Wolves in the Woods: An Ecocritical Analysis of Natural Motifs in Marissa Meyer's *Scarlet*

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ABSTRACT

Marissa Meyer is a popular American author of young adult literature, known for writing retellings of famous fairy tales. One of her best-known works is *The Lunar Chronicles* (2012-2015), a speculative fiction series of which *Scarlet* (2013) is the second instalment. The novel is loosely based on "Little Red Riding Hood", centring on Scarlet Benoit and her endeavour to save her kidnapped grandmother. To do so, she joins forces with Ze'ev Kesley, nicknamed "Wolf", and must leave her grandmother's farm and travel to the city (the futuristic Paris). Meyer's protagonist is an active heroine, an agent in her own journey, while the places she

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travels through and animals she encounters are not typical, fairy tale *topoi* serving only as metaphors for human concerns. Instead, they are represented as having innate value, inviting an ecocritical reading. In addition, the novel comments on ecological issues and paints a sharp contrast between the countryside and the cityscape. The article presents an ecocritical analysis of the motifs of the forest and the wolf in *Scarlet*, tracing their transformation from the traditional versions of "Little Red Riding Hood". It also explores Meyer's representation of the future Earth and follows Scarlet's journey to show how the city has become the main locus of danger, with the text promoting a stronger link between humans and nature.

INTRODUCTION

Everyone knows the main elements of the story of "Little Red Riding Hood" – the girl, the wolf, the grandmother – but, depending on the version, these elements are combined into differing plots. A little girl dressed in red journeys through a forest to get to her grandmother. On the way, she meets a wolf, or a werewolf; at the grandmother's house, she is eaten and dies or is saved by a passing huntsman. These are just some of the most striking variations encountered in the traditional versions of the story. In addition, "Little Red Riding Hood" continues to be an inspiration for authors across genres and media. One such retelling is *Scarlet*, a novel by the American author Marissa Meyer, published in 2013. It is the second instalment in *The Lunar Chronicles* series (2012-2015), which takes place sometime in the future, after the Fourth World War. While not specifying what the war was about, Meyer highlights that it resulted in the devastation of cultures, ruination of cities, and, importantly, destruction of natural resources. After the war, the countries of Earth formed the Earthen Union, an alliance maintaining world peace. The novels take place 126 years after the establishment of the alliance, but the consequences of war are still visible in some places, such as Paris, and the need for the expansion of the peace alliance to the sovereign nation of Luna, the Moon, drives much of the plot. Luna, for their part, would profit from the alliance because of their lack of natural resources, which the Earth still has in abundance, having recovered from the war.

The overarching narrative of the series focuses on Meyer's iteration of Cinderella, Cinder, a girl turned into a cyborg after almost dying in a fire and losing a hand and a leg, who discovers she is the heir to the throne of Luna. Scarlet Benoit, the titular protagonist of the second novel, ends up joining Cinder's team but, before getting to that point, she tries to find her own grandmother, who has been kidnapped and interrogated on account of having hidden Cinder from the Lunars, inhabitants of the Moon, to keep her safe. Helping Scarlet is Ze'ev Kesley, nicknamed "Wolf", who turns out to be a Lunar special operative. With the girl's journey to her grandmother and her encounter with a wolf the story fulfils the basic prerequisites of the "Little Red Riding Hood" story, simultaneously expanding it with further elements belonging to the genres of fantasy and science fiction. Additionally, it fits into the

contemporary trend of publishing speculative young adult fiction with female protagonists as well as the rewriting of traditional fairy tales so that they feature active heroines instead of passive damsels. Examining *Scarlet* in more detail is thus fruitful as it exemplifies current trends in young adult literature. *The Lunar Chronicles* as a whole have garnered some academic attention (see, for example, Didicher; Lykissas; and Anderson) although there has been less academic discussion about *Scarlet* in particular. This paper thus aims to fill this gap.

In *Scarlet*, Meyer adheres to the typical narrative of "Little Red Riding Hood" by featuring a protagonist who journeys physically, through the forest, and metaphorically, towards sexual maturity. In line with the trend of contemporary, rewritten fairy tale heroines, Scarlet is an active character wielding significant agency throughout her journey. Importantly, Meyer diverges from the traditional structure when representing two key natural elements: the forest and the wolf. Scarlet's point of view conveys the message that these natural elements are not only literary motifs but real places and real animals, worthy of preservation in and of themselves: they no longer serve merely as metaphors for human behaviours and experiences. These natural motifs invite an ecocritical reading. In the broadest sense, ecocriticism considers the representation of nature in literary works. An ecocritical examination of a work of popular fiction published relatively recently helps illuminate the way contemporary authors – and audiences – ponder the human treatment of nature. In addition to presenting a novel representation of these motifs, *Scarlet* also introduces a change into the typical formula of the girl visiting her forest-dwelling grandmother. Here, the author places Scarlet on the journey from the countryside to the city to highlight the differences between the two and promote a life that is more in tune with nature. Furthermore, as a work of fantasy and science fiction, the text enables speculation about the future of Earth, food resources, and wildlife, further inviting an ecocritical analysis.

The article begins with a presentation of ecocriticism. It then examines the implications and potentialities of applying such a reading to works of speculative fiction – specifically fantasy and science fiction. Next, the paper uses an ecocritical lens to examine the representations of the key natural motifs, the forest and the wolf, in three traditional versions of the story: a French oral tale; the version by Charles Perrault recorded in the late nineteenth century and likely based on the French oral tale (Even-Zohar 181), and the adaptation by the Brothers Grimm.[1] Examining the traditional versions sheds light on how the representation of the forest and the wolf have solidified in popular culture and highlights the importance of novel interpretations of these age-old motifs, interpretations that align with current ecocritical thought. Therefore, the paper finally turns to the analysis of *Scarlet*, focusing on the image of the wolf and the forest within it, the question of food resources in the imagined future, and the juxtaposition between the country and wilderness,

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[1] This article uses the version of the French oral tale as reprinted in Delarue (15-16).

on the one side, and the city, on the other, to demonstrate how the novel promotes a way of life closer to nature.

ECOCRITICSM

The term ecocriticism first appeared in William Rueckert's 1978 essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism", in which he argues for the application of "ecological concepts to the reading, teaching, and writing about literature" (107). The same basic aims were reiterated in Cheryll Glotfelty's succinct definition of ecocriticism as the study of "the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). In a more expanded definition, ecocriticism "has sought to investigate how particular templates of storytelling and image-making shape humans' real-life interactions with the natural world in ways that are historically and culturally distinctive" (Buell et al. 419). For example, ecocriticism investigates the role and representation of the environment and nature in literature, the metaphors used to bring specific issues to light, and values promoted. Its key purpose is to raise consciousness about ecological issues, which can also serve as a call to action, spurring the audience into taking steps necessary for the betterment of the ecological situation (Glotfelty xviiii-xix, xxiv; Hambrick 129).

