7). The term ‘female hero’ is also important because even though our society is evolving everyday, it has not quite yet reached the point “where we might leave out ‘female,’ where we could just discuss heroes and not have to focus specifically on gender” (*ibid.*).

Knowing all this, is Cinder a heroine or a hero? First of all, Cinder *is* the main character of the series, something that heroes in novels almost always are. Second of all, people put their faith in her: “He [Kai] believed that Cinder, who had proven to be the most resilient and resourceful person he’d ever known, actually stood a chance of finding her [Selene], and keeping her safe, and revealing her identity to the world” (*Cress*: 167); for Kai, Cinder is “resourceful” and “resilient”, he believes in her and puts all his hopes on her. Cinder has a destiny, and though it was hard to accept, as a true hero, she eventually does: “I know that I am who you say I am. And someone has to stop Levana. If that someone has to be me, well...yes. I accept that. I’m ready” (*Cress*: 181). Another hero trait Cinder bears, is that she is inspiring, people want to follow her:

Thoughts swarming, she picked up a piece of the bread, glistening with golden oil and speckled with herbs. The soft inside was still steaming when she pulled it apart.

It was a gift...from Lunars. From her own people.

Her eyes widened and she gaped up at the doctor again. “Do they know? About...me?”

He sniffed. “They know that you stood up against the queen. They know that you continue to defy her.” For the first time since she’d arrived, Cinder thought she detected a smile beneath the doctor’s annoyed expression. “And I may have led them to believe that, one of these days, you intend to assassinate her.”

“Wha—*assassinate* her?”

“It worked,” he said with an unapologetic shrug. “These people will follow you anywhere.” (*Cress*: 187)

In this excerpt, the gratitude Cinder feels towards the Lunars who gifted her the bread is flagrant, in the way the bread is described, we can almost imagine Cinder salivating: it “glistens”, the oil is “golden”, the inside is “steaming”. She is positively astonished, as someone who rarely received gifts in the past, that she receives one from people she has never met: her eyes “widened”, she “gaped”. Her actions—and a little white lie from Dr. Erland—makes people want to “follow” her “anywhere”. She is not the follower, the heroine, she is the leader, the hero. Furthermore, in Chapter 3 of *Cinder*, when talking to Iko about going to the ball, she says: “For starters, I just spent my life savings on a new foot. But even if I did have money, why would I spend it on a dress or shoes or gloves? What a waste.” (31); these words ‘dress’, ‘shoes’, ‘gloves’ belong to the lexical field of princesses and their wardrobe, and this is not what Cinder is about, she cares about useful things, as getting a new robotic foot that fits her. She is practical and pragmatic, as a hero would be.

Considering the importance of her actions, and the fact that the world’s destiny rests on her shoulders, Cinder is a hero, her preoccupations are never futile or selfish, as the traditional heroine’s might be.

B. The Hero’s Journey, Cinder’s Monomyth

Cinder is a hero, and as most heroes, she goes on a journey. Her journey is one which ends by defeating the evil queen and making the world a better place to live in. There is a name for this structure: the monomyth.

The monomyth, as the *Collins English Dictionary* defines it, is ‘a major theme that occurs in many different mythologies’. It was first majorly used for myths and folktales, however nowadays it can be enlarged to any storyline which fits the pattern. The term

was first theorized by the scholar Joseph Campbell in his 1949 *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, but it was coined by James Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*⁵⁶ (1939). Campbell's theory of the monomyth revolves around the idea of cycles; the hero always goes through three major phases:

The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation—initiation—return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth.

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.

(Campbell, Joseph: 51)

The monomyth is this pattern which is found in almost every myth and tale and was used by many contemporary authors to base their storylines on: after the hero has been informed of their mission, they leave their home and embark on their adventures; when their mission is accomplished, they go back home having made the world a better place.

Cinder goes through these three stages too. The 'separation' part corresponds to the moment Cinder learns she is Princess Selene, when Dr. Erland visits her in prison after the ball in Chapter Thirty-Seven of *Cinder* :

"Anyway, you see, I had your DNA sequenced. It informed me not only that you are Lunar, not only that you are *not* a shell, but also something of your heritage. Your bloodline."

Cinder's heartbeat quickened. "My family?"

"Yes."

"And? Do I have one? My parents, are they..." She hesitated. Dr. Erland's eyes had saddened at her outburst. "Are they dead?"

He pulled his hat off. "I'm sorry, Cinder. I should have gone about this a better way. Yes, your mother is dead. I do not know who your father is or if he is alive. Your mother was, shall we say...known for her promiscuity."

She felt her hopes shrivel. "Oh."

"And you have an aunt."

"An aunt?"

Dr. Erland squeezed the hat in both hands. "Yes. It's Queen Levana."

Cinder blinked at him.

"My dear girl. You are Princess Selene". (*Cinder*: 379)

⁵⁶ In *Finnegans Wake*, the dreams of a drunken Irish man tell the story of Humanity, which goes on in cycles, like the cycles of the monomyth.

At first excited and hopeful when learning Dr. Erland discovered her origins (her “heartbeat quickened””, asking if her parents are still alive), her “hopes shrivel” learning her parents are dead, and the fall is even greater when the doctor anxiously (“squeezed” his hat) tells her she is Princess Selene (she “blinks” at him, with no other reaction, because it is the end of this chapter, which in a way ends on a cliff-hanger). The following Chapter Thirty-Eight, the last one, is about building up Cinder’s motivation, on the verge of accepting her destiny:

“If you won’t let me help you, Cinder, then she will have already won, won’t she? Soon Queen Levana will take you away. She will find a way to marry Kai and become empress. She will wage war against the Earthen Union and, I have no doubt, be victorious. Many will die, the rest will become slaves, just like us Lunars. It is a sad fate but unavoidable, I suppose, if you are not willing to accept who you truly are.” (Dr. Erland to Cinder, in *Cinder*: 384)

Here, in order to persuade Cinder she has to escape and embrace her destiny, Dr. Erland chooses to guilt her into it. He tells her how Levana will take control over the Earth and how it will affect the earthens, using the lexical fields of war (‘won’, ‘wage war’, ‘victorious’, ‘slaves’) and death (‘die’, ‘sad fate’). The ‘initiation’ part is all the adventures Cinder and her friends go through, escaping prison, meeting Scarlet and Wolf, going to Africa, fighting against Sybil, for example. The ‘return’ part is a little trickier, because Cinder does not return to New Beijing, she returns home on Luna, as the queen, and plans to make it a better place.

Cinder is a female hero, this has now been established. However, when you take into consideration her abilities, the great importance of her actions and the weight which is put on her shoulders by other people... maybe she could be called a female *superhero* as well?

II. Why are Female Superheroes Necessary?

A. *The Female Superhero, and Can Cinder be Considered as a Female Superhero?*

With her special abilities, which she owes to being a Lunar and a cyborg, Cinder could very well be a comic-book superhero: Victor Stone⁵⁷ meets Wanda Maximoff⁵⁸. *The Lunar Chronicles* does not belong to the superhero genre, this is not a comic-book either, let us be clear, however, it very well corresponds to the description Peter Coogan makes of superhero stories, they “concern the responsible use of extraordinary power in the service of justice⁵⁹”, as Cinder uses her Lunar gift of mind control and her cyborg abilities—computer interface, robotic strength, weapons and utensils in her robotic limbs—to make good around her. In ‘superhero’, “the super part indicates powers or abilities that are significantly greater than those of the average people (though they need not be ‘beyond those of mortal men’ or women)” (Rosenberg: 1); Cinder’s abilities are indeed ‘greater’ than normal humans’ and even greater than other Lunars’, as Dr. Erland—we learn that his real name is Dr. Sage Darnel—implies when saying: “She’s capable of killing your head thaumaturge and all your guards and your entire court. She’s Princess Selene, the true heir to the throne. She can kill you all, and she will kill you all. She’s coming for you, My Queen, and she will *destroy you!*” (*Cress*: 501). Indeed, even though she has not been using her gift for long, it appears to be very strong, and

⁵⁷ Victor Stone is DC’s Cyborg. After an accident which nearly killed him, his scientist father saves him by using his more advanced technologies and transforms him into a superior being, a cyborg. Now practically more machine than human, Victor has super-strength, can interface with computers, and has various weapons integrated to his robotic limbs.

⁵⁸ Wanda Maximoff is Marvel’s Scarlet Witch. Deemed to be Marvel’s most powerful superhero, she is a very complex character. She was born with the ability to harness Chaos magic and developed mind-control powers after being experimented on by a malicious organisation.

⁵⁹ Coogan, Peter, “The Hero Defines the Genre, the Genre Defines the Hero”, in (Rosenberg, Robin S., and Peter Coogan, editors), *What is a Superhero?*, Oxford University Press, 2013, p.3.

developing very quickly, as she was able to manipulate and mind torture the queen's head thaumaturge, someone whose life was dedicated to perfecting her gift to serve her queen.

However, having powers and super-abilities is not enough, there needs to be more. Originally, the superhero was a character that “vanquished evil, saved the damsel, and generally fought along clear lines of right and wrong” (Balhmann: 6-7), and indeed, Cinder vanquishes evil, i.e. Levana, she saves the “damsel”, i.e. Kai who was in danger because of Levana, and she has a high sense of what is right and what is wrong, she always wants to be on the “good” side, set things right for everyone. The first superhero to appear in the comic-book history is Superman⁶⁰, he was “the new messiah”, “an alien sent here from the dying planet Krypton” (Balhmann: 5), to become the world's savior. Cinder, in a way, is a messiah⁶¹ too, she is the queen everyone has been waiting for, the only one who can save the world from Levana's wrath. Superheroes' adventures are also usually drawn, and *The Lunar Chronicles* is not a graphic novel, however, a sequel was published in 2017, called *Wires and Nerve*⁶², and this time as a graphic novel, so eventually, Cinder got to make her comic-book debut.

These elements seem to qualify Cinder as a superhero, a female superhero, because she is a young woman. She is the sole superhero in the novels, and her supervillain foe is queen Levana of course. No man is able to do better, to be stronger. Let us now see why such representations of the female superhero are so important.

⁶⁰ He was first introduced in *Action Comics* in 1938, and was created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster.

⁶¹ The *Merriam Webster* online dictionary defines the word as follows: “The expected king and deliverer of the Jews” and “a professed or accepted leader of some hope or cause”.

⁶² Meyer, Marissa, Holgate, Douglas (illustrator), and Stephen Gilpin (illustrator), *Wires and Nerve*, New York, Feiwel & Friends, 2017.

B. Reverse Misogyny?

In most revered dystopias, the ones considered as pioneer novels in the genre, such as *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1931), women did not have important roles, worse, they were often mistreated, naive, used, with no substantial role, other than making men look good and strong⁶³. The Merriam Webster online dictionary defines misogyny as follows: “hatred of, aversion to, or prejudice against women”. With no surprise, there is no misogyny in *The Lunar Chronicles*. More broadly, in contemporary novels, in the time and society we live in, it is really not encouraged. As said a few lines earlier, misogyny was used to make men look stronger, however, as we study our novels, full of strong female characters, was it necessary to do the same—misandry, reverse misogyny—in order to make the female characters look stronger?

Cinder, Scarlet, Cress and Winter do not need men to be minimized in order to be strong and important. In the novels, men have important roles, Kai is an emperor, and though he is not portrayed as a particularly strong man, his diplomatic qualities are often mentioned and his role is important; Wolf and Jacin are very skilled fighters and Thorne is a very witty and smart man. If anything, what Marissa Meyer changes in her male characters in comparison to Huxley’s novel and others alike, is that they have emotions, which they show and express throughout the novel.

In *The Lunar Chronicles*, female and male characters are equals, there is no gender discrimination in the importance of each person’s role in society, and “female” qualities like showing emotions are demonstrated by any character, no matter their gender. Furthermore, Cinder often acts in more manly ways than would be expected of a female

⁶³ In the novel, no woman has a high ranking role in society, they can never go beyond the fertilizing room. Only men are taught about important subjects and allowed to make decisions for the State, and they learn very early on that emotions—which are often linked to women—are not something that should be shown in society. The place of eugenics is also very important in the novel, and motherhood does not exist anymore, as children are bred scientifically in test tubes.

character, for example when Iko tells her that her hair is messy and that she never looks presentable very long, to which Cinder responds “I’m a mechanic” (*Cress*: 441). Her answer, which seems very logical to her, and the fact that mechanics are usually expected to be men, show how blurred gender norms are in the novels and in fact better correspond to real life. You can also see that in *Scarlet*, chapter forty-three, when Kai is on a video call with the other leaders of the Earthen Union: Queen Camilla of the United Kingdom and Prime Minister Kamin of Africa are women, which shows that unlike Huxley’s *Brave New World*, Meyer’s *Lunar Chronicles* gives important roles to women, they are country leaders, they matter at least as much as men.

The importance of female representation through strong characters will never be stressed enough, and this is why female heroes and superheroes matter that much in the content the youth consume. As Anna Boden, *Captain Marvel*⁶⁴’s director, said about Carol Danvers’ character,

As she gets to know herself and embrace what makes her *her*, she really achieves her true power. [...] Part of that means rejecting the voices of people who tell her she’s not strong enough and doesn’t belong. I feel like a lot of people will be able to relate to that, particularly women.⁶⁵

This really corresponds to Cinder’s character too, as people despise or fear her for being a cyborg and a Lunar. Plus, she also has to reject her own inner voice telling her she is not strong enough, and with the support of her friends, who also are strong characters—females and males, even androids—she succeeds, showing that the Chosen

⁶⁴ *Captain Marvel* (Anna Boden, Ryan Fleck, 2019, Marvel Studios), is a superhero film in which Carol Danvers, a former airforce pilot, comes back to earth after several years spent on an alien planet, with extraordinary powers. Amnesic, she will learn about her past on earth and who her true enemies really are.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Itzkoff, Dave. “Can ‘Captain Marvel’ Fix Marvel’s Woman Problem?”, *The New York Times*, Feb. 28, 2019.

One does not always have to be alone in order to accomplish her destiny, creating a kind of sisterhood, as we will see in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Only Strong Women in the Building

As many novels portraying strong women, *The Lunar Chronicles* can be discussed in the light of feminism. The most obvious link here would have to be made with Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1984), because the main character of our novels is a cyborg. There are different types of feminism, which are called 'waves'. Haraway's feminism belongs to third-wave feminism—a phrase coined in 1992 by a young Black bisexual woman, Rebecca Walker—and is about encouraging feminists to go beyond political, gender and racial barriers. Third-wave feminism starts in the 90s, after second wave feminism allowed women to enjoy more institutional equalities. Third-wave feminism was more aware of racial disparities, which the first and second waves had ignored, and was all about women choosing how to live their lives on their own terms. The development of the internet expanded this feminist view around the world. We are now said to live in the fourth wave of feminism, which is a continuation of the third, but social media brought it to a whole other level, with the Me-too and women's rights movements resurfacing. Feminism is now about "what empowerment, equality, and freedom really mean"⁶⁶. The Cyborg figure—from the *Cyborg Manifesto*—, represented mainly by Cinder, is also disseminated in the whole series, as it portrays characters from different racial and social backgrounds: "a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (Haraway: 15-16).

