

Tales of times to come in Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles*: the contribution of fairy tales in the transglossic hour

by Silvia E. Storti

Over the years, there have been some standout examples of fairy tales being adapted for the science fiction genre. Already in 1984, Tanith Lee retold the story of Beauty and the Beast, setting it at a difficult time in the space era of mankind in her anthology *Red as Blood*. Humanity is here at the mercy of more advanced beings, whose only demand is that humans occasionally surrender a child to them; in the context of the fairy tale, Estár is the Beauty character, and one of the alien beings who resemble “some species of huge feline”, is her Beast. *Beauty* (1991) by Sheri S Tepper combines historical fiction, fantasy, and science fiction tropes to retell the story of Sleeping Beauty. It is an insightful exploration of the impact of human activity on the environment spanning centuries, cultures, and technological advancement. Throughout, the reader is asked to question what constitutes beauty and beautiful places. More recently, novels such as *Cinderella is dead* (2020), *Stitching Snow* (2013), *Mechanica* (2015) have also blended fairy tales with the fantasy and sci-fi genres, to varying degrees of success.

The focus of this article is on the YA series by Marissa Meyer, collectively known as *The Lunar Chronicles* (2012-2015) and comprised of the main novels *Cinder*, *Scarlet*, *Cress*, and *Winter*. Corollary books complete Meyer's fairytale space opera: *Fairest* (2015b) is a prequel to *Cinder*, detailing the earlier life of the main antagonist, Queen Levana, while *Stars Above* (2016) is a collection of short stories set within the same fictional universe. The main cast of characters embody otherness in one way or another, and this is often explored in depth in their own novel as well as to further their character development in the main storyline. This article will briefly touch on the characters as they become relevant, but most of the analysis focuses on the main overarching character, Cinder, and antagonist, Queen Levana. However, by virtue of their proximity to Cinder's story, two of the other characters are also caught in the analysis: the android Iko, and Winter, the Snow White stand-in of the series. *Cinder* and *Winter* form the core of this study, supplemented by canonical infor-

mation within the rest of *The Lunar Chronicles* material. The main theoretical framework is provided by Shaw & Upstone's *The Transglossic*, but the analysis also draws on the work of Italian writer and educator Gianni Rodari in *Grammatica della Fantasia*.

Destabilising beauty: transglossic fairy tales

Ultimately, what this article argues is that Meyer's *Cinder*, and *The Lunar Chronicles* as a whole, represent an example of transglossic literature, facilitated by using fairytale narratives as its foundation.¹ Transglossic texts come as postmodern texts go; the term was first introduced by Shaw & Upstone in their 2021 article *The Transglossic*, where they identify it in relation to six "indefinable trends and characteristics": (1) Deep simultaneity, (2) Planetary consciousness, (3) Intersectional transversality, (4) Artistic responsibility, (5) Productive authenticity, (6) Trans-formalism (2021, p. 8). This article will be drawing on these features throughout and delineating them relatively to their relationship with the text. For the purposes of introducing the term, the transglossic is a literary and cultural theory which resists the sense of ending in the wake of postmodernism and across different forms and genres. It instead captures contemporary storytelling's return to questions of social justice, meaning, and truth across forms and identities. The analysis here will focus on the deep simultaneity, planetary consciousness, and intersectional transversality aspects. Although not the focus of the original article by Shaw & Upstone, it finds a natural home in fairytale retellings, reworkings, and adaptations, which have been used to challenge existing norms and conventions within the genre as well as outside of it.