While some scholars started overtly acknowledging environmental problems in their works in the nineteen seventies, the mid-eighties and nineties saw the rise of widely recognized environmental criticism. Especially influential was the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), founded in 1992, and the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* established in 1993 (Glotfelty xvi-xviiii; Buell et al. 418). The term ecocriticism thus found an organised platform and gained wider usage, with Joseph Meeker, Leo Marx, Raymond Williams, Lawrence Buell, Ursula K. Heise, and Cheryll Glotfelty being some of the leading ecocritical scholars. While the scholarship of the nineties focused on the bond between humans and the non-human nature, the more contemporary works have "shown greater interest in literatures pertaining to the metropolis and industrialization" and have "tended to reject the validity of the nature-culture distinction" (Buell et al. 419), recognizing the interrelatedness of humanity and nature instead of seeing nature simply as human environment or a repository of resources waiting to be exploited.

While there are many approaches to ecocritical analyses, Lawrence Buell offers a matrix of several defining characteristics a text should have to be considered environmental. These characteristics remain open-ended enough to allow for diverse interpretations and applications. Namely, Buell asserts that the non-human environment in the work should be featured in a way that does not relegate it to the background, but rather "as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history" (*The Environmental Imagination* 7). Next, the interests of the human characters are not presented as "the only legitimate interest"; the text should point out that humans are

responsible for the environment; and, finally, "[s]ome sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text", meaning that the nature surrounding the (human) characters in a given text is not static but actively changes (*The Environmental Imagination* 7-8). As Buell's propositions are useful guidelines for determining whether a text has ecocritical potential, this paper will refer to them when applicable, alongside applying an ecocritical theoretical framework.

ECOCRITICISM IN SPECULATIVE LITERATURE

Although not as practice-oriented as natural sciences, the humanities may play an important role in "the revisioning of the relationship between humans and the natural world" (Brawley 17). When addressing environmental issues, literary texts raise awareness and direct the audience's attention to the processes happening in the real world, sometimes even offering solutions for them. While realistic fiction may directly address real-life environmental problems, texts set in imaginary worlds are also a potentially useful platform for applying an ecocritical perspective. When discussing the merits of environmentally-oriented speculative fiction, Keira Hambrick finds that its potential to incite the readers to take action and try to save our planet lies precisely in its fictional nature. She argues that whereas reading non-fiction is more likely to arouse feelings of doom and helplessness, readers of speculative fiction are "less likely to feel immobilized by fear and eco-anxiety, and may respond favorably to the call-for-action espoused by the narrator, characters, or the author" (135). Freed from the constraints of reality, speculative fiction allows for a more relaxed investigation of pressing problems.

Sometimes called "fantastic fiction", "literature of the imagination", or "literature of the strange", speculative fiction includes the genres of fantasy, science fiction, and horror (Tixier Herald and Kunzel xii). Populated by magical, non-human, supernatural, alien, and human-made beings, these genres are closely related and often intertwined. This makes pinpointing the exact genre of some works, such as Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles,* difficult. While the novels take place in the technologically advanced future and explore the possibilities of a life on the Moon, some of the characters exhibit telepathic abilities that, while explained as a genetic mutation, are termed "magical" (Meyer 189), blurring the lines between fantasy and science. To best contextualise the analysis of Meyer's *Scarlet,* with its dualistic genre identity, it is essential to explore the ecocritical potential of both fantasy and science fiction.

Works of fantasy are most frequently set in an imaginary world and include the use of magic (Tolkien; Timmerman 372). However, fantasy worlds often remain intertwined with the real world, resonating with "the idea that fantasy literature—literature that takes place in fictive lands and far removed times—can serve as an important art form and critique of social and cultural norms. It can serve as a warning; it can also serve as a

solution" (Baratta 31). As one of the major social concerns, the relationship between humans and nature is frequently mulled over in works of fantasy fiction.

Many characteristics of fantasy contribute to its abundant ecocritical potential (Ulstein 15). Primarily, non-human characters are inherent to the genre with talking animals, mythical creatures, and sentient flora all being staples of a fantasy landscape. By featuring non-human characters, fantasy "call[s] into question the nature of the human and, simultaneously, the boundaries between the self and other" (Colligs 69). In addition, as it often operates on the concept of interrelatedness of all beings in nature, fantasy upsets the dominant view of the world as anthropocentric (Brawley 23). Fantasy, especially epic fantasy, set in an imaginary world usually evoking medieval times, serves to remind humanity of pastoral times (Le Guin 86-87), promoting this idyllic image of life in nature as a better option than living in an urbanised society. In general, works of fantasy concerned with ecological issues "establish a positive attitude toward nature within the narrative, which can ultimately be transferred onto the reader" (Colligs 83). However, Colligs also argues that fantasy literature can only raise awareness about environmental issues, but not offer viable or long-lasting solutions for them (83). Colligs builds this conclusion on the argument that fantasy is preoccupied with the past and with fantastical, exaggerated elements, which renders its environmental problems less relevant for the real, contemporary world. This would, however, best apply to epic or heroic fantasy. Urban fantasies, on the other hand, where magical beings live within what we recognise as our own, primary world (Stableford 86), frequently include commentary on, or explicitly deal with ecological issues, even offering solutions to them.[2] Conversely, works of high fantasy do not necessarily only highlight the issue – they, too, can offer solutions, as in Naomi Novik's *Uprooted* (2015) and Rin Chupeco's *The Never Tilting World* series (2019-2020). Importantly, the listed examples target younger audiences. This suggests that it is literature for children and young adults that chooses optimism in its approach to ecological issues. In fantasy for younger audiences, the quest is usually centred on the maturation of the protagonists, and it ends with a satisfactory, happy conclusion (Baker 238). While investigating contemporary young adult fiction, Alice Curry argues that "young people's social and political struggle and maturation is indivisible from the needs of the earth, particularly at this moment of accelerating environmental crisis" (5). Given the entanglement of the young protagonist's personal trajectory with the fate of the earth, the happy ending favoured by children's and young adult fiction often means the resolution of environmental issues mentioned in this type of fantasy works.

Like fantasy, science fiction can also serve as a platform of ecocritical examination. Instead of magic, the world in science fiction is ruled by science and technology (Tixier Herald and Kunzel xii). Works belonging to this genre frequently take place in the future

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[2] Examples of such works would be Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series (2005-present), Holly Black's *The Darkest Part of the Forest* (2015), and Rachel Griffin's *The Nature of Witches* (2021), to name a few.