⁶⁶"Types of Feminism: The Four Waves", *Human Rights Career* < <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/types-of-feminism-the-four-waves/> >.

I. Creation of a Sisterly Bond, and Strong Women Elsewhere

The story starts with Cinder, and her role as the chosen one was well established in the previous chapter, she is the key to saving the world. But the truth is, she could not have done it all by herself. Along the way, she met other people, other girls, who helped her become the hero she was supposed to be, and became heroes themselves too. The girls all have their own problems to solve, but they will cross paths and meet and start alliances that will lead to true friendships.

Scarlet's journey begins because her grandmother has been missing for quite a long time. Growing desperate because the police have no lead on the case and people in town mock her for worrying so much, she finally starts getting clues when she meets Wolf, a strange street-fighter, who happens to be closely linked to her grandmother's disappearance. Jumping forward, she meets Cinder when she and Wolf need rescuing in Paris, and connects the dots in her mind, between what she saw on the news and what her grandmother told her, recognizing Cinder as Princess Selene. Her grandmother dead, she decides to take on her mission, and help Cinder get back on the Lunar throne, which would save the Earth too. Their relationship does not start on a good footing, as Scarlet accuses Cinder of cowardice for doing nothing all these years, with very harsh words, (*Scarlet* 429) but when she learns that Cinder has known her true identity for a week, she eases off on her.

For Cress and Winter, what first made them side with Cinder is their belief in their true queen, being Lunars themselves. Winter remembered her old friend from when she was a child, before Selene/Cinder's 'accident' with fire and everyone thought her dead, so it was that much easier to support her. Therefore, it started with a sense of loyalty, which then transformed into trust, and friendship.

Going through all these adventures, often traumatizing, they start building very strong friendships, and there is no more Cinder without Iko, Scarlet, Cress, and Winter

at the end. They are all fighting for the same goal, and together they know they are stronger, forming some kind of a sisterhood⁶⁷.

II. The Cyborg in Every Girl

While there is no clear evidence, no record in any interviews, that Marissa Meyer read Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* and got inspired from it, there is no denying how similar Haraway's cyborg is to Cinder and how each of the four main characters is a cyborg too in a way. As Haraway says, "the cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century" (Haraway: 3), so the cyborg is not tangible, it is a matter of headspace, of experience, anyone can develop a cyborg in themselves. She adds that her "cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" (14), therefore, the cyborg is also a liberation, it is about not being afraid of what is not socially accepted. Cinder is the material representation of it, however, the cyborg lives in each and every one; it is in Scarlet, Cress, and Winter too.

⁶⁷ This pattern of the chosen one getting help and not having to be alone in their fight can be found in another famous chosen one's story: Buffy. Indeed, in the last season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Buffy starts training 'potentials' after they all take refuge at hers because of the First Evil wanting to kill them all. She gets them ready for a war. In the end, the burden of being the only slayer no longer weighs on Buffy's shoulder, because she has other slayers by her side, reminding us of Cinder, who is not alone in her fight against Levana, and showing the importance of community and team-playing.

This theory of the feminist cyborg is all about embracing who you are, stopping to care about gender and racial distinctions⁶⁸ or what makes us different. In interviews⁶⁹, Marissa Meyer actually talked about diversity and how important it was for her, saying:

I didn't think so much about diversity when I was first crafting the story and the characters. I created the characters back in 2008, and I wanted the world to feel authentic and real, and the idea that all these characters doing amazing things would be white seemed ridiculous to me. The world isn't made of only white people, so fictional worlds shouldn't be either. It felt much more natural for me to include characters with a variety of skin tones and ethnic backgrounds. Now I hear from a lot of readers thanking me for including people of colour in central roles –but I can't help but hope that someday soon that will just be the norm. (*Guardian* article, 2016)

Indeed, in the story, the main characters are from different ethnic backgrounds, for example, Kai is Asian, but the most telling example must be Princess Winter, whose character is inspired from Snow White, who we all see in our minds as the ivory skinned and raven-black haired young woman from the Disney movie. The first description of Princess Winter is told through Scarlet's point of view:

Her warm brown skin was flawless and healthy, her fingernails perfectly shaped and clean. Her eyes were bright, the color of melted caramel, but with hints of slate-gray around her pupils. On top of all that, she had silky black hair that curled into perfect spirals, neatly framing her high cheekbones and ruby-red lips. She was the most beautiful human being Scarlet had ever seen. (*Cress* 516-517)

Using only positive adjectives and adverbs, such as 'warm', 'flawless', 'healthy', 'perfectly', 'clean', 'bright', 'silky', 'perfect', 'neatly', 'most beautiful', Meyer wants the reader to really acknowledge how breath-taking Winter must be. It is also interesting to notice that no other character in the series is described with such detail, not even Cinder.

The cyborg theory is also about accepting interactions between the human and the machine, between the human and the animal. In that sense, all our main characters

⁶⁸ This will be further explored in the third and last part of this paper.

⁶⁹ "Marissa Meyer: The world isn't made of only white people, so fictional worlds shouldn't be either", *The Guardian*, 2016 < <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2016/feb/02/marissa-meyer-lunar-chronicles-interview> > and "CINDER!! Interview with Marissa Meyer", 2012 < <https://enchantedinkpot.livejournal.com/111826.html> >.

are cyborgs too. Scarlet accepts Wolf as he is, a human-wolf mutant, learns to know him and gets rid of any judgement or preconceptions she might have had before knowing him, even making a place for him in her heart. Cinder is part human, part machine, and most people, as she grew up, were afraid of her or despised her, but she eventually meets people who see her for who she is inside. Iko's character is also very interesting, as she is not a human being, she is a hundred percent machine, but she has developed a unique personality which in a lot of instances makes her more human than many humans. As Haraway said, "a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (Haraway: 15).

In a way, then, *The Lunar Chronicles* is a real testimony to the cyborg feminist theory. The goal here is to be united and accept everyone's differences, help each other becoming a better version of themselves, to make the world a better place.

Part. 3 Another One Bites the Cinder: Overcoming Barriers in *The Lunar Chronicles*

Chapter 6: Togetherness and Selflessness

One of the most important themes of the series is friendship, and how joining forces with people who have the same goal as you can make you stronger, even if you did not know them before. In *The Lunar Chronicles*, people from all around the world and from different backgrounds get together and learn to work with each other in order to defeat the evil queen. From this alliance of convenience, true friendships develop. Let us see how togetherness—“the pleasant feeling of being united with other people in friendship and understanding”⁷⁰—and selflessness—“the quality of caring more about what other people need and want than about what you yourself need and want”⁷¹—made our characters stronger and enabled them to win the fight.

⁷⁰ *Cambridge online Dictionary.*

⁷¹ *ibid.*

I. Friendship and women supporting each other

A. *Iko and Cinder: Old Friendship, Anxiety and Confidence*

At the end of *Scarlet*⁷², Iko and Cinder have an interesting conversation, which ends the book on a strong note, as Cinder is ready to rise herself against Levana. With the help of her best friend, the android Iko, she realizes that she cannot let anxiety take the best of her, while also reassuring Iko on her importance in the journey they are on.

The most striking theme in this excerpt is anxiety, which could seem quite paradoxical when talking about friendship; but isn't supporting each other when faced with shared struggles part of what a real friendship is? Both Iko and Cinder are anxious here, however, they show it in very different ways. In *Scarlet*, Iko's personality chip was put into Thorne's ship, which needed a new auto-control system, a role Iko could play. Having to get used to this new "body", Iko must have felt a bit alienated from the action and from the other characters, and needs to be reassured on her usefulness. Her emotions are expressed through the ship's electronic devices: "The yellow running lights brightened by the floor" (*Scarlet*, 449), they "brighten", for a human it would be "her eyes brightened" when the person regains hope or excitement at a new idea; "The temperature of the engine room spiked" (450), as if she were blushing with pleasure; or "One of the engine fans slowed" (*ibid.*), to show her indignation or the process of thinking to decide whether Cinder was joking or not. Cinder's anxiety is most noticeably expressed through her toying with a communication chip—the one she found in Nainsi and used to communicate with Cress—, as in: "Cinder practiced spinning the chip like a top on the tip of her finger. It took a few tries before she got the hang of it and could watch it sparkle and dance without much effort" (*ibid.*), showing she is preoccupied

⁷² See Excerpt 1 in the Appendix.

when they were still talking about Iko, but when the conversation starts to be about her and how she is feeling, her anxiety and stress shows: “The chip tumbled off her finger and she barely caught it” (*ibid.*) or “She loosened her grip, suddenly afraid that her metal fist would crush the chip while she was distracted” (451). It is interesting to see how, while Cinder is able to see and understand Iko’s reactions—“The running lights brightened, reminding Cinder of a blush” (449)—, her android friend is unable to see hers, creating an imbalance in their conversation, as Iko does not have all the cards to understand her friend. The fact that a ship can have a conscience and have feelings like Iko does, is a bit uncanny too, difficult to “compute”—interesting choice of word to use instead of “understand” on Iko’s part (and sometimes used by other characters), since she is an android, an AI, basically a computer.

For the anxiety to pass, both Iko and Cinder need to find confidence and get validation, and because they are very empathic towards one another, it works. This empathy makes them—this is an even more remarkable trait of Iko’s who is an AI—more human than some humans. Iko’s fear of letting everyone down (449) is washed away when Cinder tells her “You were brilliant” and “We’d all be dead if it weren’t for you” (450), using strong adjectives like ‘brilliant’ and ‘dead’, maybe exaggerating a bit, but it was what Iko needed to hear, which is all that counts. Cinder finds her strength when talking to Iko about Kai marrying Levana, and realizing that she could not let that happen. The chip also has a role to play here, as when playing with it she starts focusing on her cyborg hand. She glamours it into a human one—the lexical field of the anatomy is very present: “thumb”, “forefinger”, “spine”, “wrist”, “hand”, “skin” and “bone” (451)—thinking about it, and when Iko asks her if she has a plan to prevent the wedding, the glamour changes and the hand becomes the rusted small cyborg hand Cinder grew up with, the one she was ashamed of—described as an old piece of metal found in a junkyard—as the last glimpse of anxiety leaves her body. She had always tried to keep it hidden, but then the thought of the silk gloves Kai had gifted her crosses her

mind. She realizes that the girl she had been at the start of her journey had changed so much already and that the woman she was becoming had to “stop hiding” (452).

B. Cress' Courage and Devotion to the Good Guys

In these excerpts⁷³ (Cress, pp. 25-26 & 45-49), Cress shows how courageous and smart she is, even though at first she may seem a bit naive and awkward. Her intelligence is exhibited when she describes how she was able to find the Rampion—Cinder's ship—, describing it as “one of the greatest challenges” of her hacking career, and saying that: “In the end, it had been a question of mathematics and deduction” (25) as if, after all, it were easy. Being Sybil's prisoner on a satellite for now seven years, doing her bidding, she finds a cause to believe in when hearing about Cinder's plan to save the world and dethrone Levana. However, she might be the least confident character in the novels, calling herself a “worthless shell” (Cress, 26) and later “trying her best to look confident” (46). Even Thorne, at first, before knowing her, underestimated her, as many have in her life, which is shown when he says: “All this time we thought Cinder was casting some witchy spell on the other ships and it's been *you*?” (45), with an emphasis on “you”, which sounds like he underestimates her and does not think her capable of doing it, he doubts her, because she does not look like the image of the super smart hacker he has in his mind. Nevertheless, she helped them without even knowing them, because she knew it was for the greater good, at the risk of losing her life: “She would be killed for her betrayal” (47). When the sentence “She had to find them first.” (25) is repeated twice, the second time in italics, it shows the importance finding and protecting Cinder and her friends has for Cress, and how determined and brave she is.

⁷³ See Excerpts 2 & 3 in the Appendix.

When asked to help them again, she says yes without a second of hesitation (46), because she is desperate to help them as best as she can.

On the other hand, Cinder and her friends are going to risk their lives to rescue her, mainly, at first, because she can help them and is a valuable asset that is not to stay in Levana's hands (49). Little do they know that this mission would lead to Scarlet being kidnapped by Sybil... However, they are also going to rescue her because they know she is in danger and because they are good people; Cinder hesitated at first because she thought Cress was on Luna, which would have made the mission impossible: "If there was any way for us to get you away from her, we would, but we can't risk coming to Luna." (47-48). Empathy also plays a part, when Cress tells them she has been prisoner on a satellite for seven years, and Thorne reacts quite genuinely with the emphasis on "years": "Seven *years*? By yourself?" (48). She also is, in her own words, a "damsel in distress" (*ibid.*); this choice of expression seems to be a nod to the Fairy Tale genre—quite an ironic one here—the trope of the damsel in distress, in which princesses often need a prince to save them, and Cress, due to her over-romantic personality, first sees herself this way.

There is a high sense of togetherness and unity in these extracts, of teamwork, which the whole series is full of.

II. Male Characters Supporting Female Characters

A. Kai, the Emperor who Did Not Know It All

Kai has great responsibilities to think of, being the emperor of the Eastern Commonwealth, however, he never thought he would have to bear this weight so soon—his father died prematurely from Letumosis in *Cinder*. He had just met Cinder and was beginning to develop his interest in her when the ball happened and everything fell

into pieces. In *Scarlet* (pp. 252-253)⁷⁴, he holds a press conference about Cinder's escape and the consequences it could have on the relationship between Earth and Luna.

In this excerpt, the reader can acknowledge Kai's emperor skills, the fact that he knows how to behave and how to respond to journalists, answering their questions without really answering them, not giving the journalists what they wanted, like a true politician; when asked if Cinder's presence at the ball and her escape from prison might have worsened the situation with Luna, he does not say "yes" or "no", he says: "I don't think they helped" (253), therefore avoiding to really answer the question while satisfying the journalist. He also knows that his facial expressions and gestures can speak louder than his words, so he is careful about that too: "The irritation quickly evaporated from Kai's face, replaced with tactful vacancy" (*ibid.*) and "Kai moved to scratch behind his ear, but caught the nervous tick and placed his hand on the podium" (*ibid.*).