One of those existing norms and conventions is the emphasis on beauty in the traditional canon, where the main protagonist is habitually described as beautiful. This is what Cinderella's stepsisters are attempting to match by forcing their feet into the glass slipper. It is also the most re-

¹ Parts of this argument first appeared in Silvia Storti. "The Horror of Beauty in Contemporary Fairy Tales Adaptations". In: *Fantasy Art and Studies*, Volume 12 (2022), pp. 103–113.

cognisable trait of characters such as Beauty in *Beauty and the Beast* and *Sleeping Beauty*, so much so that it is embedded in their names. Bacchilega & Orme (2021) highlight that in fairy tales, “a character’s disposition, ethics, and feelings” are usually externalized in physical traits “rather than explored through the representation of their inner thoughts”, leading to “an unquestioned correspondence between outer and inner beauty” (p. 159). *The Lunar Chronicles* appears to offer an example of this in the characterisation of Queen Levana, which Cinder then acts as a challenge to. Thus the beauty discourse that is often central to traditional fairytale narratives will thus be key in examining *The Lunar Chronicles* through the lens of the transglossic on questions of social justice, meaning, and truth. To be perceived as physically attractive, “is to be socially and sexually desirable” (Ellington & Lim, 2017, p. 170), but retellings, reworkings, and adaptations of fairy tales routinely go against the predominance of this narrative. They often examine the differences between the construct and the experiential, particularly as regards to femininity, a facet of which is beauty; an approach that started with feminist re-evaluations of fairytale narratives in the second half of the 20th century and continues to this day. Notable examples include “The Lady of the House of Love” (1979) by Angela Carter and *Kissing the Witch* (1997) by Emma Donoghue, with more recent work by authors such as Sarah Pinborough and Deirdre Sullivan. None of these, however, cross the boundary into the sci-fi genre, as Meyer’s space opera does. In tackling the subject of beauty, Meyer’s texts put the spotlight on the interdependence between the beauty of the heroine and the villains in fairytale narratives. The extreme outer physical beauty of the characters marked as the antagonist dwells in the realm of the uncanny, marking them as the afore-mentioned monstrous Other. The outer beauty of the heroines is consolidated through more favourable inner beauty attributes, such as cleverness and kindness. Meyer’s choice of destabilising beauty expectations is consistent with the feminist trend to challenge the themes of the established canon, as well as revealing of how pervasive the beauty ideal still is in contemporary culture.

Fairy tales facilitate the process of rewriting as the narratives can be metaphorical vessels to be imbued with new meaning by changing their cultural context. Fairytale adaptations could be said to have easily exploited the freedom that stories and characters in the public domain offer to authors and artists. Disney’s own princess beauty standards are a com-

modification of a fantasy moment that will never be realised but forever desired (Bennett & Schweitzer, 2014, p. 27). In contemporary reworkings, some writers are explicit in their use of fairy tales, and some masquerade them so that only the keen eyed may spot the tale lurking beneath. In many instances, marketing strategies of publishers and executives reveal the mystery. The cover art for Meyer's series also exploits the easily recognisable tokens of the fairy tales she used: the long braid on Cress echoes Rapunzel's hair, the red cloak on Scarlet is a clear link to *Little Red Riding Hood*, and the cover for *Winter* features the well-known red apple from *Snow White*. *Cinder* is unique among them as it manipulates the shoe element from the story to showcase the cogs and springs of Cinder's mechanical foot.

Lunar, cyborg, shell, princess: Deep simultaneity

The Lunar Chronicles tetralogy is articulated as the futuristic rendition of classic fairy tales, whose main storyline follows a cyborg Cinderella. The technique that Rodari calls *a ricalco* – “recasting a new fairy tale from an old one, with various degrees of recognition, or with total transference to foreign soil” (2025, p. 119) – is a time-honoured tradition of fairytale reworkings.

In Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles*, that foreign soil is a futuristic Earth and its satellite world on the Moon, Luna. Here, a wicked queen is beautiful beyond comparison, but her charm and allure are consciously manufactured. At the start of the story, Cinderella's prince is Crown Prince Kaito of the Eastern Commonwealth; after his father's death in *Cinder*, Kai becomes the Commonwealth's new emperor. Cinderella herself is the adoptive daughter of the Linh household; unlike the fairy tale character, Cinder bears no blood relation to the head of the family, who has already died prior to the events of the first book.