Earth and "imagine what our transformed planet might eventually be like for those who will come to live on it" (Canavan 17). Texts belonging specifically to the dystopian genre often present environments that are not necessarily our future, but rather our present circumstances cast in starker light (Heise 3). Science fiction, therefore, has the potential to directly comment on the consequences of our own lifestyle and to present a possible picture of what the environment will look like. It can highlight issues and problems with an ecological dimension, such as the representation of the human and more-than-human world (androids, cyborgs, mutants, and other beings, as well as the natural and animal world), food shortage, resource exploitation, nuclear disasters, global warming and its consequences. Ursula K. Heise relates such dystopian writing to cautionary tales as "readers are invited to contemplate the present as the matrix of the past from which dystopia sprang, as well as to consider how alternative developments might be initiated" (5). To reiterate Hambrick's point above, this type of fiction presents a bleak future while maintaining its fictional status, which allows the readers to immerse into it without feeling that doom is inevitable. Therefore, by "witnessing the destruction of a fictional world, perhaps readers are able to encounter and consider concepts that could positively impact reality" (Hambrick 141).

Similarly to young adult fantasy, children's and young adult science fiction has a more positive outlook on the future of earth and society than the seminal "nihilistic dystopian traditions of adult science fiction" (Hammer 37). It is more prone to present a world where solving societal and environmental issues is possible or where they have already been resolved. For example, *The Lunar Chronicles* series is set in a futuristic world that has experienced four world wars. Meyer briefly mentions the nuclear and chemical destruction on Earth, but Earth has apparently mostly recovered from desolation. The author focuses her commentary on how people living on Luna suffer from the lack of resources – primarily food. Like other speculative young adult works set in the future, *Scarlet* represents a future that readers recognise as their own present (Hammer 40) with issues such as the consequences of war and food shortage, especially in underdeveloped or exploited parts of our present world. At the start of the novel, Wolf is introduced to tomatoes, which he has never had before since he is from Luna, where it is not possible to grow fresh produce. He is immediately taken with them and is later fascinated by carrots as well (Meyer 14, 27). This representation of growing produce can be analysed ecocritically.[3] It highlights the contrast between Luna and Earth: while the former is undoubtedly scientifically advanced, it cannot replicate the conditions necessary for food production akin

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[3] In a similar vein, Scarlet and Wolf exhibit revulsion at having to eat canned/jarred produce and compare its taste and quality to the fresh vegetables they enjoyed on Earth (Meyer 443). This segment evokes "the genre of slow food", a type of text that presents "a lament about and commitment to opt out of industrialized agriculture's technologies—from supermarkets and processed foods to growth hormones, pesticides, patented seeds, and monoculture farms" (Carruth 314). Processed, Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) produce is yet another issue ubiquitous to contemporary society that the readers will readily recognise.

to the ones on Earth. The need for resources is a crucial reason for Lunars wanting to wage war against Earth and subdue the Earthen nations so as to exploit the fertile land. The novel is optimistic in imagining the Earth of the future as still able to grow an abundance of fresh, healthy produce while simultaneously containing a message about the difficulty of creating sustainable living conditions on a different astronomical object. This evokes American physicist Loren Acton's reflections on his 1985 space flight: "Looking outward to the blackness of space, sprinkled with the glory of a universe of lights, I saw majesty – but no welcome. Below was a welcoming planet [...] That's where life is; that's where all the good stuff is" (qtd. in Glotfelty xxv). Here, imagining life on other astronomical objects, a speculative element, serves as a platform for examining our own present and near future, reminding the readers to care for and preserve their home planet.

From this brief overview, it is clear that speculative fiction offers rich possibilities for exploring the human relationship with nature. By choosing from a plethora of "what if" questions and pursuing their answers, "speculative fiction can alter the ways in which we perceive and interact with our surroundings" (Dědinová et al. 12). What if animals and plants talked? What if humans lived in pastoral havens evocative of times long past? What if we pursued technological progress to the detriment of all nature, including humans? Questions like these have the potential to make the readers ponder their own stance towards ecological issues as well as the stance of our society on the whole.

NATURAL MOTIFS IN TRADITIONAL "LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD" RETELLINGS

Meyer's *Scarlet* is a novel of speculative fiction, a science fiction text with elements of fantasy, but it is also a fairy tale retelling. As such, it does not exist in a vacuum – it inherits the motifs of the traditional versions of the "Little Red Riding Hood" story. To contextualise the ecocritical analysis of *Scarlet*, these traditional tales will be examined first, with an ecocritical approach applied to the two major natural motifs, the forest and the wolf, in the French oral version titled "The Story of the Grandmother", Charles Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood"(1697) and "Little Red-Cap" (1812) by the Brothers Grimm.

The forest is a motif commonly used as a metaphor rather than showcased as a real, physical place. From an ecocritical perspective, using natural motifs as metaphors for human experiences or behaviours is potentially damaging to the place/animal in question, as will be seen with the example of the wolf later, and demeaning to its real-life counterpart as it relegates the natural element to a motif in service of humanity, instead of allowing it to have value on its own. Ecologically, forests are important ecosystems that support numerous organisms and regulate the climate and geological processes, such as erosion and sedimentation (Colligs 70). Because of this, they are invaluable on the literal level while being intriguing on the literary one, thus inviting an ecocritical reading.

The motif of the forest represents a rich depository of connotative meaning. Quite frequently, the representation of the forest aligns with a strict binary: "[w]hen it is 'good', it

is a remedial setting of wonder and enchantment; when it is 'bad', it is a dangerous and terrifying wilderness" (Parker 1). Yet, the wilderness is not always or unequivocally shown in a negative light. For instance, Albrecht Classen, while discussing medieval German literature, notes that a protagonist, to achieve his goals, must enter and pass through a "forest, that is, the wilderness, a clear metaphor for his endeavor to track his own path in life and hence to establish his individuality without external guides" (125). In these cases, the forest represents a place of transformation and growth. Classen even goes so far as to say that "whenever a literary figure enters a forest, for whatever reason or with whatever purpose, a dramatic change in the narrative development regularly takes place and a significant transformation of the individual is about to happen" (165).