Kai keeps up a good face for the public even though on the inside he does not know what to think of Cinder and the situation. This shows from his nervousness just mentioned above, and also when he admits he did not know that Cinder was a Lunar, saying: "I—naively, it seems—was under the impression that there were no Lunars in the Commonwealth" (252) with a pinch of sarcasm and self-mockery when adding "naively, it seems", and by using the expression "I was under the impression that". Admitting he did not know Lunars walked the Earth and lived on his territory could be seen as a weakness, because how could an emperor not know what happens on his soil? Nevertheless, he gets defensive when her being cyborg is mentioned with disgust by the journalist. Indeed, he coldly answers: "I don't see that her being cyborg is relevant. Next question?" (*ibid.*), which can be considered as him protecting her, showing that he does not fully believe she is the villain here, even though he has to stay neutral in front of his people.

⁷⁴ See Excerpt 4 in the Appendix.

In an other excerpt, in *Winter* this time (pp.40-42)⁷⁵, Kai's "good talker" (40) skills appear useless. Indeed, now on the Rampion with the almost full Cinder team, Kai feels useless and wants to help in any way he can. He talks to Cinder about it, showing her his vulnerability and asking her for help, so that he feels less guilty. He is even ready to let her practice her gift on him, something that he dreads. Facing her refusal, he opens himself up to her:

Cinder, I have nothing better to do. Literally, *nothing* better to do. My time on this ship has taught me that I have zero practical skills. I can't cook. I can't fix anything. I can't help Cress with surveillance. I know nothing about guns or fighting or ... Mostly, I'm just a good talker, and that's only useful in politics. (*ibid.*)

With the anaphora in "I can't", the author makes Kai insist on the things he cannot do, reinforcing the fact that he is "useless" and showing his desperation. The word "nothing" in italics also serves this aim, making the reader hear how Kai probably pronounced this word and insisted on it. Indeed, before being on the Rampion, he had never felt this way, he was in his element, dealing with diplomatic issues. Now, he is lost and needs Cinder to help him feel useful. He makes himself vulnerable and lets her see his "weaker" side, which shows that he trusts her. The fact that he needs reassurance is also a sign of his low self-esteem, in spite of his high social rank and his title of Emperor.

The thing is, Kai is in this situation *because* of Cinder, because she kidnapped him. He however understands why she did it and tries not to blame her: "He was kind to her [...], he was careful not to blame her for his frustrations" (42). Him taking care of Cinder's feelings like this is his way of supporting her and helping her too, because he knows blaming her would only make her feel guilty and slow her down in her important mission.

⁷⁵ See Excerpt 5 in the Appendix, page.

B. Of Thorns and Wolves: Apparently Unreachable Men Become Reliable Friends

Thorne and Cinder meet in prison, helping each other escape. As a criminal, an internationally wanted thief, and because of his slimy behavior, Thorne does not seem to be someone Cinder can trust. In *Scarlet* (pp.366-367)⁷⁶, however, he demonstrates another side of his personality, one which makes him a good friend you can count on.

Their relationship usually works through humor and sarcasm, and this is how the excerpt starts. Indeed, helping him clean his wounds after they fought wolf-soldiers in Paris, Cinder asks him how he is feeling, to which he responds: “Like I was bit by a feral dog” and “Pretty upset about my jacket” (366). In the first instance, he is clearly sarcastic, comparing the wolf-soldiers to feral dogs, and in the second, he sounds ironic, bringing up his jacket, a material loss, instead of responding to the concerning fact that he has lost a lot of blood. In a way, Thorne corresponds to the comic relief trope, the character who often finds a humorous way relieve the tension when things get too serious.

Cinder then starts thinking about what just happened during the fight, and manifests guilt because she unintentionally glamoured a woman to protect herself, and this woman died, serving as a human shield. Cinder beats herself up about it, and the excerpt is full of guilt: “her voice hiccuped”, “she felt sick”, “i just panicked”, “it just happened”, “it’s turning me into a monster”, “confession”, “I killed a woman”, “I just used her”(366-367); you can notice the word “just” appearing thrice here, which is often used to emphasize what you are saying.

Seeing his friend in mental distress, Thorne does his best reassuring her. Surprisingly, he carefully chooses his words and shows a capacity for seriousness he rarely exhibits in the novels. Although usually always taking things lightly, he gets serious

⁷⁶ See Excerpt 6 in the Appendix.

and logical to make his friend understand it was not her fault. His first argument is that she has not been practicing her gift long enough to be able to fully control it: “It was an accident, and you’re still learning,” and “Cinder, you were scared. You didn’t know what you were doing” (367). And his second argument relies on the reason they were in danger in the first place, the wolf-soldier, which he mentions with colorful adjectives: “blood-sucking, howling wolf-man” (*ibid.*), and who would have killed the woman anyway: “And you think he would have left the rest of us alone once he had you?” (*ibid.*). Thorne proves to be someone of trust, someone she can rely on and who is able to help her get through hard times.

Another male character who was ambiguous at first, even more than Thorne, is Wolf: was he a good guy or one of the bad guys? When Scarlet was convinced he was the latter, he proved her the contrary and helped her. Towards the end of *Scarlet* (pp.338-340)⁷⁷, after feigning to betray her in order for the both of them to find Michelle, Scarlet’s grandmother, he helps her escape the cell she was put in by his ‘colleagues’. First apologizing to her for playing the part of the villain and making her feel like a fool for trusting him: “I lied to you about a lot things [...] but I meant every apology.” (338), and showing real remorse and guilt: “She saw a gulp straining against his throat. Hurt flashed across his face” (339), he gives her what she needs to escape, while playing his villain part again because he knows he is being watched. Indeed, when forcing her into a kiss, he gives her “something small and flat and hard”(340)—an adjective accumulation which makes the scene slow down—, an ID chip which will allow her to open her cell’s door. Again, his body shows his emotions more than his words: “He flinched, as if touching her pained him” (*ibid.*). This scene proves Scarlet that Wolf is on her side after all, and a few chapters later, she escapes her cell: “The bars swung open without resistance” (371).

⁷⁷ See Excerpt 7 in the Appendix.

Be it between women or with men, friendships are what make the story move forward. Together and united, our protagonists continuously show each other that they can be trusted and support each other through bad times, no matter how different they are, no matter how 'other' they are.

Chapter 7: Otherness, Being and Feeling Different

Usually in fairy tales, otherness tends to be something you want to get away from, you want to be like everyone, it is not about accepting your otherness, it is about repressing it, as in “Beauty and the Beast”:

If we let this go and view the Beast as good but misunderstood, the fact remains that his otherness is viewed as negative: the fairytale forces him to change. As long as the Beast is different, Beauty cannot accept him. The only way they can have their happy ending is for the Beast to conform to the handsome, royal fairytale norm.⁷⁸

Here, otherness is experienced by almost every character. However, it is all about accepting it and being proud of it, using it to grow, instead of hiding it and having to change in order to have a happy ending.

I. Being Unconventional

A. An “*Exemplary Model of Modern Science*”

Victim of a fire when she was still a child, Cinder was saved by rebellious Lunar scientists, who had to, in order to keep her alive, replace parts of her body with metallic ones and electromechanical devices, transforming her into a cyborg, a bionic human. Sadly, in the world Cinder evolves in, cyborgs are barely considered human, and people are either afraid of them, or disgusted by them. In the excerpts I have selected here (Cinder, pp.73-74 and pp.80-82)⁷⁹, we will see an example of how cyborgs are treated and how Cinder feels about being one.

⁷⁸ See the full *Guardian* article here: <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2016/jan/12/charles-perraud-google-doodle-fairy-tales>.

⁷⁹ See Excerpts 8 & 9 in the Appendix.

This is the passage when Cinder meets Dr. Erland and is examined in his lab. Here, the lack of human decency given to Cinder is striking. It is flagrant that she is not here because she wants or has agreed to, and we can first see it when we read: “The girl’s hands and wrists had been fastened with metal bands” (73), showing that she is restrained, she cannot move. Plus, she did not surrender without a fight, “The med-droids had trouble apprehending her” (74). Consent is totally denied to her, she is considered as a volunteer, but she never volunteered, someone did in her place: “But she volunteered? - Her legal guardian did.” (*ibid.*). More preoccupying, the scientists do not even wait for her to be awake to start their experiments, Dr. Erland even says: “We don’t need consciousness” (*ibid.*). The cyborg is an object, given as much right as a wild animal, which would have just been captured. The cyborg does not have a say in all this. Cinder is a test subject, and her status of “volunteer” is only a smokescreen. She has had to undergo a myriad of invasive treatments when she was younger: “**Some** surgeon, **some** stranger, opening her skull and inserting their made-up system of wires and conductors **while she had lain helpless beneath them**” (emphasis mine, 80), the use of “some” is pejorative here, and “she had lain helpless” also shows that she did not choose this. Now, she has to undergo a similar invasion again, while being awake: “someone was in her head. Inside her. **An invasion. A violation.** She **tried to jerk away**, but the android **held her firm**”(emphasis mine, 81), but she is still helpless, and even when she says “*Get out!*” (*ibid.*), written in italics to show that she screams, the invasion only stops when the android is finished with its task; what she wants is not important, her body is not really hers here.

Speaking of her body, it is not described as human, not really; almost every description of Cinder, especially in the excerpt written through Dr. Erland’s point of view (73-74), is about her cybernetic parts, there is no interest in her human characteristics: “her left hand was steel” (73), “revealing one human leg and one synthetic”, “Is she pugged in yet?”, “you should have seen her wiring”, “Autocontrol and four-grade nervous

system” (74), which participate in her dehumanization and objectification. Cinder even calls herself “this” in the middle of page 81, a pronoun which, in informal speech, is used emphatically, to show how strongly she feels about being a cyborg—her bitterness, resentment towards the people who made her a cyborg and towards herself for being one.

B. “You’re *Linh Cinder? The Mechanic?*”

The opening scene of *Cinder* (3-8)⁸⁰ introduces the main character into the story and the reader also gets to witness her first encounter with Prince Kai. From the start, she is a very different Cinderella: she’s not what she was expected to be, not the fragile, pure, always put-together delicate princess.

Other than being a cyborg, she is a mechanic (“Cinder was the only full-service mechanic” (3)). This is an interesting choice of job, on the part of Marissa Meyer, for her main character who is inspired by a princess, because a mechanic gets dirty, and it is a very manual job. Unsurprisingly then, prince Kai himself is astonished to discover that the reputed mechanic Linh Cinder is in fact a young woman: “You’re not quite what I was expecting” (8), meaning he expected a man (“Is he around?” a few lines prior). However, it seems fitting to have made her a mechanic, being a cyborg, knowing how to repair herself would be quite practical, even more so considering how her step-mother treats her—she would not pay for Cinder to be repaired.

Her behavior would also be considered quite “boyish”, in the way she speaks and how she is described. This can be seen in the verbs “tossing” and “yanked” (3) for example, which demonstrate Cinder’s lack of delicacy. She groans (3), her workplace smells “of metal and grease” (4); she pulls “her dirty fingers through her hair”, puts it in a “messy tail” (5): she does not care about her appearance at all. Again, this is a great

⁸⁰ See Excerpt 10 in the Appendix.

contrast with the Fairy Tale princess, who is always put together, delicate and charming. She is also quite sarcastic, for example she says: “It’s not like wires are contagious.” (5) when the baker forbids her son to get too close to Cinder’s booth.

When Kai arrives though, she gets self-conscious and all the confidence she seemed to have a few moments before just washes away in a heartbeat. She tries to be sarcastic but fails to, when Kai tells her she is not what he expected: “Well you’re hardly—what I—um.” (8), tripping over her words, just like a few lines prior: “How—can I—are you—”, because Kai intimidates her. She also takes great care not to let Kai notice she is a cyborg, hiding her footless ankle as best as she can: “glad that he couldn’t see her empty ankle behind the tablecloth.” (7) and her steel hand: “Cinder dared to lift one stabilizing hand from the table, using it to tug the hem of her glove higher on her wrist” (8).

Cinder is a very paradoxical character. While most of the time she is this tough, highly skilled cyborg mechanic, in the end the feminine “norms” are still rooted in her, because that’s the behavior her stepsisters have and are encouraged to have by their mother, because it is the behavior she thinks is best accepted by society, and because she likes Kai and wants him to like her in return. Rejected for being a cyborg for most of her life, Cinder desperately wants to feel accepted, she wants to belong, and she thinks hiding her cyborg nature will help. However it just makes her lose this special spark she has which makes her who she really is.

II. Being Alien, a Lunar

When Dr. Erland tells Cinder she's Lunar (*Cinder*: 175-179)⁸¹, she becomes other on another level. Learning she is not human is not an easy experience to live for Cinder. Her brain takes a long time to process it, this is something she never imagined would be possible.

The word washed over Cinder as if he were speaking a different language. The machine in her brain kept ticking, ticking, like it was working through an impossible equation.

"Lunar?" The word evaporated off her tongue, almost non-existent. (175)

She is flabbergasted at this revelation. Her brain is compared to a machine, a calculator in error mode because of an "impossible equation". Maybe this is not totally a comparison, because Cinder *does* have a control panel in her brain (80), however, I believe it is, and it is very fitting, mostly because Cinder *is* cyborg. The "error" is reinforced when Cinder absently says "Lunar?", the narrator adding "the word evaporated off her tongue", and also a few lines down, when she repeats it, written in italics in the text (176) to show her shock. Disbelief is flagrant: "She pulled back. Looked at the walls, the exam table, the silent news anchor." (*ibid.*), the accumulation of nouns here, of things she looks at, is here to demonstrate how overwhelmed she is; she puts her gaze everywhere but on the doctor, trying to find a way out, trying to convince herself she is dreaming maybe. She already felt alienated, but this makes her a real alien: "I'm *cyborg*. You don't think that's bad enough?" (*ibid.*), she is even less human—earthen human—than she thought she was, she who had just wanted to be accepted and to fit in for her entire life—at least what she remembers of it.

Everything she knows about Lunars is linked to the queen, she thinks being a Lunar equals being like the queen and her followers: she is prejudiced against Lunars, as all earthens are. However, of course, all Lunars are not the same, but she does not know

⁸¹ See Excerpt 11 in the Appendix.

that yet, for her, Lunars are “a cruel, savage people”, they are murderers, liars and manipulators (178). She is full of hate for them, therefore, she others them all, she others herself too.

Guilt is a strong feeling, it comes to someone when they feel like they have done something wrong or at least hold responsibility for something bad that happened. It replaces anger pretty quickly in Cinder’s mind, and when Dr. Erland tries to explain to her how he knows Lunars are immune to Letumosis, adding another line to the list of things Lunars are responsible of in Cinder’s mind, it does not help at all:

“You see,” said Dr. Erland, “Lunars are the original carrier hosts for letumosis. Their migration to the rural areas of Earth, mostly during the reign of Queen Channary, brought the disease into contact with humans for the first time. Historically, it’s a common situation. The rats that brought the bubonic plague to Europe, the conquistadors who brought smallpox to the Native Americans.” (177)

He even compares Lunars to rats and conquistadors, two examples which while being relevant in the sense that they too brought diseases to a people, convey a really bad connotation, rats being considered pests and conquistadors being responsible for the deaths of millions of Native Americans during the Spanish conquest of the Americas. It puts everything in question in Cinder’s mind, about how Peony got Letumosis, because now she knows for a fact that she could have been contagious long enough to infect her. She has also just learned that Lunars use ID chips that have been taken from deceased earthens and sold on a black market (170), and realizes that her ID chip was not really hers, which disgusts and guilties her even more.