Rodari deems it a more complex endeavour than merely adapting fairy tales as “recasting a story offers to different people different paths”, leading to different messages:

“But we did not start with the “message”. It emerged by itself as an involuntary point of arrival. The essential moment of the recasting is the

analysis of the given fairy tale. It is a process that is at once analytic and synthetic, and it goes from the concrete to the abstract, and from the abstract it returns to the concrete.” (2025, p. 120)

Bacchilega and Greenhill (2025) remind us that fairy tales are “created and re-created within interwoven narrative webs and circulated across media and cultures, there is no original tale but only versions and adaptations” (p. 22). Rodari’s argument echoes Harries (2003) and Bacchilega (1997), who divide fairy tales into two categories: compact, or traditional, and complex, or postmodern. Complex tales “work to reveal the stories behind other stories, the unvoiced possibilities that tell a different tale” (Harries, 2003, p. 16). Contemporary fairytale adaptations tend to fall in the complex category because they “may well acknowledge and reproduce some characteristics while self-consciously choosing to reject or modify others” (Tiffin, 2009, p. 8). They are “complex in their reimaginings of well-known and more conventional fairy-tale patterns and motifs” and that doubleness and insistence “on representing the other side of the story” (Harries, 2003, p. 15), makes that complexity necessary. In crafting her tracing of the fairy tales, Meyer brings to the fore some elements at the same time as she jettisons others: the author, as Flanagan (2014) notes, contests “established humanist paradigms of selfhood and identity, using non-human protagonists and narrators to interrogate ideas about subject formation from a position of otherness” (p. 69).

Storytellers, Bacchilega and Greenhill (2025) explain, “have both the responsibility and freedom to retell, re-create, update, and transform these works”; which, in the 21st century, has resulted in “an explosion of fairy tales”, often “mixed with other genres” (p. 22). The fantasy-cum-sci-fi element allows the author to elevate her characters above the confines of the fairy tales they have sprung from and the dis/abilities that the characters believe to be their defining characteristics are turned upside down just like the fairytale plots Meyer chose to adapt. The fantasy and science-fiction genres can function as progressive socio-political literature, and thus the ideal channel to situate and ground fairy tales for a new generation (Malone, 2016, p. 220). What the analysis shows are the ways in which the post-humanist perspective in *The Lunar Chronicles* fully utilises the opportunities that science fiction offers to push and challenge boundaries. Fairy tales already tend to tell stories about outsiders, but

Flanagan (2014) remarks that “Cinder’s status as an outsider hinges not only on her cyborg origins, but also her racial hybridity and her gender identity” (p. 61).

The Lunar Chronicles presents readers with a futuristic version of classic fairy tales and in doing so exemplifies the transglossic aspect of deep simultaneity, where “fluidity is transcribed in the notion of movement across different identities, perspectives, and subjectivities and expressed by a correlative formal inhabitancy of multiple codes and genres” (Shaw & Upstone, 2021, p. 9). Not only is the main character empowered by this fluidity, but the narrative also benefits from crossing the genre boundaries between fairy tale, fantasy, and science fiction. The central storyline starts in the novel *Cinder* and follows Linh Cinder, who is also the long-lost princess of the Lunar kingdom on Luna, Earth’s Moon. Meyer’s characterisation of the protagonist as a cyborg mechanic girl, made up of discarded leftover parts, is meant to boost and aggrandise her non-reliance on her looks to survive, but it makes Cinder into a metaphor for disability. Schmiesing (2014) remarks that “able-bodied protagonists are [...] contrasted with antagonists who exhibit or are punished with impairment” (p. 1), and Meyer’s work shifts away from that pattern with Cinder being the impaired character at the beginning of the story.