The forest is a frequent motif in fairy tales, featuring in many narratives, like "Snow White", "Hansel and Gretel", and, of course, "Little Red Riding Hood". In these tales, it can represent a shelter for characters but can also (sometimes simultaneously) be a place of danger. In a similar vein to Classen's observation above, the woods often represent a "symbolic site of transformation where the characters and their conflicting opposites meet. The forest is where the journey's path is; the path that must be taken to fulfil the quest" (Nouri 82). In other words, the forest is both the setting for a physical journey of the protagonist as well as a place of metaphoric progression, "such as the loss of innocence and the acquisition of knowledge" (Farris 46). Thus, a journey through the forest corresponds to a coming-of-age process or a rite of passage.

In "Little Red Riding Hood" stories, the forest is the physical setting of the girl's journey as well as of her sexual maturing, although the interpretation of the story as a narrative of sexual initiation is only one possible view among many. Given the context of Medieval and Early Modern Europe, its wolf population and many forests, the story could equally represent a literal warning about what may happen to unprotected children encountering wild animals in the forest (Sugiyama 111). Nevertheless, the encounter with a male stranger in the forest, combined with the ubiquitous colour red and the hairy wolf waiting in the bed, provides fertile ground for approaching this story with the girl's developing sexuality in mind. With the girl facing a wolf on her journey to the grandmother / sexual maturity, the forest is also figured as a place of danger. In the French oral tale, the forest is significant because it is a place filled with "pins and needles", and in their first encounter, the werewolf asks the girl if she is taking the path of pins or the path of needles. She takes the latter, and the werewolf hurries down the former while the girl "enjoyed herself picking up needles" (Delarue 15). Verdier relates the pins and needles to the tradition of young girls in the nineteenth century, when the story was collected, being sent to apprentice with a seamstress whereupon they would learn not only the trade but also how to behave and dress up as an adult (105-108). She, then, convincingly argues that these sharp objects stand for the girl's advent into puberty and denote the spilling of her menstrual blood. With the story's happy ending, in which the girl manages to escape the wolf on her own, the girl's journey through the forest is an essential part of her growing up and successfully joining society. In ecocritical terms, the forest is thus seen as a place that may

represent danger to this questing girl but one that she can, ultimately, effectively navigate. Like in other fairy tales with a sylvan journey, this "is a necessary stopping point in the process of maturation—confronting the monsters at the darkest part of the forest and finding the way out again" (Farris 46).

In his version, Perrault once again links the forest with sexuality. Unlike the oral version, which sees it as a necessary process in the circle of life, he represents the passage through the forest as dangerous and firmly negative. Perrault often used his narratives to promote order and discipline at court, and so he transforms the triumphant tale of a rite of passage into a warning against sexual deviance. In this version, the girl must pass through the forest to get to her grandmother. The girl stumbles upon "Master Wolf, and he wanted very much to eat her up; but he did not dare, because there were some woodcutters in the forest" (Perrault 99). He engages her in conversation and finds out where she is going so that he can arrive there faster, eat her grandmother, and wait in an ambush for the girl herself (Perrault 99). The girl is saved from immediate demise by the presence of the woodcutters, patriarchal figures that symbolically prevent her dalliance with the wolf. In an ecocritical perspective, the woodcutters are a sign of human superiority over the natural world. They literally subdue it by cutting it down, thus weaving the narrative of the forest as a place of danger and disorder that must be conquered, cleared, and "civilised". Furthermore, the woodcutters also metaphorically put a stop to the girl's sexual development. Like in many other works, physical nature is here linked with the female sex (Ortner 74-76). Drawing on the common interpretation of the forest as a space of "erotic errancy" (Harrison 121), the girl's foray into the woods serves to emphasise the view of nature as dangerous and women as corrupted, inherently drawn towards the sinful sensuality of the forest. It is only once the girl is out of the woodcutters' reach that she can begin to explore her sexuality: she "amused herself gathering hazel-nuts, running after butterflies, and making posies out of the flowers that she saw" (Perrault 99). The enjoyment of earthly pleasures is figured as negative, as an unnecessary dalliance, while the flowers metaphor carries clear sexual connotations, referring to the deflowering that awaits the girl (Vaz da Silva 184).

Finally, in the Grimms' take on the story, the narrative is again updated to align with their own extra-textual goals. They wrote in line with the Protestant ethic and patriarchal worldview they were raised in. Their emphasis is on orderliness and following the right path, so in their "Little Red Cap", the girl is clearly warned against straying from the correct path and into the forest: "walk nicely and quietly and do not run off the path, or you may fall and break the bottle, and then your grandmother will get nothing" (Grimm and Grimm 98).[4] The importance of staying on the proper path can be connected with a warning against any sexual deviance that would imperil the purity of the girl, and even the motif of the breaking of the bottle can be understood in sexual terms, referring to the potential defloration of the

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[4] However, it should be noted that the forest in the Grimm tales represents not only danger but also sanctuary. Discussing "Hansel and Gretel" and "Snow White", Brian Radford showcases how the woods may prove perilous, but they may also provide a safe haven to characters fleeing from society (6).

girl (Vaz da Silva 181). Afterwards, the girl sets off on her journey to the grandmother. Following the same plan as before, the wolf entices her to waste time in the forest while he gets to the grandmother's house. At the wolf's advice, the girl runs off the path, enchanted by the forest "described in pastoral mode" (Murai and Kato 723). She picks flowers and strays "deeper and deeper into the wood" (Grimm and Grimm 99). The flowers again symbolise the girl's sexuality, but, unlike in the oral tale, her attempt to reach maturity is not something to be celebrated.

While it may be true that in all three versions of the story "[i]t is only after her walk through the forest that she leaves childhood and is ready to become an adult" (Nouri 80), the approach is different in the three versions. Whereas the oral tale uses the forest to connote sexual awakening and the potential predators that the girl must be on the lookout for, the story celebrates the girl's advent into adult society and features a resourceful heroine who saves herself, thus successfully completing her rite of passage. On the other hand, both Perrault and the Grimms represent the girl's sexuality in an overtly negative light. Dallying in the forest and explicitly going against parental instructions must be punished: in Perrault's version by death (and/or rape) and in the Grimms tale by a temporary death from which both the girl and the grandmother are saved by another patriarchal figure, the huntsman (Grimm and Grimm 100; Zipes 13; Orenstein 46). While in all three stories, the forest is a physical place hiding Big Bad Wolves, it is mainly the site for a figurative journey from childhood into adulthood, whether presented as a positive or a negative process. Therefore, the forest is, primarily, used metaphorically rather than as an invaluable environmental setting in its own right.