Again, Cinder is a paradox. Being a cyborg on Earth, she belonged to an oppressed category of society, she was considered less than human, replaceable, other people used her and took advantage of her. Now, she discovers she is Lunar too, she also belongs to a people of oppressors, which makes everything more complicated regarding her identity: she is oppressed and oppressor. With time though, she learns that all

Lunars are not maniacs like Levana—in *Winter*, she gets to know the real Lunar people, the oppressed majority, and leads a revolution for them—, and accepts herself.

III. Being Said to be Mentally Challenged

A. Calling People Crazy When You Do Not Understand Them

In *Scarlet* (pp.17-21)⁸², people call Scarlet and her grandmother crazy at Gilles's bar, when Scarlet starts defending Cinder against violent, heinous and misogynistic comments made by the clients watching the news on TV. She tries to make them understand her point of view, but they are too close-minded to get what she is saying and be reasonable. She tells them to be more respectful because Cinder is a teenager and she's going to be executed, to which they respond that she is a Lunar, so she should be executed anyway (17); other than being cruel, this is also kind of racist. To the reader, Scarlet is the only reasonable person in the bar, however, in the novel, the people in the bar see it the other way around. They do not understand Scarlet's point of view, she does not think like they do, therefore she is crazy: "Give Scarlet a break! [...] We all know cray runs in her family" (17-18) says one of the drunken men, alluding to Scarlet's grandmother. People call Scarlet's grandmother crazy because they do not understand her either: "She keeps herself holed up in that old house, talks to animals and androids like they're people, chases folk away with a rifle—", or "Granny Benoit split her last rocket" (18), they marginalize her because she acts differently.

⁸² See Excerpt 12 in the Appendix.

Being called crazy⁸³ and hearing her grandmother, who she loves deeply, be called crazy too, bewilders Scarlet. Hearing “laughters and jeers” (18) angers her even more and, very defensive of her grandmother, she resorts to violence: “Scarlet shoved Roland hard with both hands”. Her reaction to persecution—violence—is making things worse, because violent behaviors are often called crazy too; Wolf, who she has not met yet, is also categorized as crazy, a “lunatic” in the drunken man’s words (19), when he defends Scarlet, lifting the man in the air to scare him. Scarlet and Wolf are then urged to get out of the bar by its owner and Scarlet feels alienated: “Here they were, both outcasts. Unwanted. *Crazy.*” (21), the word “crazy” in italics, this same word she did not dare to hear associated with her grandmother earlier, yet used here to describe herself.

B. A Chosen Madness

In *Cress* (pp. 516-525)⁸⁴, Winter pays a visit to Scarlet in the Menagerie—Scarlet was taken prisoner by the Queen on Luna; the Menagerie is where Winter’s “pets” live, some kind of zoo. The excerpt shows how mentally deranged Winter is, but that this is also something that she chose, to protect others from her glamour; this is a sacrifice she has decided to make, even though people look down on her and mock her for it.

Scarlet quickly realizes that something is wrong with Winter, first because of her facial and bodily expressions: “The girl smiled. It was both warm and conspiratorial and it made Scarlet shiver.” (517), for a smile to be both conspiratorial and warm at the same

⁸³ « One of the best ways to understand mental health is, of course, to start talking about it. The more we talk, the more it becomes clear that there’s no single definition of “crazy,” that there’s no single experience of “crazy,” and that the word “crazy” itself means different things to different people. Some avoid labels, while others embrace them. There is power in language, and there’s power in what a word or a label can mean to each person. “Crazy” is not a singular—or definitive—experience. » From Jensen, Kelly, editor. *(Don’t) Call Me Crazy, 33 Voices Start the Conversation About Mental Health*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Young Readers, 2018, p. 12 (ebook).

⁸⁴ See Excerpt 13 in the Appendix.

time is a bit oxymoronic indeed. Winter's reactions, too, are not what Scarlet expects when she talks harshly and calls her crazy: "The girl's eyes were blank—neither surprised nor offended by Scarlet's outburst." (519), she does not react, this is something she certainly is used to hear. Winter says things that often do not make sense, like: "Your hair is like burning. Does it smell like smoke? [...] I wouldn't want you to catch fire." (518) because Scarlet has red hair, but it does sound delusional.

Winter, unlike Scarlet, does not get offended when people say she is crazy, because she knows she is:

"You shouldn't call me crazy. **They don't like that.**"

Scarlet faced her again, her gaze dragging down the raised scar tissue on her cheek.

"But you are crazy."

"I know." She lifted a small box from the basket. "Do you know how I know?"

Scarlet didn't answer.

"Because **the palace walls have been bleeding for years, and no one else sees it.**"

She shrugged, as if this were a perfectly normal thing to say. "No one believes me, but in some corridors, the blood has gotten so thick there's nowhere safe to step. When I have to pass through those places, **I leave a trail of bloody footprints for the rest of the day, and then I worry that the queen's soldiers will follow the scent and eat me up while I'm sleeping.** Some nights I don't sleep very well." Her voice dropped to a **haunted whisper**, her eyes taking on a **brittle luminescence**. "But if the blood was real, the servants would clean it up. Don't you think?"

Scarlet shivered. This girl really *was* crazy. (emphasis mine, 519-520)

She does not care if people call her crazy, but tells Scarlet she should not, because the guards do: she is a princess and should not be talked to disrespectfully. She is fully aware that she sees things no one else can see, even though sometimes she does not know if what she sees is real or not and it confuses her ("then I worry that the queen's soldiers will follow the scent and eat me up"). Again, her voice and facial expression show how troubled she is, her voice being a "haunted whisper", which sounds a bit scary, and her eyes "taking on a brittle luminescence", "brittle" being synonymous with "unstable" and "fragile" and "luminescence" sounding a bit ghostly too. Scarlet "shivers" at the end of this small monologue and asks her later: "Do you ever make sense?" (521).

Fully aware of her condition then, Winter eventually explains that she is “going mad” (523) because she has refused to use her glamour, her Lunar gift, manipulating bioelectricity, for years now, which slowly damages her brain. Scarlet, at first very wary, begins to understand that Winter is not that crazy and untrustworthy at the end of the excerpt, when, very hungry, she eats a candy Winter had given her earlier, and realizes it contained pain medicine.

Far from feeling bad about her condition, Winter plays with it, she often plays “dumb” and uses it to get what she wants, as when Scarlet called her crazy and she said: “We’re pretending that I cut off her hair and glued it to my head because I wanted to be a candlestick, and she didn’t like that.” (519) so that the guard would go away and not give them too much attention.

People often alienate things they are scared of and things they do not understand, therefore, otherness only exists in relation to other people, for something “other” to exist, there has to be a “self”, that has been socially accepted by the majority, by the dominant group. Almost none of the main characters are part of the dominant groups in our novels, the Humans from Earth, and the Lunars from Luna, and both of them reject our main characters. What is considered a weakness or liability by the dominant groups are not hidden or changed for the characters to evolve and have a happy ending. Cinder is still a Cyborg at the end of Winter, when she is queen of Luna, she is still a Lunar and still in a relationship with an earthen (Kai), Winter still has visions but is working on herself to manage them in a better way. Talking about “Beauty and the Beast” earlier, Scarlet and Wolf become Beauty and the Beast in a way too, when Wolf is captured by the queen and he undergoes additional mutations that make him look like a beast, but he stays that way even at the end of the novels, and Scarlet is still in a

relationship with him. In this story, the barriers do not prevent evolution, they make them happen.

Conclusion

This paper on Marissa Meyer's *Lunar Chronicles* had the goal to show how she modernized the fairy tales her work was inspired from, and the Fairy Tale genre as a whole.

We have established that the first step she took to do so was to mix the Fairy Tale with Science Fiction, and to set the story in a Dystopian world. She took major tropes of each genre and with a twist each time, managed to make them fit together; tropes such as the Fairy Tale's Prince Charming, the Princess, the Happy Ending, Science Fiction's aliens, cyborgs, robots and genetic experiments, Dystopia's totalitarian regime and revolution. The posthuman elements Science Fiction brings into the fairy tales creates the sense of wonder and magic there usually is within all fairy tales, however, it also allows the story to feel more real, it makes it more believable and more fitting into the dystopian world, because all science fiction is based on scientific innovations; as Meyer said herself in an interview⁸⁵, she had to do a lot of research when it came to the posthuman and advanced technologies she integrated in her story, in order to imagine her futuristic world: "I can honestly say that there isn't a single element of technology in the book that isn't already possible or being worked on by scientists at this very moment".

These tropes were modified, transformed, and mixed together, so that the Princess, the 'damsel in distress', became the world's savior, a real testament to female empowerment. The female hero portrayed through Cinder is inspiring, people believe in

⁸⁵ "CINDER!! Interview with Marissa Meyer", 2012 < <https://enchantedinkpot.livejournal.com/111826.html> >.

her, she could even be called a superhero because of her ‘powers’ and the international, interplanetary repercussions of her actions, as well as the hope she gives people who look up to her. Indeed, the Princess does not need to be saved, on the contrary, people need her to save them, disrupting the usual patriarchal hegemony found in fairy tales and such stories. The Princess is a cyborg, an alien, a mechanic, a very sarcastic person, but also a very loyal, selfless and empathic one. She is not amazingly beautiful and fit, gender-norms-abiding like a WonderWoman⁸⁶ or any other comic-book female superhero, she is just an ordinary extraordinary girl. She embodies a new way of being female, of being a woman.

We have established *The Lunar Chronicles*’ strong stand in favor of female empowerment and inclusiveness, however one could wonder why, in a story which portrays so many strong female characters and strives to demonstrate their independence from men, there was always a love interest on their paths...was it really necessary or was it only for the reader’s pleasure? Maybe the romantic aspects—they are not predominant but they are still there—take away some of the importance given to the societal challenges the characters have to face, and sometimes even back-seat them? Nevertheless, as it is a Young Adult series, destined to a younger audience, it cannot always be serious, and there is a need for this kind of relief from time to time. One thing is sure though, the modernized happy ending at the end of *Winter* does make a clean break with many romance-focused novels in Young Adult literature, as our Cinderella becomes queen without having to get married to her love interest.

⁸⁶ One of the first female superheroes, created by William Moulton Marston, she made her first appearance in a 1941 number of *All Star Comics*. Although her creator wanted to make her a feminist character, from the beginning she was very sexualized, wearing a tiny suit which hid very little of her body, and always represented as a beautiful, very fit woman, creating “norms” almost all female superheroes in comic-books followed after her, as well as girls and women in the audience.

Maybe the most important message in *The Lunar Chronicles* is about teamwork and acceptance. Indeed, throughout the series, the most important relationships portrayed are friendships, slowly developing friendships which turn out to be the strongest pillars of the story. These friendships unite people with very different backgrounds and particularities, and demonstrate the power of acceptance and having a supportive community. However, it is not only about the acceptance of others, but mostly about self-acceptance.

The norms created by our society make it very hard to accept ourselves when we differ from it even in the slightest amount. Otherness is the other main theme of the novels, as every character feels alienated for different reasons, for examples: Cinder is not an Earthen, she is a cyborg and a Lunar; Iko is an android who yearns to be human; Scarlet is misunderstood by her entourage because of her stubbornness and her ideas; Cress is a shell, a Lunar with no gift who was kept separate from society and social contacts, alone in a satellite for years; Winter is a mad Lunar Princess; Wolf was genetically altered and is not human anymore, and so on. They all first hated their particularities because they made them feel different and separate from society. Eventually, they all overcome their insecurities and manage to deconstruct the norms.

This is a story which, at first, might have seemed quite simple and self-explanatory to analyze, following the major tropes of the genres it borrows from, such as the Fairy Tale, Science Fiction or Dystopia. Nonetheless, as we studied it and went deep into the themes and problems it brings to light, we were able to understand how special and different it really was from other similar works. Sure, there are many empowered females in literature nowadays, but it is mostly mixing the themes of female empowerment and otherness which makes the series unique. It portrays young women in a different way, showing multiple ways of feeling and being other, while also creating a community they can be a part of, a very heterogenous community, a new kind of

sisterhood, friendships without boundaries. As a rallying movement, meaning to unify women, the concept of sisterhood has, too often, been hindered by limitations created by notions of race and social class (Dill). In *The Lunar Chronicles*, the community, the sisterhood created by the female protagonists really is all-inclusive, they are all very different: Cinder is a cyborg princess from another planet, Iko is an AI, Scarlet is a stubborn red-haired French girl, Cress is a naive geek girl, and Winter is a mad black princess.

Speaking of madness, mental illness is discussed through a new and very interesting lens in these novels, showing that there is not only one way to be mentally ill, normalizing it, and that this is something anyone could go through, or not really, as it is sometimes a construction people apply to other people when they do not understand them or their way of thinking. Someone who really is mentally ill, like Winter, can nevertheless be a strong woman, able to do great things. On that note, female empowerment, sisterhoods and mental deficiencies are interesting themes in many works nowadays. In a recent TV series called *Ratched* (Murphy, Ryan and Evan Romansky, Netflix, 2020—), a prequel to *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*⁸⁷ starring its villain, Nurse Ratched, Mildred Ratched seeks revenge on those who wronged her in the past, and even though she does it through monstrous acts, becoming more evil and seemingly deranged every episode, she reclaims her identity and sense of self (Tinubu): “the screenwriters allow Mildred to reclaim her story and identity without becoming the diabolical “Big Nurse” who has been etched into popular culture. And, instead of being haunted by her past, Mildred becomes the hunter” (*ibid.*). In *Sharp Objects*⁸⁸, by Gillian

⁸⁷ First a novel by Ken Kesey (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, New York, Viking Press, 1962), then adapted into a famous movie (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Directed by Miloš Forman, performances by Jack Nicholson and Louise Fletcher, United Artists, 1975).

⁸⁸ First a novel (Flynn, Gillian. *Sharp Objects*, New York, Broadway Paperbacks, 2006), and recently adapted into a miniseries (*Sharp Objects*, created by Marti Noxon, and directed by Jean-Marc Vallée, HBO, 2018, 8 episodes).

Flynn (2006), reporter Camille Preaker, freshly out of a psych hospital, returns to her hometown to cover the murder and disappearance of young girls, but this case makes her demons resurface, and the reader witnesses her try not to be consumed by them. Finally, in *Big Little Lies*⁸⁹, an unlikely sisterhood gets created between very different women, built on shared trauma and secrets, also involving a murder.