Throughout the novels, people attempt to name Cinder, with naming acknowledged as rendering the named powerless because defined by a label that focuses on differences in ability (Ellington & Lim, 2017, p. 171). In *The Lunar Chronicles* this ableism takes the form of words such as cyborg, Lunar, as well as shell and princess. When the story begins, Cinder hides the fact that she is a cyborg as best she can; partly this is because of the cyborg draft, which is also “a reminder that cyborgs were not like everyone else”.² Her reluctance to be recognised as cyborg echoes El-

² It is explained that due to the draft, random cyborgs are selected every day for the dubious honour of acting as test subjects in the development of an antidote to the letumosis disease that threatens humanity: “The cyborg draft had been started by some royal research team a year ago. Every morning, a new ID number was drawn from the pool of so many thousand cyborgs who resided in the Eastern Commonwealth [...] to act as guinea pigs for the antidote testing. It was made out to be some sort of honor, giving your life for the good of humanity.” (Cinder 29).

lington & Lim's statement about "disabled" bodies not being associated with being physically attractive and thus labelled as a contradiction to perfection (2017, p. 170). This is articulated by Cinder herself: "I didn't ask to be made like this", as she claims that all femininity was "ruined by whatever the surgeons had done" during her cybernetic operation and, once the key *Cinderella* storyline is introduced, "she was cyborg, and she would never go to the ball" (Meyer, 2012, p. 33). When she is discovered and examined in a lab, she is also named as "a girl full of wires" who is "36.28 percent not human" (Meyer, 2012, p. 82). Because cyborgs are a halfway point between human and technology, characters like Cinder prompt questions about what it means to be human.

In Meyer's universe, however, "naming" someone a Lunar is portrayed as worse than exposing someone as cyborg. Lunars are said to have "evolved from an Earthen moon colony" and are now completely othered and not human anymore (Meyer, 2012, p. 43). The protagonist shudders at the thought of Lunar and cyborg combining in her self: "To be cyborg and Lunar. One was enough to make her a mutant, an outcast, but to be *both*?" (Meyer, 2012, p. 178) Lunar people are particularly skilled at the glamour, which is explained as "the spell to enchant, to deceive, to turn one's heart toward you and against your enemies" (Meyer, 2012, p. 206). Meyer contextualises it as a "manipulation of bioelectricity" that allows a practitioner to input their thoughts into someone else's head (Meyer, 2012, p. 171). This is mostly used to enhance beauty and hide physical flaws, but the glamour projection can be exposed by reflections, such as mirrors and screens.³ As a result, beauty is at the core of the narrative surrounding Cinder and her claim to the throne. In the lab, her blood samples bring to light the fact that Cinder is Lunar; coupled with the information about her cyborg parts being more extensive than she thought means she is suddenly faced with the image of herself as part-cyborg and part-Lunar, but not human at all. Her only response is to claim that she has none of the "gift" Lunars possess and is consequently faced with another label: shell. The reader is told that "not all Lunars are born with

³ This could be said to echo the Brothers Grimm's Snow White tale, where the queen repeatedly asks her mirror: "Mirror, mirror, on the wall / Who in this land is fairest of all?" – a suggestion that is made overt in the title of the companion novella, *Fairest*, which centres on Queen Levana.

the Lunar gift”. Although their lack of ability makes them immune to the glamour, those that are bioelectrically challenged are named as shells, which has “a slightly derogatory connotation on Luna”(Meyer, 2012, p. 176).

Cinder occupies multiple identities at the same time; this is a cause of distress for the character at the start of her story, but she slowly becomes able to move from one to the other as she accepts her own deep simultaneity. In transglossic terms, simultaneity stands in contrast to the meta-modernist conception of oscillation, which reaches for the inhabitancy of alternating positions: transglossic simultaneity “is concerned rather with the conterminous occupation of multiplicity” (Shaw & Upstone, 2021, p. 9). A telling moment in the character’s quest for identity in *Cress* (Meyer, 2024, p. 441) follows an encounter with an enemy android, which forces Cinder to conceal her cyborg hand: “Honestly, Cinder, can’t you look presentable for more than five minutes?” [...] “I’m a mechanic,” [Cinder] said, an automatic response.” Being a mechanic is the core of her identity, a mundane means of earning a living, dispensing her from concerns about her appearance. Once the threat is over, Cinder does not consider using the glamour to conceal her messy hair and crumpled clothing; her identity reverts to her core sense of self. This dissonance between identities is exemplified by a conversation Prince Kai and his advisor Torin have in *Winter*:

“Cinder can do this.”

“You mean, Selene can do this.”