In addition to the forest, an ecocritical reading of the "Little Red Riding Hood" stories should also focus on the figure of the wolf. The media often oscillates between representing animals as similar to humans, on the one hand, and as the human opposites, on the other hand. While animals are "evolutionarily connected more closely to humans than other parts of nature", they are, contradictorily, often "represented as being separated from humans by a fundamental boundary" (Buell et al. 430). This is a manifestation of an anthropocentric ideology that figures people as separate from and above nature. At the same time, in cultural products, animals are used to represent aspects of human "concepts, traits, and values" (Mitts-Smith 13), resulting in symbols and images of animals that do not align with the lived experiences and natures of those same animals. Animals are thus imbued with characteristics that they do not possess; for example, no animal can rightly be considered as evil. With such and similar representations being ubiquitous, it is important to underscore that the way literature and other media construct the nature of animals has the potential to influence the audience's stance towards real animals (Mitts-Smith 13).

Although the wolf was seen as a protector in the period of gatherers and hunters, the settlement into grazing societies led to it being perceived as an adversary (Zipes 47). While wolves have received some positive representation in literature, for example, in Roman mythology or in *The Jungle Book*, Rudyard Kipling's story about the boy raised by wolves (Arnds 178; Mitts-Smith 4), the wolf is generally figured as a villain in stories. In Western

European folk and fairy tales, he is a predator and a glutton; this negative view is supported in the Judeo-Christian tradition, in which "the wolf represents rapacious, dangerous behavior" (Mitts-Smith 4). In line with this, "encounters with wolves in [...] tales function as warnings against sin and the impurity associated with sinfulness" (Arnds 179). Such is the case in most traditional "Little Red Riding Hood" narratives.

While many authors write about the wolf character as a stand-in for a male figure, some interpretations of the story propose a literal reading of "Little Red Riding Hood", explaining that real wolves were a danger to people in rural areas (Sugiyama 111). For people whose lives and livelihoods were intertwined with nature, "stories in which humans succeed in taming or conquering nature offered hope" (Mitts-Smith 42). However, in the case of the story of "Little Red Riding Hood", most critics approach it as a figurative tale about the danger a strange, adult man would pose to a young girl. For Margaret Joan Blount, the wolf in "Little Red Riding Hood" is "obviously human" (25). In Bruno Bettelheim's famous psychoanalytic interpretation, the wolf is an embodiment of the girl's father, whom she subconsciously desires (172-81). As in other tales, this wolf is merely a metaphor "for wicked or dangerous humans, behaviors, and situations" (Mitts-Smith 25).[5] Negative representation of the wolf in the media may have had tangible consequences outside of literature. Kaisa Lappalainen claims that "'Little Red Riding Hood' has a profound effect in negatively influencing people's perceptions about wolves, which in turn impacts wolf recovery and management" (2). The practice of using an animal as a stand-in for evil humans is thus an exploitative tactic that damages the animal's own identity and its importance as an autonomous member of the biosphere. More importantly, it may negatively reflect on the survival of the whole species.

Linked to the wolf itself (or himself) is the character of the werewolf, which also appears in some iterations of the tale. The werewolf, first seen in the image of shamans and other spiritual leaders of early tribes in the period of gatherers and hunters donning wolf or bear skins to perform rituals, contains an additional layer of meaning – he is "suspected of possessing unique powers of transformation, and considered uncontrollable, untameable, and yet necessary for the cultural process" (Zipes 47). Namely, Zipes underlines that "[t]he wolf was crucial in archaic thinking as a representative of the human wild side, of wilderness" (14). Thus, the werewolf, as a man-wolf hybrid, can be seen in a positive way because he represents the "integration of the cultural and the wild elements of humans" (47). Yet such an outlook was eventually overtaken in the Middle Ages when he "was considered destructive, bloodthirsty, cunning, and supernatural", with the link with the devil being established in the late Middle Ages (48). This has solidified the still prevalent, largely negative, view of the werewolf as a monster.

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[5] The "wolf-as-human" metaphor was not lost on the audiences of the "Little Red Riding Hood" story and was, moreover, solidified by other media, such as picture sheets printed during the nineteenth century that often featured the wolf dressed up in human garb, like a gentleman or a soldier (Zipes 21).

Strongly intertwined with medieval and early modern French folklore, the oral tale includes the character of *bzou,* a werewolf. The introduction of lycanthropy into the narrative makes apparent the dual danger he represents: as a wolf, he is a devourer in the literal sense, having eaten the grandmother; as a man, he devours metaphorically, inviting the girl to strip and join him in bed (Delarue 15-16). A tentative positive interpretation could be offered of the wolf as a figure necessary for the girl's advent into adulthood, but he is more comfortably recognized as the dangerous man-wolf. The duality of this character as being both a wolf and a man is more subtly but still recognizably retained in Perrault's and the Grimms' versions of the tale. Perrault writes about "Master Wolf", but his character is not a simple animal. Again, he is a deceitful trickster, and his ultimate goal remains a murky mixture of literal and sexual devouring. Vaz da Silva notes that Perrault's story contains remnants of the werewolf tradition, signifying that Perrault probably rewrote a folk tale and used a euphemism for the werewolf to appease his aristocratic audience (176-78). In the plot, the girl arrives at her grandmother's house and is devoured by the wolf because she believes his disguise and deceit – another skill of the literary wolf (Mitts-Smith 30). When the little girl undresses and joins the wolf in bed, "the wicked Wolf flung himself on Little Red Riding-Hood, and ate her up" (Perrault 103). However, the human-like status of the wolf is ossified in the moral of the story, where Perrault explicitly warns about gentlemen who pretend to be courteous, only to be revealed as having wolfish characteristics: "I call them wolves, but you will find / That some are not the savage kind, / Not howling, ravening or raging; / Their manners seem, instead, engaging" (Perrault 103). In the Grimms' version, the wolf is also represented as an animal, but the hunter calling him "thou old sinner" (Grimm and Grimm 99) links him with humanity. While the girl and the grandmother escape death, the wolf is the one who must die because he is the criminal, an outcast, the ultimate "Other" in the society. Instead of permanently punishing the girl for her sexuality and disobedience, the story sets "an example [...] using a misfit or outsider from the lower classes" (Zipes 56). When the huntsman snips the wolf's belly to get the two women out, "Red-Cap [...] quickly fetched great stones with which they filled the wolf's body, and when he awoke, he wanted to run away, but the stones were so heavy that he fell down at once, and fell dead" (Grimm and Grimm 100). It is indicative that the girl sews the stones into the wolf's belly herself: in this way, she is symbolically internalising the laws of society (Zipes 56; Orenstein 55). The wolf thus appears to be more a symbol of sexuality and lawlessness than a simple animal in these stories. Like with the forest, a natural element is therefore transformed into a metaphor about human behaviour, evoking the notion of anthropocentrism, demeaning the autonomy of nature and its other inhabitants, and harming their reputation and chances of survival.