⁸⁹ Moriarty, Liane. *Big Little Lies*, New York, Berkley Books, 2015. And its adaptation into a TV series, *Big Little Lies*, created by David E. Kelley and distributed by HBO between 2017 and 2019.

Appendix

○ Summary of *Cinder*:

In a distant future, after four World Wars, Earth is finally peaceful, except for a lethal virus which cannot be cured, and tensions with its neighbor, Luna, or the Moon, which was colonized a few hundred years ago. Indeed, Luna is ruled by a ruthless and cruel queen, Levana, whose main goal is to invade and colonize Earth.

On Earth, the life of a young cyborg mechanic is about to radically change. When Cinder meets prince Kai, it marks the beginning of her journey towards her true self and her destiny, as her true identity is revealed to her—that of the long lost princess Selene Blackburn of Luna, true heir to the throne—along with the responsibility to save the world from Levana’s plans. However, when she boldly comes to the prince’s ball to alert him of the queen’s plans, an unfortunate turn of events make her end up in prison.

○ Summary of *Scarlet*:

While Cinder becomes the Eastern Commonwealth’s most wanted fugitive when she escapes New Beijing’s prison with the help of a new ally, Thorne, the reader goes in France to meet Scarlet Benoit, whose grandmother went missing. With the help of a strange street fighter named Wolf she just met, she goes searching for her; and so does Cinder. Little did Scarlet know that her grandmother was linked to Cinder’s arrival on Earth... The two teams eventually meet and join forces against the queen, embarking on new adventures.

○ Summary of *Cress*:

Cinder and her friends are looking for a way to discredit Queen Levana and push her off the Lunar throne, when they come into contact with Cress, a genius geek girl who grew up isolated on a satellite, as a prisoner, obliged to do Levana's bidding. When they rescue her, a fight with the queen's right-hand woman and her guard separates them from Scarlet, who is taken prisoner and brought to Luna.

Not able to rescue their friend right away, the team goes to Africa, where Dr. Erland expected Cinder to meet him. Together, they establish a plan to stop Levana from marrying Emperor Kai, and end up kidnapping him.

○ Summary of *Winter*:

Cinder and her friends have managed to stop—for now—Levana from becoming Empress, by kidnapping Kai. Meanwhile, the reader gets to know Princess Winter a little better, the uncanny Princess whose beauty and kindness overshadowed the Queen's. Getting to know Scarlet, who has been made her "pet" by the Queen, Winter gets involved in Cinder's fight against Levana, as eager as the long-lost Princess to free her people from the tyrant.

Together with the whole "Cinder team", they start the revolution Lunars had been needing for so long, finally defeating Levana and getting their own versions of a Happy Ending.

○ Excerpt 1 from *Scarlet*, pp. 449-452:

"Cinder? Are you in here?"

Her fingers stilled with the chip balanced on her pinkie knuckle. "Yeah, Iko. I'm here."

"Maybe next time we're on Earth you can pick up some sensors? I feel like I'm eavesdropping having the audio on all the time. It's becoming awkward."

"Awkward?"

The running lights brightened, reminding Cinder of a blush. She wondered if it was intentional.

“Scarlet and Wolf are saying gushy things in the galley,” Iko said. “Normally I like gushy things, but it’s different when it’s real people. I prefer the net dramas.”

Unexpectedly, Cinder found herself smiling. “I’ll do my best to get some sensors next time we’re on Earth.” She resumed her fiddling. The chip flipped, clacked, flipped, rolled. “How are you feeling, Iko? Are you getting used to being the auto-control system? Is it getting easier?”

Something hummed on the computer panel. “The shock has worn off, but it still feels like I’m pretending to be much more powerful than I really am, and I’m going to let everyone down. It’s a lot of responsibility.” The yellow running lights brightened by the floor. “But I did well in Paris, didn’t I?”

“You were brilliant.”

The temperature of the engine room spiked. “I was kind of brilliant.”

“We’d all be dead if it weren’t for you.”

Iko let off an unusually pitchy noise, one that Cinder thought might be a nervous giggle. “I guess it’s not so bad being the ship. You know, so long as you need me.”

Cinder smirked. “That’s very ... big of you.”

One of the engine fans slowed. “That was a joke, wasn’t it?”

Laughing, Cinder practiced spinning the chip like a top on the tip of her finger. It took a few tries before she got the hang of it and could watch it sparkle and dance without much effort.

“How about you?” Iko said after a moment. “How does it feel to be a real princess?”

Cinder flinched. The chip tumbled off her finger and she barely caught it. “So far it’s not nearly as fun as one would imagine. What were you saying about having too much power and responsibility and feeling like you’re going to let everyone down? Because that all sounded pretty familiar.”

“I thought that might be the case.”

“Are you mad that I didn’t tell you?”

A long silence followed, tying Cinder’s stomach in knots.

“No,” Iko said, finally, and Cinder wished that her lie detector worked on androids—or spaceships. “But I’m worried. Before, I figured that Queen Levana would tire of searching for us, and eventually we’d be able to go home, or at least go back to Earth and live normal lives again. But that’s never going to happen, is it?”

Cinder gulped and started flipping the chip over her fingers again. “I don’t think so.”

Click, click, click.

She exhaled a long breath and flipped the chip one last time, clutching it in her fist.

“Levana’s going to murder Kai after they’re married. She’ll be coronated as empress, and then she’ll kill him, and she’ll have the entire Commonwealth under her control. After that, it will only be a matter of time before she invades the rest of the Union.” She swept her hair off her forehead. “At least, that’s what this girl told me. The queen’s programmer.”

She loosened her grip, suddenly afraid that her metal fist would crush the chip while she was distracted.

“But I like Kai.”

“You and every other girl in the galaxy.”

“Every girl? Are you finally including yourself in that count?”

Cinder bit her lip. She knew Iko was thinking back to all the times Cinder had teased Peony for her hopeless crush on the prince, pretending to be immune to such silliness herself. But that all seemed a long, long time ago. She could hardly remember the girl she was back then.

“I just know that I can’t let him marry Levana,” she said, her voice snagging. “I can’t let him go through with it.”

She held up the chip between her thumb and forefinger. Her new hand still felt too new. So clean, so untarnished. She squinted and let the electric current flow from her spine, warming up her wrist until the hand looked human. Skin and bone.

“I concur,” said Iko. “So what are you going to do?”

Cinder gulped and let the glamour change. The flesh of her hand became metal again—not flawless titanium, but plain steel, battered with age, grime caked into the crevices, a little too small, a little too stiff. The cyborg hand she’d replaced. The one she’d always hidden—usually with heavy, work-stained cotton. Once with silk.

The girl she’d been back then. The one she’d always tried to keep hidden.

An orange light blinked at the corner of her eye. She ignored it.

“I’m going to let Wolf train me. I’m going to become stronger than she is.” She flipped the chip again. It was awkward at first, making sure the fingers in the illusion moved just how they were supposed to, that the joints flexed and moved at the right time. “I’m going to find Dr. Erland, and he’s going to teach me how to win against her. Then I’m going to track down the girl who programmed this chip, and she’s going to tell me everything she knows about Luna and its security and all the queen’s secrets.”

Click. Click. Click.

“And then I’m going to stop hiding.”

○ **Excerpt 2 from *Cress*, pp. 25-26:**

Finding the coordinates of the Rampion had been one of the greatest challenges of Cress’s hacking career. Even then, it had taken her only three hours and fifty-one minutes to do it, and all the while her pulse and adrenaline had been singing.

She had to find them first.

She had to find them first.

Because she had to protect them.

In the end, it had been a question of mathematics and deduction. Using the satellite network to ping signals off all the ships orbiting Earth. Discarding those with trackers, as she knew that the Rampion had been stripped. Discarding those that were clearly too big or too small.

That left mostly Lunar ships, and all of those were, of course, already under her dominion. She’d been disrupting their signals and confusing radar waves for years. There were many Earthens who believed Lunar ships were invisible because of a Lunar mind trick. If only they’d known that it was actually a worthless shell causing them so much trouble.

In the end, only three ships were orbiting Earth that fit the criteria, and two of them (no doubt illegal pirating ships) wasted no time in landing on Earth once they realized there was a massive space search going on that they were about to be caught in the middle of. Cress, out of curiosity, had later scanned Earthen police records in their proximity and found that both ships had been discovered upon re-entering Earth’s atmosphere. Silly criminals.

That left only one. The Rampion. And aboard it, Linh Cinder and Carswell Thorne.

Within twelve minutes of pinpointing their location, Cress scrambled every signal that posed any risk of finding them using the same method. Like magic, the 214 Rampion, Class 11.3, had vanished into space.

Then, nerves frazzled from the mental strain, she'd collapsed onto her unmade bed and beamed deliriously at the ceiling. She'd done it. She had made them invisible.

○ **Excerpt 3 from *Cress*, pp. 45-49:**

"Mistress," she said, forcing the word. "Mistress Sybil. She ordered me to find you, but I haven't told her anything—and I won't, you don't have to worry about that. I—I've been jamming the radar signals, making sure surveillance satellites are faced the other way when you pass, that sort of thing. So no one else could find you." She hesitated, realizing that four faces were gaping at her as if all her hair had just fallen out. "You must have noticed that you haven't been caught yet?"

Lifting an eyebrow, Cinder slid her gaze over to Thorne, who let out a sudden laugh.

"All this time we thought Cinder was casting some witchy spell on the other ships and it's been *you*?"

Cinder frowned, but Cress couldn't tell who her annoyance was directed at. "I guess we owe you a huge thanks."

Cress's shoulders jerked into an uncomfortable shrug. "It wasn't that difficult. Finding you was the hardest part, but anyone could have figured it out. And sneaking ships around the galaxy is something Lunars have been doing for years."

"I have a price on my head large enough to buy the Province of Japan," said Cinder. "If anyone could have figured it out, they would have by now. So, really, thank you."

A blush crept down her neck.

Thorne jabbed Cinder in the arm. "Soften her up with flattery. Good strategy."

Cinder rolled her eyes. "Look. The reason we're contacting you is because we need your help. Evidently more than I realized."

"Yes," Cress said emphatically, unwrapping the hair from her wrists. "Yes. Whatever you need."

Thorne beamed. "See? Why can't you all be this agreeable?"

The second girl smacked him on the shoulder. "She doesn't even know what we want her to do yet." Cress really looked at her for the first time. She had curly red hair, a collection of freckles over her nose, and curves that were unfairly exaggerated next to Cinder, who was all angles in comparison. The man beside her dwarfed them both and had brown hair that stuck up in every direction, faded scars that hinted at more than his share of scuffles, and a recent bruise on his jaw.

Cress tried her best to look confident. "What do you need help with?"

"When I talked to you before, on the day of the ball, you told me that you've been spying on Earth's leaders and reporting back to Queen Levana. And you also knew that once Levana became empress, she planned on having Kai assassinated so she could have total control of the Commonwealth and use that power to launch a full-scale attack on the other Earthen countries."

Cress nodded, perhaps too vigorously.

“Well, we need the people of Earth to know what lengths she’s willing to go to in order to stake claim to Earth, not just the Commonwealth. If the other leaders knew that she’s been spying on them all this time, and that she has every intention of invading their countries the first chance she gets, there’s no way they would condone this wedding. They wouldn’t accept her as a world leader, the wedding would be canceled, and ... with any luck, that’ll give us a chance to ... er. Well, the ultimate goal is to dethrone her entirely.”

Cress licked her lips. “So ... what do you want me to do?”

“Evidence. I need evidence of what Levana’s planning, of what’s she’s been doing.”

Pondering, Cress sank back in her chair. “I have copies of all the video surveillance from over the years. It would be easy to pull up some of the most incriminating vids and send them to you over this link.”

“That’s perfect!”

“It’s circumstantial, though. It would only prove that Levana is interested in what the other leaders are doing, not necessarily that she plans on invading them, and I don’t think I have any documentation about her wanting to murder His Majesty, either. It’s largely my own suspicions, and speculation on the things my mistress has said.”

“That’s fine, we’ll take whatever you have. Levana already attacked us once. I don’t think Earthens will take much convincing that she would do it again.”

Cress nodded, but her enthusiasm had waned. She cleared her throat. “My mistress will recognize the footage. She’ll know it was me who gave it to you.”

Cinder’s smile began to fade, and Cress knew she didn’t need to clarify her point. She would be killed for her betrayal.

“I’m sorry,” said Cinder. “If there was any way for us to get you away from her, we would, but we can’t risk coming to Luna. Getting through port security—”

“I’m not on Luna!” The words tumbled out of Cress, coaxed on by a twist of hope. “You don’t have to come to Luna. I’m not there.”

Cinder scanned the room behind Cress. “But you said before that you couldn’t contact Earth, so you’re not...”

“I’m on a satellite. I can give you my coordinates, and I checked weeks ago if your Rampion has compatible docking gear and it does, or at least the podships that come standard with it do. You ... you still have the podships, right?”

“You’re on a satellite?” said Thorne.

“Yes. Set to a sixteen-hour polar orbit around Earth.”

“How long have you been living in a satellite?”

She twisted her hair around her fingers. “Seven years ... or so.”

“Seven *years*? By yourself?”

“Y-yes.” She shrugged. “Mistress restocks my food and water and I have net access, so it isn’t so bad, but ... well...”

“But you’re a prisoner,” said Thorne.

“I prefer damsel in distress,” she murmured.

One side of Thorne’s mouth quirked up, into that perfect half smile he’d had in his graduation photo. A look that was a little bit devious, and all sorts of charming.

Cress’s heart stopped, but if they noticed her melting into her chair, they didn’t say anything.

The red-haired girl leaned back, removing herself from the frame, though Cress could still hear her. “It’s not like we can do anything that will make Levana want to find us even more than she already does.”

“Plus,” said Cinder, exchanging looks with her companions, “do we really want to leave someone in Levana’s care who knows how to track our ship?”

Cress’s fingers began to tingle where her hair was cutting off circulation, but she hardly noticed.

Thorne tilted his head and peered at her through the screen. “All right, damsel. Send over those coordinates.”

○ Excerpt 4 from *Scarlet*, pp. 252-253:

When Kai called on another journalist, Cinder realized she’d missed an entire question.

“Did you know that she was cyborg?” asked a woman in an unhidden tone of disgust.

Kai stared at her, appearing confused, then let his gaze dance over the crowd. He shuffled his feet closer to the podium, a wrinkle forming on the bridge of his nose.

Cinder bit the inside of her cheek and braced herself for adamant disgust. Who would ever invite a cyborg to the ball?

But instead, Kai said simply, “I don’t see that her being cyborg is relevant. Next question?”

Cinder’s metal fingers jolted.

“Your Majesty, did you know that she was *Lunar* when you extended this invitation?”