“Selene. Cinder. She’s the same person, Torin.”

“I must disagree. To the world, Linh Cinder is a dangerous felon who kidnapped a world leader and instigated a war, while Princess Selene could be the solution to all our problems with Luna. By helping Linh Cinder, the world will think you’re nothing but an infatuated teenager. By helping Selene, you’re making a brave stand against our country’s enemies and doing what you believe is best for the Commonwealth’s future.”

A wisp of a smile jotted across Kai’s lips. “Whatever the world thinks, they are the same person.” (Meyer, 2015a, p. 142)

Early in the narrative, the character of Kai already surmised what Cinder will take several more chapters to acknowledge as true: Cinder/Selene

are merely two facets of the same person. Cinder reclaiming the naming that is imposed on her by the narrative achieves that conterminous occupation of multiplicity and empowers her to bring her story to its fairytale conclusion: triumph over the villain, Queen Levana, and the culture of separatism she enforces. When she is addressed as princess for the first time in *Cinder*, she recoils: "Don't call me that [...] I can't be a queen or a princess or—I'm nobody. I'm a cyborg!" (Meyer, 2012, pp. 381-4) By the end of the series, Cinder announces to a throne room and, via a live-feed, to all of Luna that she is the lost princess; her splinter identity as Cinder the unremarkable cyborg mechanic now integrated into the Cinder/Sele-ne fold.

Aboard the Rampion: Planetary consciousness

As evidenced by the quotes above mentioned, Cinder's journey is predicated on the support of other characters. Operating without borders towards a notion of planetary humanism in its transitional yearning to embody multicultural ethics and the universality of the vulnerability in relation to the wrongs humans visit upon one another is one of the ways the transglossic operates (Shaw & Upstone, 2021, p. 13). Throughout the series, Cinder meets and befriends other fairytale characters, including the human girl Scarlet and the Lunar soldier Wolf as stand-ins for Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, and the Lunar shell Cress Darnel, whose long hair and isolation in a futuristic faraway tower reveal her to be Rapunzel to the reader. The character who starts alongside Cinder, however, is the android Iko; the character identifies as female and she transitions from one form of physicality into another at various points in the narrative (glitching servant android, spaceship navigation system, human-coded escort android) but maintains her sense of self throughout. Iko is first introduced in *Cinder*, as the property of Linh Adri, Cinder's step-mother, who reluctantly allows Iko to assist Cinder at her market stall as a mechanic. Far from being an inconsequential character, however, she remains integral to the story throughout as she navigates identity shifts almost at the same rate as Cinder does. When her personality chip is perforce installed into the spaceship's systems, the personality remains; compare these two excerpts from *Cinder* and *Cress*:

“You don’t see a personality like that every day,” said Prince Kai[.] “Did you program her yourself?”

“Believe it or not, she came that way. I suspect a programming error[.]”

“I do not have a programming error!” said Iko” (Meyer, 2014, p. 12).

And later in *Cress*:

“Your ship has some messed-up priorities, you know that?”

“Iko. My name is Iko. If you don’t stop calling me the ‘ship,’ I am going to make sure you never have hot water during your showers again, do you understand me?” (Meyer, 2014, p. 318)

In the same book, as she sheds the skin of ship system and prepares to embrace a human-presenting body again, in the form of appropriating the body of an inarticulate escort-droid to infiltrate behind enemy lines, she monologues:

“I want you to know that I hold nothing against you,” [Iko] said [to the droid-escort], by way of introduction. “I understand that it isn’t your fault your programmer had so little imagination. [...] In another life, we could all have been sisters, and I feel it’s important to acknowledge that. [But] I cannot be swayed from my goal by my sympathy for androids who are less advanced than myself” (Meyer, 2014, p. 416).

The strength of Iko’s identity as herself also makes her the ideal mouthpiece for Meyer’s thoughts on hybridity and its perception in the *Lunar Chronicles* universe. Cinder and Wolf could already be said to be hybrid posthuman characters, combining human with technology or animal, but especially Iko. As a group, the characters’ storylines intersect as they all find themselves aboard the Rampion spaceship, which physically and metaphorically stands outside of the ongoing narrative.