As another version of the "Little Red Riding Hood" storyline, *Scarlet* presents the same basic plot – a girl on her way to the grandmother – and engages with the same key natural motifs: the wolf and the forest. Yet, it treats them in a way that differs from the tradition while drawing creatively on some of the symbolic associations. As such, it calls for an ecocritical examination that would cast light on contemporary trends in popular fiction dealing, overtly or subtly, with environmental issues. Thus, it is valuable to interpret how Meyer's versions of traditional elements, such as the wolf and the forest, may be seen in an ecocritical light that reflects the contemporary drive to raise awareness about ecology.

Many contemporary authors of fiction who integrate wolves into their plots abandon the typical representation of the wolf. He ceases to be perceived as a threat – on the literal level, the wolf population is not large enough to represent a realistic everyday danger to people; as a symbol of carnality, he is no longer feared. Finally, the wolf represents nature and the need to preserve it, in line with contemporary ecocritical writing (Zipes 44; Parker 189). This changing stance is evident in literary production, with increasing realistic images of wolves as opposed to them being used merely to comment on human behaviour as well as with calls to action to save the wolf population (Mitts-Smith 22). For example, Mayako Murai writes about the representation of the wolf in "Little Red Riding Hood" picture books by Bernadette Watts (first published 1968) and Kazuyoshi Iino (2001) as an animal ensuring its own survival (9-12). Vita Murrow's version of the story, published in her *Power to the Princess*: *15 Favourite Fairytales Retold with Girl Power* (2018), carries an explicitly environmental message through the heroine's endeavour to save wolves, who are at the brink of starvation because humans have destroyed their habitat, and the forest can no longer provide them with enough food.

Similarly, some versions of the story abandon or adjust the typical forest setting to reflect the changed stance towards nature, which is no longer seen as evil or sinful. Instead, these texts may choose to transfer the negative connotations of the forest setting onto a cityscape, as is the case with *Scarlet*. Another example is the story by Francesca Lia Block, published in *The Rose and the Beast: Fairy Tales Retold* (2000), set in Los Angeles. The journey is relocated to the city and the desert and features the girl travelling by bus; this version uses the opportunity to comment on pollution and smog. Evidently, authors of fairy tale retellings have become environmentally conscious in recent years.

While the traditional versions of the tale mainly focus on the forest as a place of sexual awakening and potential danger and on the wolf as a human-like murderer and rapist, Marissa Meyer expands her usage of motifs and settings in ways that can be interpreted ecocritically. The following analysis should be prefaced with an acknowledgment that Marissa Meyer's writing has been criticised by scholars such as Miranda Green-Barteet and Meghan Gilbert-Hickey for being informed primarily by her "white, middle class American worldview" (12) and her "troubling impulse to assume that [the white, middle class American] perspective on global issues is the only one" (12). In

discussing the representation of race in *The Lunar Chronicles*, Meyer both promotes an ideology of colour-blindness while simultaneously contributing to the creation of harmful stereotypes, as we shall see with the character of Ze'ev later.[6] By erasing the importance of race in the novels, her work downplays the oppression people of colour experience, including in relation to environmental issues. Meyer provides little insight into how the environmental themes she tackles, such as species extinction, concerns about food resources and quality, and migration into and from the countryside and city affect different groups of people in unequal ways. Nevertheless, the inclusion of subtle messages about the value of the natural world and an eco-friendly way of life may arouse environmental awareness in young adult readers, without deflecting from the main adventures of the characters in the novel.

No More Mr. Big Bad: Representing the Wolf

Instead of falling back on stock characterization, Meyer's representation of the wolf is dual: she writes about real wolves, while "wolves" also refers to genetically engineered soldiers from the Moon. On the one hand, the novel treats wolves as real, living creatures trying to live independently from humans, disassociated from their harmful metaphorical representation as carnal and gluttonous predators, which the novel acknowledges: "'Wolf', she [Scarlet] whispered [...] 'To some, a wild beast, a predator, a nuisance. To others, a shy animal who was too often misunderstood by humanity'" (Meyer 113). Moreover, wolves still exist and live in their natural habitats, even in the distant future, thanks to "the species protection act that had been enforced centuries ago" (113).[7] This may be understood as a call "to preserve, protect, and restore wolf populations, urging the public to take up the call" that Mitts-Smith observes in contemporary stories dealing with wolves (23). Additionally, this fulfils Lawrence Buell's condition of an environmental text directing attention towards non-human interests, including animal species protection (*The Environmental Imagination* 7). Meyer, thus, integrates an environmentalist message into a future world created by means

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[6] It should be noted that Cinder is not actually "a white, young female cyborg" (Green-Barteet and Gilbert-Hickey 12). Meyer has clearly stated that Cinder is of "mixed ethnicity—Asian/Caucasian?, tan skin" ("A Guide to Lunar Chronicles Character Traits"). The discussion of race in the series would benefit from taking into account Cinder's actual race as well as how the main text of the series is ambiguous enough about racial identities to warrant a character guide published on Meyer's website, which is, perhaps, problematic in itself.

[7] Ronald Sandler poses intriguing questions about the viability of saving a species. He argues that conserving endangered animals in zoos or human-controlled habitats does not actually save the species in question because the essence of their life becomes modified, and the species as it "naturally" existed is effectively lost anyway (76-78). The saved wolves in *Scarlet*, however, seem to be living in a habitat not too changed by human activity, so the novel can be understood as having an optimistic view of the future of fauna.

of speculative fiction. Having said that, the text does not offer insight into how this protection was implemented or critically address actual problems in species preservation.

On the other hand, "wolves" is also the name given to the genetically engineered Lunar soldiers. These operatives are "a cross between a man and a beast" with "[p]rotruding fangs and enormous claws, hunched shoulders and a fine layer of fur up their broad arms" (Meyer 416). These wolf-like soldiers present the greatest threat to the characters of the novel while saving the actual animals from the bad reputation traditionally ascribed to them. While it may be argued that the soldiers are viewed in such a negative way because they are imbued with wolfish characteristics, they are clearly a product of human meddling into natural genetic material as they are mentally forced to obey their Lunar masters (404). It is, thus, human activity that is cast in the negative light. Here, elements of speculative fiction – genetic engineering – are working in tandem with traditional fairy tale motifs to create a potentially environmentalist message.