Looking like he might keel over from exhaustion, Kai shook his head. “No. Of course not. I—naively, it seems—was under the impression that there were no Lunars in the Commonwealth. Other than our diplomatic guests here at the palace, of course. Now that it’s been brought to my attention how easy it is for them to blend in with the populace, we will be taking additional security measures to both keep Lunars from emigrating here, as well as to find and export any that may be within our borders. I have every intention to comply with the statutes of the Interplanetary Agreement of 54 T.E. on this matter. Yes, second row.”

“Regarding Her Majesty, Queen Levana, has she or any of the Lunar court commented on the escape of the convict?”

Kai’s jaw tensed. “Oh, she’s had a thing or two to say about it.”

Behind Kai, a government official cleared his throat. The irritation quickly evaporated from Kai’s face, replaced with tactful vacancy.

“Queen Levana wants Linh Cinder to be found,” he amended, “and brought to justice.”

“Your Majesty, do you think these events may have harmed the diplomatic proceedings between Earth and Luna?”

“I don’t think they helped.”

“Your Majesty.” A man stood, three rows back. “Witness accounts from the ball seem to indicate that Linh Cinder’s arrest was part of an agreement between yourself and the queen, and that letting her go could be cause for war. Is there reason to believe the cyborg’s escape could lead to a greater threat to our national security?”

Kai moved to scratch behind his ear, but caught the nervous tick and placed his hand back on the podium. “The word war has been thrown around between Earth and Luna for

generations. It is my prerogative, as it was always my father's, to avoid that at all costs. I assure you, I am doing everything in my power not to further unravel our fragile relationship with Luna, starting with finding Linh Cinder. That's all, thank you."

He stepped off the stage to a wave of unanswered questions, and was pulled into a whispered conversation with a group of officials.

○ **Excerpt 5 from *Winter*, pp. 40-42:**

"Oh, probably nothing, but there's a small chance the ship would self-destruct." Pulling out two of the fresh-cut wires, she began to twist them together into a new sequence.

Kai hardly breathed until she'd taken one of the threatening wires out of his grip. "Why don't you practice on me?" he said.

"Practice what?"

"You know. Your mind-manipulation thing."

She paused with the cutters hovering over a blue wire. "Absolutely not."

"Why?"

"I said I'd never manipulate you, and I'm sticking with that."

"It isn't manipulation if I know you're doing it." He hesitated. "At least, I don't think so. We could use a code word, so I'll know when you're controlling me. Like ... what were those called again?"

"Wire cutters?"

"Like *wire cutters*."

"No."

"Or something else."

"I'm not practicing on you." Slipping the cutters into her pocket, she finished splicing the rest of the wires and relieved Kai of his duty. "There, we'll see how that goes."

"Cinder, I have nothing better to do. Literally, *nothing* better to do. My time on this ship has taught me that I have zero practical skills. I can't cook. I can't fix anything. I can't help Cress with surveillance. I know nothing about guns or fighting or ... Mostly, I'm just a good talker, and that's only useful in politics."

"Let's not overlook your ability to make every girl swoon with just a smile."

It took Kai a moment to hear her over his frustration, but then his expression cleared and he grinned.

"Yep," she said, shutting the panel. "That's the one."

"I mean it, Cinder. I want to be useful. I want to help."

She turned back to face him. Frowned. Considered.

"*Wire cutters*," she said.

He tensed, a trace of doubt clouding his expression. But then he lifted his chin. Trusting.

With the slightest nudge at Kai's will, she urged his arm to reach around her and pull the wrench from her back pocket. It was no more difficult than controlling her own cyborg limbs. A mere thought, and she could have him do anything.

Kai blinked at the tool. "That's wasn't so bad."

"Oh, Kai."

He glanced at her, then back to the wrench as his hand lifted the tool up to eye level and his fingers, no longer under his control, began to twirl the wrench—over one finger, under the other. Slow at first, then faster, until the gleaming of the metal looked like a magic trick.

Kai gaped, awestruck, but there was an edge of discomfort to it. “I always wondered how you did that.”

“Kai.”

He looked back at her, the wrench still dancing over his knuckles.

She shrugged. “It’s too easy. I could do this while scaling a mountain, or ... solving complex mathematical equations.”

His eyes narrowed. “You have a *calculator* in your head.”

Laughing, she released her hold on Kai’s hand. Kai jumped back as the wrench clattered to the ground. Realizing he had control of his own limb again, he stooped to pick it up.

“That’s beside the point,” said Cinder. “With Wolf, there’s some challenge, some focus required, but with Earthens...”

“All right, I get it. But what *can* I do? I feel so useless, milling around this ship while the war is going on, and you’re all making plans, and I’m just waiting.”

She grimaced at the frustration in his tone. Kai was responsible for billions of people, and she knew he felt like he had abandoned them, even if he hadn’t been given a choice. Because *she* hadn’t given him a choice.

He was kind to her. Since that first argument after he’d woken up aboard the Rampion, he was careful not to blame her for his frustrations. It was her fault, though. He knew it and she knew it and sometimes it felt like they were caught in a dance Cinder didn’t know the steps to. Each of them avoiding this obvious truth so they didn’t disrupt the mutual ground they’d discovered. The all-too-uncertain happiness they’d discovered.

“The only chance we have of succeeding,” she said, “is if you can persuade Levana to host the wedding on Luna. So right now, you can be thinking about how you’re going to accomplish that.” Leaning forward, she pressed a soft kiss against his mouth. (*Eighteen.*) “Good thing you’re such a great talker.”

○ **Excerpt 6, from *Scarlet*, pp. 366-367:**

“How does it feel?” she asked, examining the bite marks on his arm.

“Like I was bit by a feral dog.”

“Are you light-headed? Woozy? You lost a lot of blood.”

“I’m fine,” he said, glowering. “Pretty upset about my jacket.”

“It could have been a lot worse.” She ripped off a long band of medical tape. “I could have used you as a human shield, like that officer.” Her voice hiccupped on the last word. A headache was coming on, starting in her desert-dry eyes, as she wrapped a bandage around Thorne’s arm and taped it.

“What happened?”

She shook her head and peered down at the gash in her palm. “I don’t know,” she said, awkwardly wrapping the tape around it too.

“Cinder.”

“I didn’t mean to.” She slumped back in her own chair. She felt sick, remembering the dead, blank stare of the woman as she put herself between Cinder and that man. “I just panicked, and the next thing I knew, she was there, in front of me. I didn’t even think—I didn’t try—it just happened.” She shoved herself out of the chair and marched out into the cargo bay, needing room. To breathe, to move, to think. “This is exactly what I was talking about! Having this gift. It’s turning me into a monster! Just like those men. Just like Levana.”

She rubbed her temples, biting back her next confession.

Maybe it wasn’t just being Lunar. Maybe it ran in her blood. Maybe she was just like her aunt ... just like her mother, who had been no better.

“Or maybe,” Thorne said, “it was an accident, and you’re still learning.”

“An accident!” She spun around. “I killed a woman!”

Thorne held up a finger. “No. That blood-sucking, howling wolf-man killed her. Cinder, you were scared. You didn’t know what you were doing.”

“He was coming after *me*, and I just used her.”

“And you think he would have left the rest of us alone once he had you?”

Cinder clamped her jaw shut, stomach still churning.

“I get that you feel like it was your fault, but let’s try to put some of the blame where it belongs here.”

○ Excerpt 7, from *Scarlet*, pp. 338-340:

Wolf didn’t move, and didn’t speak again for a long time. Spinning away, Scarlet crossed her arms over her chest and glared at the wall, shaking.

“I lied to you about a lot of things,” he finally said.

She snorted.

“But I meant every apology.”

She scowled, seeing bright spots on the wall.

“I never wanted to lie to you, or frighten you, or ... and I tried, in the train...”

“Don’t you dare.” She faced him again, digging her nails into her arms to keep from lashing out and making an idiot of herself again. “Don’t you even *think* about bringing that up, or trying to justify what you did to me. What your people have done to my grandmother!”

“Scarlet—” He took a step toward her but she threw her hands up and backed away until her calves collided with the mattress.

“Don’t come near me. I don’t want to see you. I don’t want to listen to you. I would rather die than ever be touched by you again.”

She saw a gulp straining against his throat. Hurt flashed across his face but it only served to make her angrier.

Wolf cast a glance toward the door and Scarlet followed the look, noting that her usual guard was waiting outside, watching them as if they were a popular drama on the netscreens. Her stomach twisted.

“I’m sorry to hear that, Scarlet,” Wolf said, turning back to her. His voice had lost the edge of regret and was all business and cruelty again. “Because I didn’t come to apologize. I came for something else.”

She straightened. “I don’t care what you—”

He was at her in a single stride, his hands buried in her hair, pressing her against the wall. His mouth stifled her surprised cry, and then an angry scream. She tried to shove him off her but she’d have had no more luck against the iron bars on the door.

Her eyes went wide as she felt his tongue and in a flash of rebellion she thought to bite him, but then there was something else. Something small and flat and hard being pressed into her mouth. Every muscle went taut.

Wolf pulled away. His grip softened, cradling her head. His scars were a blur in her vision. She couldn’t find her breath.

And then he murmured, so quiet she could barely catch the words even as they steamed against her lips. “Wait until morning,” he said. “The world won’t be safe tonight.”

Wolf focused on his own fingers as they took a red curl between them. He flinched, as if touching her pained him.

Indignation returning, Scarlet swiped him away and darted beneath his arm. She fled to the corner of the room and crouched down on the bed. Covering her mouth with one hand, she smashed the other against the wall for balance.

She waited, her entire body aflame, until Wolf slinked out of the room. The bars opened and shut.

Outside, the guard snickered. “I suppose we all have our thing,” he said, and then their footsteps padded down the corridor.

Slumping against the wall, Scarlet spit the foreign object into her palm.

A small ID chip winked up at her.

○ **Excerpt 8, from *Cinder*, pp. 73-74:**

Dr. Erland pulled a stylus from behind his ear and tapped at his port, downloading the information Li had sent him. The new patient’s profile popped up.

LINH CINDER, LICENSED MECHANIC
ID #0097917305
BORN 29 NOV 109 T.E.
0 MEDIA HITS

RESIDENT OF NEW BEIJING, EASTERN COMMONWEALTH. WARD OF LINH ADRI.

Li opened the door to the lab. Tucking the stylus back behind his ear, Dr. Erland entered the room with twitching fingers.

The girl was lying on the table on the other side of the viewing window. The sterile quarantine room was so bright he had to squint into the glare. A med-droid was just capping a plastic vial filled with blood and plunking it onto the chute, sending it off to the blood lab.

The girl's hands and wrists had been fastened with metal bands. Her left hand was steel, tarnished and dark between the joints as if it needed a good cleaning. Her pant legs had been rolled up her calves, revealing one human leg and one synthetic.

"Is she plugged in yet?" he asked, slipping his port into his coat pocket.

"Not yet," said Li. "But look at her."

Dr. Erland grunted, staving off his disappointment. "Yes, her ratio should be impressive. But it's not the best quality, is it?"

"Not the exterior maybe, but you should have seen her wiring. Autocontrol and four-grade nervous system."

Dr. Erland quirked an eyebrow, then lowered it just as fast. "Has she been unruly?"

"The med-droids had trouble apprehending her. She disabled two of them with a...a belt, or something, before they were able to shock her system. She's been out all night."

"But she volunteered?"

"Her legal guardian did. She suspects the patient has already had contact with the disease. A sister—taken in yesterday."

Dr. Erland pulled the microphone across the desk. "Wakey, wakey, sleeping beauty," he sang, rapping on the glass.

"They stunned her with 200 volts," said Li. "But I expect her to be coming around any minute now."

Dr. Erland hooked his thumbs on his coat pockets. "Well. We don't need consciousness. Let's go ahead and get started."

○ **Excerpt 9, from *Cinder*, pp. 80-82:**

Her heart galloped as the android undid the latch in the back of her head. She shut her eyes, trying to imagine herself anywhere but this cold, sterile room. She didn't want to think about the two metal prongs being inserted into her control panel—her brain—but it was impossible not to think about it as she heard them being maneuvered into place.

Nausea. She swallowed back the bile.

She heard the click of the prongs. She couldn't feel anything—there were no nerve endings. But a shudder ripped through her, sending goose bumps down her arms. Her retina display informed her that she was now connected to **RATIO DETECTOR 2.3. SCANNING . . . 2% . . . 7% . . . 16% . . .**

The machine hummed on the table behind her. Cinder imagined a subtle current of electricity slipping along her wires. She felt it most where the skin joined with metal, a tingle where the blood had been cut off.

63% . . .

Cinder clenched her jaw. Someone had been there before—in her head. A fact never forgotten, always ignored. Some surgeon, some stranger, opening her skull and inserting their made-up system of wires and conductors while she had lain helpless beneath them. Someone had altered her brain. Someone had altered her.

78% . . .

She choked on the scream that tried to burble out of her. It was painless. Painless. But someone was in her head. Inside her. An invasion. A violation. She tried to jerk away, but the android held her firm.

“Get out!” The scream echoed back to her off the cold walls.

SCAN COMPLETED .

The med-droid disconnected the prongs. Cinder lay trembling, her heart crushed against her ribcage.

The med-droid didn’t bother to close the panel in the back of her head.

Cinder hated it. Hated Adri. Hated the mad voice behind the mirror. Hated the nameless people who had turned her into this.

“Thank you for that stellar cooperation,” said the disembodied voice. “It will take just a minute for us to record your cybernetic makeup, and then we’ll proceed. Please make yourself comfortable.”

Cinder ignored him, face turned away from the mirror. It was one of those rare moments she was glad to have no tear ducts, otherwise she was sure she’d be a sniveling disaster, and she would have hated herself all the more for it.

She could still hear voices over the speakers, but their words consisted of muttered scientific lingo she didn’t understand. The med-droid was bustling around behind her, putting the ratio detector away. Ready for her next instrument of torture.

Cinder opened her eyes. The netscreen on the wall had changed, no longer showing her life stats. Her ID number was still at the top, headlining a holographic diagram.

Of a girl.

A girl full of wires.

It was as if someone had chopped her down the middle, dividing her front half from her back half, and then put her cartoonish image into a medical textbook. Her heart, her brain, her intestines, her muscles, her blue veins. Her control panel, her synthetic hand and leg, wires that trailed from the base of her skull all the way down her spine and out to her prosthetic limbs. The scar tissue where flesh met metal. A small dark square in her wrist—her ID chip.

But those things she had known. Those things she had expected.

She had not known about the metal vertebrae along her spine, or the four metal ribs, or the synthetic tissue around her heart, or the metal splints along the bones in her right leg.

The bottom of the screen was labeled:

RATIO: 36.28%

She was 36.28 percent not human.