The Lunar Chronicles breaks the traditional boundaries between fairy tales to show the reader how global and relatable these stories can be by exploiting the interplanetary setting (Lykissas, 2018, p. 307). Borrowing characters and motifs from multiple fairy tales to set them loose in a new world is at the heart of what Gianni Rodari (2010) defines as a fairytale salad (*insalata di favole*) in *Grammatica della Fantasia*: characters from

various tales—including unrelated fairytale traditions—tossed together and seasoned with new scenes and settings. The salad mechanism is at play in *The Lunar Chronicles*; by introducing one character into the story of another, their energy destabilises the tale and force it to re-assemble itself to fit the new circumstances (Rodari, 2010, p. 64). What Rodari calls a fairytale salad has also been known as collaborative fairy tale, where popular characters not only appear in the same story, but also work together to vanquish the main villain in that narrative (Lykissas, 2018, p. 307). Cinder becomes the *de facto* leader of the *Rampion* crew; her multiple identities human, cyborg, Chinese, Lunar allow her to embody the transglossic aspect of speaking across cultures and how “works of fiction are involved in the reinscription of the postmodern to address cultural, ecological, socio-economic and political realities” (Shaw & Upstone, 2021, p. 13). Her role is complemented by Winter, Cinder’s narrative counterpart on Luna.

Behind the glamour: intersectional transversality

Cinder is a young woman whose organic body was supplemented with synthetic material when she was a child; this served a dual purpose as it saved her life as well as concealing her identity from Queen Levana, who is the story’s antagonist and Cinder’s aunt. Flanagan notes that:

The emphasis on subjectivity in posthumanism, specifically in relation to the act of depriving the historical status of the human subject, complements YA fiction’s thematic and ideological preoccupation with subject formation. Adolescence is often constructed in terms of its “otherness” or liminality within this genre, and thus parallels the alignment of the posthuman with “otherness” as a means through which to destabilise the exclusionary construction of the humanist subject. (2014, p. 18)

As previously mentioned, in *The Lunar Chronicles* words such as cyborg, Lunar, shell, or princess become stand-ins for “naming”, where the named is “dis/abled” because defined by a label that focuses on differences in ability (Ellington & Lim, 2017, p. 171). Cinder’s identities are often described and commented upon by herself and other characters in terms of disability: “she was 36.28 percent not human”, “everyone gawked at

the limping, one-footed girl”, and “she certainly has the smell of [an insignificant Lunar shell]” (Meyer, 2012, p. 82, p. 286, p. 352). Although Meyer’s third-person narration tends to imply that the self-criticism Cinder views herself with is not how the reader should see her, it is also clear that the journey of “subject formation” within Cinder will also encompass questions of social justice, meaning, and truth within the reality presented in the novels. In *Scarlet*, Meyer outlines Cinder’s main driving force in her life thus far:

“All Cinder had ever wanted was freedom. Freedom from her stepmother and her overbearing rules. Freedom from a life of constant work with nothing to show for it. Freedom from the sneers and hateful words of strangers who didn’t trust the cyborg girl who was too strong and too smart and too freakishly good with machines to ever be *normal*.” (Meyer, 2013, p. 149)

The emphasis on Cinder being “too much” is a strong indicator of her subject formation in spite of societal expectation. Normality is defined as an unattainable goal for a “cyborg girl”, and Cinder’s otherness is paralleled in another example of posthuman subject in the story: the android Iko.