In the novel, Ze'ev Kesley, Scarlet's love interest, is not only one of the Lunar wolf-soldiers but also nicknamed "Wolf"; the wolf imagery places him into the role of the villain of a traditional "Little Red Riding Hood" narrative. Like other soldiers, he is a dangerous figure and a physical threat. Like most wolves in the traditional tale, he is manipulative and deceitful, luring Scarlet into a trap, albeit against his own will (Meyer 370). The novel evokes the sexual connotations of the original fairy tales, with a character proclaiming that Wolf "has found himself a tender morsel tonight" (76) when the latter is seen talking to Scarlet, linking carnal consummation with eating. This representation of Ze'ev has raised some concern. Green-Barteet and Gilbert-Hickey, for example, argue that the portrayal of Ze'ev evokes links with Middle Eastern terrorism (15-17). He is a part of Lunar special operatives conducting simultaneous terrorist attacks in various Earthen cities and has "olive-toned skin – think Middle Eastern" (Meyer, "A Guide to Lunar Chronicles Character Traits"). This results in a potentially demeaning connection of people of colour with animality as well as in a perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. In terms of sexuality, however, he is not represented as a stereotypical animalistic aggressor, for it is Scarlet who makes the first move before their mutually desired kiss. The scene holds significance for the "Little Red Riding Hood" narrative as well: while the traditional stories, except for the oral tale, punish the budding sexuality of the girl character, *Scarlet* features a flirtatious heroine who is free to explore her own desire (Meyer 174, 242). At the end, Scarlet and Wolf establish a relationship; it is figured in wolf pack terms, with Wolf asking her to be his alpha female, matching his own alpha male status (446). Metaphorically, Scarlet is therefore also aligned with natural, animal characteristics such as carnality, which are not penalized, but represented positively.[8]

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[8] This turn of events is not unique to *Scarlet*. Several other retellings of the "Little Red Riding Hood" story end with a happy relationship between the girl and the wolf, be it a werewolf, a human, or a supernatural being that occupies the role of the wolf. Such works include Angela Carter's "The Company of Wolves" (1979), Debbie Viguié's *Scarlet Moon* (2004), Jessica Day George's *Princess of the Silver Woods* (2012), and Hannah Whitten's *For the Wolf* (2021).

There and Back Again: Scarlet's Journey

As the plot of the novel progresses, the readers follow Scarlet's quest from her abode in the country to the city of Paris, where she hopes to find her missing grandmother. Before reaching her destination, she is forced to seek refuge and a safer path in the forest. The countryside, the forest, and the city represent a triad ripe with potential environmental messages. Scarlet's journey consists of a removal from the countryside into Paris, and it does so whilst playing upon the distinction between nature and culture (Turner 41, 45). In literary tradition, the city and the country are firmly juxtaposed, being imagined as places of "noise, worldliness and ambition" and "backwardness, ignorance, limitation", respectively (Williams 1). However, the country is also a retreat from "the stink of place and of profit; the noise and danger of being crowded together" (Williams 47), a sort of pastoral haven. This image of the country is propagated through the genre of the pastoral, whose tradition also relies on "the spatial distinction of town (frenetic, corrupt, impersonal) and country (peaceful, abundant)" (Garrard 39).

Scarlet's life in her grandmother's countryside farm exhibits similarities to pastoral life. The novel presents rurality as a key component of an appealing, slow-paced life. Scarlet's circle, and mostly her grandmother, is positioned as a group that is connected with nature. Her grandmother is viewed as an eccentric by some of the village people "[w]ith 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" (Meyer 18). She appreciates non-human creatures and prefers them to human company upsetting the anthropocentric standard of the rest of the community, even if their reaction can be attributed to the fact that she has secrets to hide.[9]

The pastoral world frequently represents "a natural world, a green world, to which sophisticated urbanites withdraw in search of the lessons of simplicity which only nature can teach" (Love 231). In that sense, the pastoral does not actually deal with nature so much as humans enjoying nature for a certain amount of time before returning to the city, filled with the knowledge gained in the pastoral haven (Garrard 39). At first glance, the rural landscape in *Scarlet* seems to fit this purpose. Scarlet had moved from Paris to the countryside when she was young because her mother had left, and her father had turned to excessive drinking. Moving in with her grandmother, Scarlet "went from being a pretty spoiled city kid to getting up at dawn and being expected to finish [her] chores" (Meyer 206). However, the stereotypical view of the pastoral environment is traded for a genuine interest in rural life. Scarlet does not want to return to the city; on the contrary, she dreams of spending her whole life on her farm:

> For more than half her life, this farm had been Scarlet's paradise. Over the
> years, she'd fallen in love with it more deeply than she'd known a person

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[9] Admittedly, people probably begrudge her the fact that she threatens them with firearms more than the fact that she talks to creatures. Yet, the human society in the novels is undeniably anthropocentric, which is best illustrated in the fact that prejudices against cyborgs as well as Lunars abound. Cinder, being both, works to dismantle this bigotry.

> could fall in love with land and sky—and she knew her grandma felt the
> same. Though she didn't like to think of it, she was aware that someday she
> would inherit the farm, and she sometimes fantasized about growing old
> here. Happy and content, with perpetual dirt beneath her fingernails and
> an old house that was in constant need of repair. (40)

Scarlet is satisfied with the country life. However, she is compelled to go look for her missing grandmother, and her journey takes her first into the woods and then into Paris.

At the beginning of the novel, Scarlet meets Wolf who promises to help her find her missing grandmother, and so they take the train to Paris. On the way, the train is stopped as there are people looking for Scarlet, and the pair are forced to escape to a forest. The representation of the forest in the novel contradicts the stereotypical image of the forest as either a dangerous or idealised place. On the one hand, Scarlet acknowledges that it is not her own habitat and approaches it with caution and, perhaps, apprehension. The forest is "choking off the midday sun" (Meyer 180), and the "dense forest stretch[ing] out, dissolving into shadows" (181) creates an eerie atmosphere. The wildlife also instil a sense of fear: "Off in the woods, a wolf howled. The lonely cry sent a shiver down Scarlet's spine" (184). Later on, she is likewise spooked by an animal in a shrub, only to realize it was a pine marten (202), and "things [...] reached and jabbed at her" while walking (198). On the other hand, time seems to have stopped in the forest and Scarlet thinks that "it was beautiful here—the fresh air, the wildflowers, the critters that came to the edge of the brush to watch Scarlet and Wolf before scurrying back into the ferns" (201). When Scarlet circles back to why the forest is not welcoming to humans, she lists reasons that mostly have to do with her own physical condition as well as the fear of predators: "her feet and back were sore, her stomach was growling, and now Wolf was telling her that the less loveable creatures of the forest were prowling nearby" (201). In other words, there is nothing metaphorically wrong with the forest – it is simply a place that Scarlet is not used to, populated by its usual occupants. As Colligs suggests, "a healthy forest, and therefore healthy nature, seems to be an indicator of a positive interconnection between all life forms" (76). This realistic representation frees the image of the forest from literary connotations. It is here possible to observe "human accountability to the environment" and a "sense of the environment as a process", two of Lawrence Buell's criteria for an environmental text (*The Environmental Imagination* 7, 8). The forest is represented as preserved, suggesting that humanity has recognised the value of nature, and is holding itself accountable for its protection. The latter Buell criterion is also evident in the way the forest is shown as full of life, with various animals coming to Scarlet's attention. Such a representation goes against "the typical presumption [...] that our landscapes are [...] static: they are passive, inanimate *settings* for our stories" (Parker 69). Instead, the forest is an alive space, constantly changed by the flora and fauna present in it.