“Thank you for your patience,” came the voice, startling her. “As you’ve no doubt noticed, you are quite the exemplary model of modern science, young lady.”

○ **Excerpt 10, from *Cinder*, pp. 3-8:**

THE SCREW THROUGH CINDER’S ANKLE HAD RUSTED, THE engraved cross marks worn to a mangled circle. Her knuckles ached from forcing the screwdriver into the joint as she

struggled to loosen the screw one gritting twist after another. By the time it was extracted far enough for her to wrench free with her prosthetic steel hand, the hairline threads had been stripped clean.

Tossing the screwdriver onto the table, Cinder gripped her heel and yanked the foot from its socket. A spark singed her fingertips and she jerked away, leaving the foot to dangle from a tangle of red and yellow wires.

She slumped back with a relieved groan. 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. She just hoped Iko would be back soon with its replacement.

Cinder was the only full-service mechanic at New Beijing's weekly market. Without a sign, her booth hinted at her trade only by the shelves of stock android parts that crowded the walls. It was squeezed into a shady cove between a used netscreen dealer and a silk merchant, both of whom frequently complained about the tangy smell of metal and grease that came from Cinder's booth, even though it was usually disguised by the aroma of honey buns from the bakery across the square. Cinder knew they really just didn't like being next to *her*.

A stained tablecloth divided Cinder from browsers as they shuffled past. The square was filled with shoppers and hawkers, children and noise. The bellows of men as they bargained with robotic shopkeepers, trying to talk the computers down from their desired profit margins. The hum of ID scanners and monotone voice receipts as money changed accounts. The netscreens that covered every building and filled the air with the chatter of advertisements, news reports, gossip.

Cinder's auditory interface dulled the noise into a static thrumming, but today one melody lingered above the rest that she couldn't drown out. A ring of children were standing just outside her booth, trilling—"Ashes, ashes, we all fall down!"—and then laughing hysterically as they collapsed to the pavement.

A smile tugged at Cinder's lips. Not so much at the nursery rhyme, a phantom song about pestilence and death that had regained popularity in the past decade. The song itself made her squeamish. But she did love the glares from passersby as the giggling children fell over in their paths. The inconvenience of having to swarm around the writhing bodies stirred grumbles from the shoppers, and Cinder adored the children for it.

"Sunto! *Sunto!*"

Cinder's amusement wilted. She spotted Chang Sacha, the baker, pushing through the crowd in her flour-coated apron. "Sunto, come here! I told you not to play so close to—"

Sacha met Cinder's gaze, knotted her lips, then grabbed her son by the arm and spun away. The boy whined, dragging his feet as Sacha ordered him to stay closer to their booth. Cinder wrinkled her nose at the baker's retreating back. The remaining children fled into the crowd, taking their bright laughter with them.

"It's not like wires are contagious," Cinder muttered to her empty booth.

With a spine-popping stretch, she pulled her dirty fingers through her hair, combing it up into a messy tail, then grabbed her blackened work gloves. She covered her steel hand first, and though 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. She stretched her fingers wide, working out the cramp that had formed at the fleshy base of her thumb from clenching the screwdriver, and squinted again into the city square. She spotted plenty of stocky white androids in the din, but none of them Iko.

Sighing, Cinder bent over the toolbox beneath the worktable. After digging through the jumbled mess of screwdrivers and wrenches, she emerged with the fuse puller that had been long buried at the bottom. One by one, she disconnected the wires that still linked her foot and ankle, each spurting a tiny spark. She couldn't feel them through the gloves, but her retina display helpfully informed her with blinking red text that she was losing connection to the limb.

With a yank of the last wire, her foot clattered to the concrete.

The difference was instant. For once in her life, she felt...weightless.

She made room for the discarded foot on the table, setting it up like a shrine amid the wrenches and lug nuts, before hunkering over her ankle again and cleaning the grime from the socket with an old rag.

THUD.

Cinder jerked, her head smacking the underside of the table. She shoved back from the desk, her scowl landing first on a lifeless android that sat squat on her worktable and then on the man behind it. She was met with startled copper-brown eyes and black hair that hung past his ears and lips that every girl in the country had admired a thousand times.

Her scowl vanished.

His own surprise was short-lived, melting into an apology. "I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't realize anyone was back there."

Cinder barely heard him above the blankness in her mind. With her heartbeat gathering speed, her retina display scanned his features, so familiar from years spent watching him on the netscreens. He seemed taller in real life and a gray hooded sweatshirt was like none of the fine clothes he usually made appearances in, but still, 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. Another second and the display informed her of what she already knew; details scribbled across the bottom of her vision in a stream of green text.

**PRINCE KAITO, CROWN PRINCE OF THE EASTERN COMMONWEALTH
ID #0082719057
BORN 7 APR 108 T.E.
FF 88,987 MEDIA HITS, REVERSE CHRON
POSTED 14 AUG 126 T.E.: A PRESS MEETING IS TO BE HOSTED BY CROWN
PRINCE KAI ON 15 AUG TO DISCUSS THE ONGOING LETUMOSIS RESEARCH AND
POSSIBLE LEADS FOR AN ANTIDOTE—**

Cinder launched up from her chair, nearly toppling over when she forgot about her missing limb. Steadying herself with both hands on the table, she managed an awkward bow. The retina display sank out of sight.

"Your Highness," she stammered, head lowered, glad that he couldn't see her empty ankle behind the tablecloth.

The prince flinched and cast a glance over his shoulder before hunching toward her. "Maybe, um..."—he pulled his fingers across his lips—"on the Highness stuff?"

Wide-eyed, Cinder forced a shaky nod. "Right. Of course. How—can I—are you—" She swallowed, the words sticking like bean paste to her tongue.

"I'm looking for a Linh Cinder," said the prince. "Is he around?"

Cinder dared to lift one stabilizing hand from the table, using it to tug the hem of her glove higher on her wrist. Staring at the prince's chest, she stammered, "I-I'm Linh Cinder."

Her eyes followed his hand as he planted it on top of the android's bulbous head.

"You're Linh Cinder?"

"Yes, Your High—" She bit down on her lip.

"The mechanic?"

She nodded. "How can I help you?"

Instead of answering, the prince bent down, craning his neck so that she had no choice but to meet his eyes, and dashed a grin at her. Her heart winced.

The prince straightened, forcing her gaze to follow him.

"You're not quite what I was expecting."

"Well you're hardly—what I—um." Unable to hold his gaze, Cinder reached for the android and pulled it to her side of the table. "What seems to be wrong with the android, Your Highness?"

○ **Excerpt 11, from *Cinder*, pp. 175-179:**

Dr. Erland's eyes softened, trying to comfort, but the look only unnerved her.

"Miss Linh, from your blood samples I have deduced that you are, in fact, Lunar."

The word washed over Cinder as if he were speaking a different language. The machine in her brain kept ticking, ticking, like it was working through an impossible equation.

"Lunar?" The word evaporated off her tongue, almost nonexistent.

"Yes."

"*Lunar?*"

"Indeed."

She pulled back. Looked at the walls, the exam table, the silent news anchor. "I don't have magic," she said, folding her arms in defiance.

"Yes, well. Not *all* Lunars are born with the gift. They're called shells, which is a slightly derogatory connotation on Luna, so...well, bioelectrically challenged doesn't sound much better, does it?" He chuckled awkwardly.

Cinder's metal hand clenched. She briefly wished she did have some sort of magic so she could shoot a bolt of lightning through his head. "I'm not Lunar." She wrenched her glove off and waved her hand at him. "I'm *cyborg*. You don't think that's bad enough?"

"Lunars can be cyborgs as easily as humans. It's rare, of course, given their intense opposition of cybernetics and brain-machine interfaces—"

Cinder faked a gasp. "*No*. Who would be opposed to *that*?"

"But being Lunar and being cyborg are not mutually exclusive. And it isn't altogether surprising that you were brought here. Since the instatement of the non-gifted infanticide under Queen Channary, many Lunar parents have attempted to rescue their shell children by bringing them to Earth. Of course, most of them die and are executed for the attempt, but still...I believe this was the case with you. The rescuing part. Not the execution part."

An orange light flickered in the corner of her vision. Cinder squinted at the man. "You're lying."

"I am not lying, Miss Linh."

She opened her mouth to argue—which part? What exactly had he said that triggered the lie detector?

The light went away as he continued speaking.

“This also explains your immunity. In fact, when you defeated the pathogens yesterday, your being Lunar was the first possibility to cross my mind, but I didn’t want to say anything until I’d confirmed it.”

Cinder pressed her palms against her eyes, blocking out the blaring fluorescents. “What does this have to do with immunity?”

“Lunars are immune to the disease, of course.”

“No! Not *of course*. This is not common knowledge.” She strung her hands back against her ponytail.

“Oh. Well, but it is common sense when you know the history.” He wrung his hands. “Which, I suppose, most people don’t.”

Cinder hid her face, gasping for air. Perhaps she could rely on the man being insane and not have to believe anything he said after all.

“You see,” said Dr. Erland, “Lunars are the original carrier hosts for letumosis. Their migration to the rural areas of Earth, mostly during the reign of Queen Channary, brought the disease into contact with humans for the first time. Historically, it’s a common situation. The rats that brought the bubonic plague to Europe, the conquistadors who brought smallpox to the Native Americans. It sounds so second era that Earthens take their immunities for granted now, but with the migration of the Lunars, well...Earthen immune systems just weren’t prepared. Once even a handful of Lunars arrived, bringing the disease with them, it began spreading like wildfire.”

“I thought I wasn’t contagious.”

“You aren’t *now*, because your body has developed means of ridding itself of the disease, but you may have been at one point. Besides, I suspect that Lunars have different levels of immunity—while some can rid their bodies of the disease entirely, others carry it around without ever developing outward symptoms, spreading it everywhere they go and being none the wiser of the trouble they’re causing.”

Cinder waved her hands before him. “No. You’re wrong. There’s some other explanation. I can’t be—”

“I understand this is a lot to take in. But I need you to understand why you cannot be present when the Her Majesty arrives. It’s far too dangerous.”

“No, you *don’t* understand. I am not one of *them!*”

To be cyborg *and* Lunar. One was enough to make her a mutant, an outcast, but to be *both*? She shuddered. Lunars were a cruel, savage people. They murdered their shell children. They lied and scammed and brainwashed each other because they *could*. They didn’t care who they hurt, so long as it benefitted themselves. She was not one of them.

“Miss Linh, you must listen to me. You were brought here for a reason.”

“What, to help you find a cure? You think this is some sort of twisted gift of fate?”

“I am not talking fate or destiny. I am talking survival. You *cannot* let the queen see you.”

Cinder shrank against the cabinet, more baffled by the second. “Why? Why would she care about me?”

“She would care very much about you.” He hesitated, his sea-blue eyes wild with panic. “She...she hates Lunar shells, you see. Shells are immune to the Lunar glamour.” He twirled his hands through the air, searching. “Their *brainwashing*, as it were. Queen Levana can’t control shells, which is why she continues to have them exterminated.” His lips hardened. “Queen Levana

will stop at nothing to ensure her control, to terminate any resistance. That means killing those who could resist her—people like you. Do you understand me, Miss Linh? If she were to see you, she would kill you.”

Gulping, Cinder pressed her thumb against her left wrist. She couldn’t feel her ID chip, but she knew it was there.

Extracted from the deceased.

If Dr. Erland were right, then everything she knew about herself, her childhood, her parents, was wrong. A made-up history. A made-up girl.

○ **Excerpt 12, from *Scarlet*, pp. 17-21:**

Scarlet spun to face them, accidentally kicking a bottle of wine off the bar. The glass shattered on the floor, but Scarlet barely heard it as she waved the cable at the incensed crowd. “You all should have some respect! That girl’s going to be executed!”

“That girl’s a Lunar!” a woman yelled. “She *should* be executed!”

The sentiment was enforced with nods and someone lobbing a crust of bread at Scarlet’s shoulder. She planted both hands on her hips. “She’s only sixteen.”

A brash of arguments roared up, men and women alike clambering to their feet and screaming about Lunars and evil and *that girl tried to kill a Union leader!*

“Hey, hey, everyone calm down! Give Scarlet a break!” Roland yelled, his confidence bolstered by the whiskey on his breath. He held his hands out toward the jostling crowd. “We all know crazy runs in her family. First that old goose runs off, and now Scar’s defending Lunar rights!”

A parade of laughter and jeers marched past Scarlet’s ears, but were muddled by the sound of her own rushing blood. Without knowing how she’d gotten off the counter, she was suddenly halfway over the bar, bottles and glasses scattering, her fist connecting with Roland’s ear.

He yelped and spun back to face her. “What—”

My grandma’s not crazy!” She grabbed the front of his shirt. “Is that what you told the detective? When he questioned you? Did you tell him she was crazy?”

“Of course I told him she was crazy!” he yelled back, the stench of alcohol flooding over her. She squeezed the fabric until her fists ached. “And I bet I wasn’t the only one. With the way she keeps herself holed up in that old house, talks to animals and androids like they’re people, chases folk away with a rifle—”

“*One* time, and he was an escort salesman!”

“I’m not one tinge surprised that Granny Benoit split her last rocket. Seems to me it’s been coming a long while.”

Scarlet shoved Roland hard with both hands. He stumbled back into Émilie, who’d been trying to get in between them. Émilie screamed and fell back onto a table in her effort to keep Roland from crushing her.

Roland regained his balance, looking like he couldn’t decide if he wanted to smirk or snarl. “Better be careful, Scar, or you’re going to end up just like the old—”

Table legs screeched against tile and then the fighter had one hand wrapped around Roland's neck, lifting him clear off the floor.

The tavern fell silent. The fighter, unconcerned, held Roland aloft like he was nothing more than a doll, ignoring Roland's gagging.

Scarlet gaped, the edge of the bar digging into her stomach.

"I believe you owe her an apology," the fighter said in his quiet, even tone.

A gurgle slipped out of Roland's mouth. His feet flailed in search of the ground.

"Hey, let him go!" a man yelled, leaping off his stool. "You're going to kill him!" He grasped the fighter's wrist, but he might have grabbed an iron bar for as much as the limb budged. Flushing, the man let go and pulled back for a punch, but as soon as he swung, the fighter's free hand came up and blocked it.

Scarlet staggered back from the bar, dully noting a tattoo of nonsensical letters and numbers stamped across the fighter's forearm. LSOP962.

The fighter still seemed angry, but now there was also the tiniest bit of amusement in his expression, like he'd just remembered the rules to a game. He eased Roland's feet back to the ground, simultaneously releasing him and the other man's fist.

Roland caught his balance on a stool. "What's wrong with you?" he choked out, rubbing his neck. "Are you some lunatic city transplant or something?"

"You were being disrespectful."

"*Disrespectful?*" barked Roland. "You just tried to kill me!"