Iko is the former household android of the Linh family and Cinder’s best friend, typically acting as her confidante. Although at the start of the story, Iko is claimed to be glitching due to being an older model that Cinder fixed and salvaged, in point of fact the android’s personality chip is already in a state of evolution that goes beyond the initial programming. Iko identifies as female and this is emphasised by her and by the narrative throughout the novels. When the group’s main mode of transport, the spaceship *The Rampion*, requires a new auto control system, Iko’s personality chip is installed as a quick replacement. Iko is shocked by her new physical form, “something’s wrong with my vision sensor. I can’t see you.” (Meyer, 2013, p. 155). A downside to being a spaceship is that Iko cannot accompany Cinder when she leaves the *Rampion*: “I don’t like being a ship. It’s awful. [...] It makes me feel less alive than ever” (Meyer, 2013, p. 170). Iko considers her new form as hideous, but the pilot of the *Rampion* is quick to remark that she is now the voice of “the most gorgeous ship in these skies” (Meyer, 2013, p. 157). The former android, as well as the

reader, are thus encouraged to see beauty as something that goes beyond humanist terms.

The trans- prefix in transglossic is the focus of the intersectional transversality; intrinsically connected to the notion of queering, a movement across positions to specifically “disrupt existing authorities, binaries, established knowledges, and normative identities” (Shaw & Upstone, 2021, p. 15). The antagonist in the overarching story is Queen Levana, Cinder's aunt, whose skill in the glamour is unsurpassed. The Lunar Queen suffered a severe burning when she was a child because of her sister; Levana looked up to and trusted the former ruler of Luna, but the betrayal of that trust caused her to hide herself and her perceived ugliness behind her glamour.⁴ For this reason, she views Cinder and her own stepdaughter, Winter, as intolerable threats; both young women possess the beauty Levana covets but must resort to glamour to conjure up. Meyer here utilises both the Cinderella storyline as well as the tale of Snow White and her wicked stepmother.

The narrative explains that the glamour is about vanity and control: “it is easier to trick others into perceiving you as beautiful if you can convince yourself you are beautiful” (Meyer, 2012, p. 172). Princess Winter is also scarred “the scars made Winter interesting to look at and somehow, odd as it was, even more beautiful” (Meyer, 2015a, p. 25) but her refusal to use glamour to hide her disfigurement is another cause of friction between her and Queen Levana. She is described as “the prettiest girl on all of Luna” (Meyer, 2015a, p. 10) by one of Levana's lackeys, before he is forced to add, “Prettiest only, My Queen. But no mortal could compare with your perfection”, when the Queen is less than pleased with his description of her stepdaughterstep-daughter. Winter is almost delighted when Levana infects her with letumosis, a Lunar-made disease that produces an unsightly rash on the infected: “It was horrifying and grotesque. If her lungs had been functioning, she might have laughed. For the first time in her life, no one could say she was beautiful” (Meyer, 2015a, p. 623). There is beauty in the horror that the disease provokes in others,

⁴ Part of this is revealed in the companion novel *Fairest*, told from Levana's point-of-view, which was originally planned as a promotional novella and not as a story on its own (Truitt, 2014).

but the reader is often reminded that the disease is not “natural”, making *The Lunar Chronicles* act as a clarion call for environmental responsibility. Cinder’s and Winter’s refusal to fully engage with their Lunar gift of bio-electrical manipulation also sets them both apart from Levana’s over-reliance on it. Cinder in particular is turning down another “naming” as she continues to defy definition in her own story.

Transglossic literature constructs meaning as transversal; in crafting her tracing of the fairy tales, Meyer brings to the fore some elements and jettisons others. Transglossic transversality focuses on “how subjects inhabit positions within the context of change and difference” (Shaw & Upstone, 2021, p. 15) and Meyer thought a lot about “the most iconic elements of each story” (Blasingame, 2015, p. 523) so that Cinder became a cyborg to allow for the upward mobility of the rags-to-riches storyline from *Cinderella*. Meyer chose to combine the wicked stepmothers and witches into one character and knit it together with their obsession over beauty. Winter opens with “The young princess was as beautiful as daylight. She was more beautiful even than the queen herself.” (Meyer, 2015a) Queen Levana’s beauty is horrific and pristine, highlighting that it is a carefully constructed façade; the title of her solo novella is *Fairest* because that is the only way she has come to accept her self-image. Ultimately, Flanagan argues, *The Lunar Chronicles* contests “established humanist paradigms of selfhood and identity” by using a trans-human protagonist, Cinder, who is Other herself as well as being surrounded by otherness (2014, p. 69). This aligns with the intersectional transversality of the transglossic which assumes a “refusal of binary structures and resisting the movement to the transcendental or singular” (Shaw & Upstone, 2021, p. 15)

In her series, “Meyer combines just enough veiled references to the original stories to spur intellectual and emotional connections” (Bradburn, 2015, p. 50), and the fantasy-cum-scifi element allows her to elevate her characters above the confines of the fairy tales they have sprung from. Cinder not being described as conventionally beautiful and Meyer’s portrayal of Winter’s “impeccable beauty” as inseparable from her “warm brown skin” (Meyer, 2015a, p. 46) are details that push the boundaries of

the western beauty standards outlined by Ellington and Lim.⁵ Flanagan (2014, p. 61) highlights how Cinder's status as an outsider hinges "not only on her cyborg origins, but also her racial hybridity and her gender identity", which are concepts also seen in other characters in *The Lunar Chronicles*. The first novel ends stating that the main character is a ghost: "deformed cyborg with a missing foot", "Lunar with a stolen identity", and a "mechanic with no one to run to [and] nowhere to go" (Meyer, 2012, p. 387). The disabilities that the characters believe to be their defining characteristics are turned upside down just like the fairytale plots Meyer chose to adapt.

The post-humanist perspective that *The Lunar Chronicles* advertises means that notwithstanding Cinder's complains about the limitations of her cyborg parts, it is precisely because of her difference that she can overthrow Levana. In *Cress*, she draws parallels between her outward form and her own sense of self:

"[T]he mirror showed her just as she had always been. Plain. Dirty. A cyborg. She tried to imagine what it would be like to see herself as she saw Levana: frighteningly gorgeous and powerful. But it was impossible with that reflection staring back at her. That was why Levana despised mirrors so much, but Cinder found her reflection almost comforting. [They had] called her brave and beautiful[,] blinding. It was kind of nice to know that they were wrong. She was still just Cinder" (Meyer, 2014, p. 227).

The extreme beauty of the queen elicits horror in the beholder and is thus seen as a sign of her mastery over Luna and the Lunar gift of bioelectrical manipulation. Cinder's ability to see through the glamour, an ability that she would not be privy to were it not for her cybernetic enhancements received on Earth, becomes key in the final moments of the story; by showing Levana's true appearance to the world, the spell cast

⁵ Ellington & Lim define Westernized Beauty Standards (WBS) as ideologies that originated in Ancient Greece: at the "Pythagorean school, where scholars determined level of beauty based on mathematical equations" as according to these WBS there is a "golden ratio of beauty, skin tone, health, and age" that excludes people of colour, with disabilities, as well as older people from "ideal beauty" (2017, pp. 170-171).

by the glamour is broken. As the character tells her aunt in the novel, “it really was all an illusion” (Meyer, 2012, p. 361). Such deconstruction is advanced in the novels “not in singular terms, but rather across identity positions, illustrating the intersection of multiple contingent identifications within a single text” (Shaw & Upstone, 2021, p. 15).

In conclusion, Meyer’s tetralogy blends the fantastic with science fiction, but there is no doubt that these YA novels are also still recognisably fairy tales warranting further study. They contain the hallmarks of the genre, albeit fractured and twisted into a new form. In folding one genre into the other, the author plays with the motifs and themes of both, but fairy tales have never stood still. Adaptations such as these transform the narratives they take inspiration from and expose the beliefs that permeate the canon; in doing so, they open up a world of possibility for future storytellers. Writers can rewrite the popular tales, and their heroes and villains need not walk the same path as their original inspiration. Meyer is one example of a growing subversive narrative current, to which authors such as Helen Oyeyemi, Sarah Pinborough, Kalynn Bayron, or Carmen Maria Machado, could also be said to belong. An animated adaptation is in development with Warner Bros. Pictures Animation and Locksmith Animation; this is not due to be released until 2028 (Gajewski, 2025), so we can only speculate on how much the animation will draw on the fairytale attributes of the story.

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