Gilles erupted from the kitchen, shoving through the swinging doors. "What's going on out here?"

"This guy's trying to start a fight," someone said from the crowd.

"And Scarlet broke the screens!"

"I didn't break them, you idiot!" Scarlet yelled, though she wasn't sure who had said it.

Gilles surveyed the dead screens, Roland still rubbing his neck, the broken bottles and glasses littering the wet floor. He glowered at the street fighter. "You," he said, pointing. "Get out of my tavern."

Scarlet's gut tightened. "He didn't do any—"

"Don't you start, Scarlet. How much destruction were you planning on causing today? Are you *trying* to get me to close my account?"

She bristled, her face still burning. "Maybe I'll just take back the delivery and we'll see how your customers like eating spoiled vegetables from now on."

Rounding the bar, Gilles snatched the cable out of Scarlet's hand. "Do you really think you're the only working farm in France? Honestly, Scar, I only order from you because your grandmother would give me hell if I didn't!"

Scarlet pursed her lips, holding back the frustrated reminder that her grandmother wasn't here anymore so maybe he *should* just order from someone else if that's what he wanted.

Gilles turned his attention back to the fighter. "I said get out!"

Ignoring him, the fighter held his hand out to Émilie, who was still half curled against a table. Her face was flushed and her skirt was soaked through with beer, but her gaze glowed with infatuation as she let herself be pulled to her feet.

"Thank you," she said, her whisper carrying in the uncanny silence.

Finally, the fighter met Gilles's scowl. "I will go, but I haven't paid for my meal." He hesitated. "I can pay for the broken glasses as well."

Scarlet blinked. “What?”

“I don’t want your money!” Gilles screamed, sounding insulted, which came as an even further shock to Scarlet, who had only ever heard Gilles complain about money and how his vendors were bleeding him dry. “I want you out of my tavern.”

The fighter’s pale eyes darted to Scarlet, and for a moment she sensed a connection between them.

Here they were, both outcasts. Unwanted. *Crazy*.

Pulse thrumming, she buried the thought. This man was trouble. He *fought* people for a living—or perhaps even for fun. She wasn’t sure which was worse.

Turning away, the fighter dipped his head in what almost looked like an apology and shuffled toward the exit. Scarlet couldn’t help thinking as he passed that despite all signs of brutality, he looked no more menacing now than a scolded dog.

○ Excerpt 13, from Cress, pp. 516-525:

A stranger, a girl, was sitting cross-legged in her cage, so close Scarlet could have touched her. Scarlet tried to push herself away, but the action sent pain rippling through her bandaged hand. She hissed and fell back onto the ground.

Her hand was the worst of it—the hatchet had taken her left pinky finger to the second knuckle. She had not passed out, though she wished she would have. A Lunar doctor had been waiting to bandage the wound, and he had done it with such precision, Scarlet suspected it was a very common procedure.

But then there were also the scratches on her face and stomach from her time spent in the company of Master Charleson, and countless aches from sleeping on hard floors for—well, she’d lost count of how many nights.

The girl’s only reaction to Scarlet’s grimace was a long, slow blink.

Clearly, this girl was not another prisoner—or “pet” as the extravagantly dressed Lunars called Scarlet when they passed by her cage, giggling and pointing and making loud remarks on whether or not it was safe to feed the animals.

The girl’s clothing was the first indication of her status—a gauzy, silver-white dress that had settled around her shoulders and thighs like snowflakes might settle on a sleepy hillside. Her warm brown skin was flawless and healthy, her fingernails perfectly shaped and clean. Her eyes were bright, the color of melted caramel, but with hints of slate-gray around her pupils. On top of all that, she had silky black hair that curled into perfect spirals, neatly framing her high cheekbones and ruby-red lips.

She was the most beautiful human being Scarlet had ever seen.

Yet, there was one anomaly. Or—three. The right side of the girl’s face was marred by three scars that cut down her cheek from the corner of her eye to her jaw. Like perpetual tears. Strangely, the flaws on her skin didn’t reduce her beauty, but almost accentuated it. Almost compelled a person to stare at her longer, unable to peel their eyes away.

It was with this thought that Scarlet realized it was a glamour. Which meant this was another trick.

Her expression changed from awestruck and blushing—she despised that she was actually *blushing*—to resentful.

The girl blinked again, drawing attention to her impossibly long, impossibly thick eyelashes.

“Ryu and I are confused,” she said. “Was it a very bad dream? Or a very good one?”

Scarlet scowled. The dream had already begun to wisp away, as dreams do, but the question reignited the memory of Wolf and her grandmother before her. Alive and safe.

Which was a cruel joke. Her grandmother was dead, and last she’d seen Wolf, he’d been under the control of a thaumaturge.

“Who are you? And who’s Ryu?”

The girl smiled. It was both warm and conspiratorial and it made Scarlet shiver.

Stupid Lunars and their stupid glammers.

“Ryu is the wolf, silly. You’ve been neighbors for four days now, you know. I’m surprised he hasn’t officially introduced himself.” Then she leaned forward, dropping her voice to a whisper as if she were about to share a closely guarded secret. “As for me, I am your new best friend. But don’t tell anyone, because they all think that I’m your master now, and that you are my pet. They don’t know that my pets are really my dearest friends. We shall fool them all, you and I.”

Scarlet squinted at her. She recognized the girl’s voice now, the way she danced through her sentences like each word had to be coaxed off her tongue. This was the girl who had spoken during Scarlet’s interrogation.

The girl reached for a strand of filthy hair that had fallen across Scarlet’s cheek. Scarlet tensed.

“Your hair is like burning. Does it smell like smoke?” Bending over, the girl pressed the hair against her nose and inhaled. “Not at all. That’s good. I wouldn’t want you to catch fire.”

The girl sat up just as suddenly, pulling a basket toward her that Scarlet hadn’t noticed before. It looked like a picnic basket, lined with the same silvery material as her dress.

“I thought today we could play doctor and patient. You’ll be the patient.” She removed a device from the basket and pressed it against Scarlet’s forehead. It beeped and she checked the small screen. “You’re not running a fever. Here, let me check your tonsils.” She held a thin piece of plastic toward Scarlet’s mouth.

Scarlet knocked her away with her uninjured hand and forced herself to sit up. “You’re not a doctor.”

“No. That’s why it’s pretend. Aren’t you having fun?”

“Fun? I’ve been mentally and physically tortured for days. I’m starving. I’m thirsty. I’m being kept in a cage in a zoo—”

“Menagerie.”

“—and I hurt in places that I didn’t know my body even had. And now some crazy person comes in here and is trying to act like we’re good pals playing a raucous game of make-believe. Well, no, sorry, I’m *not* having any fun, and I’m not buying whatever chummy trick you’re trying to play on me.”

The girl’s big eyes were blank—neither surprised nor offended by Scarlet’s outburst. But then she glanced out toward the pathway that wound between the cages, overgrown with exotic flowers and trees to suggest some semblance of being in a lush jungle.

A guard was standing at the pathway's bend, scowling. Scarlet recognized him. He was one of the guards that regularly brought her bread and water. He was the one who had grabbed her rear end the first time she'd been thrown into this cage. At the time she'd been too exhausted to do anything more than stumble away from him, but if she ever had the chance, she would break every one of his fingers in retaliation.

"We're all right," the girl said, smiling brightly. "We're pretending that I cut off her hair and glued it to my head because I wanted to be a candlestick, and she didn't like that."

While she spoke, the guard's glare never left Scarlet, only narrowed in warning. After a long moment, he meandered away. When his footsteps had faded, the girl pulled the basket onto her lap and riffled through it. "You shouldn't call me crazy. They don't like that."

Scarlet faced her again, her gaze dragging down the raised scar tissue on her cheek.

"But you are crazy."

"I know." She lifted a small box from the basket. "Do you know how I know?"

Scarlet didn't answer.

"Because the palace walls have been bleeding for years, and no one else sees it." She shrugged, as if this were a perfectly normal thing to say. "No one believes me, but in some corridors, the blood has gotten so thick there's nowhere safe to step. When I have to pass through those places, I leave a trail of bloody footprints for the rest of the day, and then I worry that the queen's soldiers will follow the scent and eat me up while I'm sleeping. Some nights I don't sleep very well." Her voice dropped to a haunted whisper, her eyes taking on a brittle luminescence. "But if the blood was real, the servants would clean it up. Don't you think?"

Scarlet shivered. This girl really *was* crazy.

"This is for you," she said, astoundingly bright once again. "Doctor's orders are to take one pill twice a day." She tilted toward Scarlet. "They wouldn't let me bring you real medication, of course, so it's just candy."

Then she winked, and Scarlet couldn't tell if the wink was to indicate that the box contained candy or not.

"I'm not going to eat it."

The girl listed her head. "Why not? It's a gift, to cement our forever friendship." She pulled the lid off the box, revealing four small candies nestled in a bed of spun sugar. They were round as marbles and bright, glossy red. "Sour apple petites. My personal favorites. Please, take one."

"What do you want from me?"

Her lashes fluttered. "I want us to be friends."

"And all your friendships are based on lies? Wait, of course they are. You're Lunar."

For the first time, the girl deflated a little. "I've only ever had two friends," she said, then glanced quickly at the wolf. Ryu had lain down, resting his head on his paws as he watched them. "Other than the animals, of course. But one of my friends turned into ashes when we were very little. A pile of girl-shaped ashes. The other has gone missing ... and I don't know if he'll ever come back." A shudder ripped through her, so strong she nearly dropped the box. With goose bumps all down her arms, she set the box on the floor between them and picked mindlessly at her dress. "But I asked the stars to send a sign that he was all right, and they sent me a shooting star across the sky. The next day was a trial, like any trial, except the Earthen girl standing before me had hair like a shooting star. And you'd *seen* him."

"Do you ever make sense?"

The girl pressed her hands onto the ground and leaned forward until her nose was almost touching Scarlet's. Scarlet refused to pull away, though her breath hitched.

"Was he all right? When you saw him last. Sybil said he was still alive, that he may have been used to pilot that ship, but she didn't say if he'd been injured. Do you think he's safe?"

"I don't know what you're—"

The girl pressed her fingertips against Scarlet's mouth.

"Jacin Clay," she whispered. "Sybil's guard, with the blond hair and beautiful eyes and the rising sun in his smile. Please, tell me he's all right."

Scarlet blinked. The girl's fingers were still on her mouth, but it didn't matter. She was too baffled to speak. The battle aboard the *Rampion* was mostly a blur of screaming and gunshots in her memory, and her focus had been on the thaumaturge then. But she did vaguely recall another person there. A blond-haired guard.

But the rising sun in his smile? *Please*.

She sneered. "I remember two people trying to kill me and my friends."

"Yes, and Jacin was one of them," she said, evidently unconcerned with the whole killing part of Scarlet's statement.

"I guess so. There was a blond guard."

Glee spread over the girl's face. The look had the power to stop hearts and brighten rooms.

But not to Scarlet.

"And how did he look?"

"He looked like he was trying to kill me. But I'm sure my friends killed him first. That's usually what we do to people who work for your queen."

The smile vanished and the girl shriveled away, tying her arms around her waist. "You don't mean that."

"I do. And believe me, he deserved it."

The girl was beginning to shake now, like she was on the verge of hyperventilating.

Scarlet decided without much guilt that if that happened, she wouldn't do a thing about it. She wouldn't try to help her. She wouldn't call for the guard.

This stranger was no friend.

Across the aisle, the wolf had climbed onto all fours and was pawing at the base of his enclosure. He began to whimper.

After a few moments, the girl managed to get herself under control. Sliding the lid back onto the candies, she settled them into her basket and stood, hunching in the small cage.

"I see," she said. "That will conclude this visit. I prescribe adequate rest and—" She sobbed and turned away, but paused before she could call for the guard. Slowly, stiffly, she turned back. "I wasn't lying about the walls that bleed. Someday soon, I fear the palace will be soaked through with blood and all of Artemisia Lake will be so red, even the Earthens will be able to see it."

"I'm not interested in your delusions." A sharp, unexpected pain shot up through the arm that Scarlet was using to support herself and she crumpled to the ground, waiting for the pinpricks of pain to fade. She glared up at the girl, angry at how weak and vulnerable she was. Angry at the flash of concern in the girl's eyes that seemed so honest. She snarled up at her. "And I don't care for your mock sympathy, either. Your glamour. Your mind control. You people have built your entire culture on lies, and I want nothing to do with it."

The girl stared at her for so long, Scarlet began to wish she hadn't said anything. But keeping her mouth shut had never been a great talent of hers.

Then, finally, the girl tapped her knuckles against the bars. As the guard's footsteps patted down the pathway, she reached into the basket and retrieved the box again. She set it down at Scarlet's side, tucking it beside her so the guard wouldn't see.

"I haven't used my glamour since I was twelve years old," she whispered, gaze piercing as if it were very important to her that Scarlet understand this. "Not since I was old enough to control it. That's why the visions come to me. That's why I'm going mad."

Behind her, the bolts of the cage door clunked open.

"Your Highness."

She swiveled on her toes and ducked out of the cage, her head lowered so that her thick hair hid both her beauty and her scars.

Your Highness.

Stunned, Scarlet lay on the ground until her tongue began to turn to chalk from thirst. As far as she knew, there was only one Lunar princess. Other than Cinder, of course.

Princess Winter, the queen's stepdaughter.

The unspeakable beauty. The scars that, according to rumor, had been inflicted by the queen herself.

When she glanced back toward the wolf's cage, Ryu had wandered away, toward the back of his enclosure. He had been given much more space to prowl than Scarlet, perhaps a quarter of an acre of dirt and grass, trees, and a fake fallen log that formed a quaint little den.

Sighing, Scarlet looked back up at the glass ceiling, where she could see black sky and countless stars between the tree branches. Her stomach panged, a reminder that her one small meal had been devoured hours ago, and unlike Ryu and the white stag that lived in an enclosure farther down the aisle and the albino peacock that sometimes wandered freely between them, Scarlet wouldn't get another meal until tomorrow.

It took a long time of battling with her weakened willpower, feeling the weight of the candies beside her. She had no reason to trust that girl. She *didn't* trust that girl. But after her stomach had begun to ache from hollowness and her head to spin with hunger, she gave up and pulled the lid off the box.

She pulled out one of the candies. It was glass smooth beneath her teeth. The outer shell cracked easily, giving way to a warm, melty center that burst sweet and sour on her tongue.

She moaned and let her head fall onto the hard floor. Nothing, not even her grandmother's prized tomatoes, had ever tasted so good.

But then, as she was working her tongue around her gums, searching out any missed bits of the candy, a tingling began to warm her throat. It expanded outward, into her chest and through her abdomen and along her limbs, all the way to her missing finger, leaving a trail of comfort in its wake.

When it was gone, Scarlet realized that it had taken her pain with it.

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