While the novel retains a neutral stance towards the forest, the forest's positive influence is subtly hinted at, regarding both Scarlet and Wolf. Scarlet notices that the forest is having a good effect on her companion, Wolf, who seems calmer and ceases his nervous hand twitching (Meyer 205). Since Wolf is genetically engineered to exhibit some animal characteristics, he may be feeling more at home in the forest because it is a more natural

habitat for him. Another potential influence of the forest is evoked in the use of the verb "prowled on" to refer to both Scarlet and Wolf (200). Scarlet seems to be gaining a gait characteristic of predators, like Wolf and the real wolves in the forest. This foreshadows her own status as Wolf's future mate – while she never physically turns into a wolf-like creature, by the end of the novel they have entered a relationship, and, with him being an alpha male, she becomes an alpha female. Here, the function of the forest reflects a trope commonly found in contemporary versions of fairy tales: utilising the forest as a setting that "interacts with the coming-of-age process" (Farris 47) with Scarlet growing into her future identity. While the forest is mainly a physical setting in the novel, fulfilling the ecocritical tenet of seeing value in the natural world *per se*, the woods are also subtly shown as a place of transformation.

The true danger to Scarlet and Wolf stems not from the forest or its dwellers but from human society. They are being hunted by androids (perhaps stand-ins for the woodcutters of Perrault's tale, in their role of bringing the girl back to a path they find to be the correct one), who, while non-human themselves, work for human benefit and rarely exhibit personality.[10] On their journey, Scarlet

> noticed sounds that didn't belong to the forest—the crunching of treads on dirt and gravel as dozens of androids circled the perimeter. Wolf abandoned the tracks, pushing through the brush and leading them into the security of the woods [...] They stopped only once, when a streak of blue light danced on the trunks over their heads. Scarlet followed Wolf's lead and pressed herself nearly to the ground, listening to the pounding of her heart, the rush of adrenaline in her ears. (Meyer 198-200)

Like other wild literary landscapes, this forest presents a "sharp distinction between the forces of culture and nature" (Garrard 67). Nature and civilization clash here, and the forest of wolves is deemed safer than the technologically advanced world. In *Scarlet*, the forest is a neutral setting providing refuge and allowing the growth of the characters but also containing realistic dangers, including human-caused threats.

This remains the case when Scarlet and Wolf reach the city. Knowing the danger that awaits Scarlet in Paris, Wolf suggests they "disappear in the forest" (Meyer 263) rather than enter the city. The text promotes a binary opposition between the city and the country that has recently been contested by scholars such as Barber; Bennett; and Christensen and Heise. Frederick Turner proposes that, instead of perpetuating the conflict between the city and the country, we embrace technology for what it can do for the betterment of the environmental situation (50). Greg Garrard further unsettles the binary by emphasising that all cultural artefacts are produced by natural creatures, that is, human beings, and "[out] of materials of natural origin in accordance with natural 'laws' of mechanical physics" (11). Following this, the city is, too, a natural product. However, *Scarlet* reaffirms the traditional binary with the city as the negative pole, especially through descriptions of the cityscape. In

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[10] The only exception is Iko, Cinder's android friend, whose personality chip is considered faulty and, therefore, an oddity; this is another aspect through which the novel challenges anthropocentrism.

the novel, the forest is presented mainly in a neutral manner while the countryside and rural landscape are seen positively. The exception to the latter is the sight of an abandoned farmhouse used by ruffian street fighters, with its "rotting structures" (Meyer 71), as well as the "decrepit, crumbling barns" (159). These features of the landscape are not dwelt on, with their state of decay attributed to human influence.

In contrast, the train station from which Scarlet and Wolf start their journey and the city of Paris are both painted in an oppressive light: "the maglev station was obnoxiously bright as they descended on the escalator, the fluorescents overcompensating for the lack of sun" (Meyer 161). This evokes the "gothicized environmental squalor" that Lawrence Buell uses when discussing landscapes blighted by toxic waste and pollution (*Writing for an Endangered World* 43). This squalor is also present in Paris, whose modernity is shown in a negative light. Here, the "glimmer of city neon" is "unnatural" (Meyer 261); the noise is "furious" even at night, with "hovers and netscreens and buzzers" (264); and it smells of "metal and asphalt", even if there is also the scent of "baking bread from a closed patisserie on the corner" (268). The city is also brimming with advertisements that promote a consumerist lifestyle (268, 269) at odds with the slow life at a farm. A music video is described as emitting "synthesized noise" (271) – not only is it unnatural, but it is also *noise*, rather than (melodic, pleasant) music. All of these clearly point out Scarlet's negative feelings towards the city, and it is no wonder that, after spending only a short amount of time in Paris, "[s]he already yearned for the solitude of the farm" (269).

Yet, not all parts of the city are vilified. Although Paris had been rebuilt after the last war, parts of it were not renovated so as to preserve their historic value. Scarlet and Wolf arrive at an older neighbourhood, ravaged by a world war:

> A block later, the memory of the Fourth World War caught up to them all at once. The scorch marks and crumbling facades of a city pummeled by war. There weren't enough of the beautiful old buildings left to draw the interest of the conservationists, and the sheer amount of destruction must have been too overwhelming for reconstruction. Unable to demolish the city's history, the government had left this quarter alone. The districts, though separated by only a few streets, seemed worlds apart. (Meyer 272)

Furthermore, Scarlet reminisces about the time her father brought her to the Musée du Louvre, which has also suffered irreparable damage (Meyer 272-73). The block seems to be stuck in time and, although bearing the marks of destruction, appears clearly nicer (to Scarlet, at least) than the modern urban environment. In these scenes, another convention of science fiction can be observed: such texts often represent our own present time as the past in an imaginary future (Jameson 288). Meyer's text poses the elements familiar to us (the Louvre, old Parisian architecture) as relics of a time long past and uses them to criticise both war and unchecked modernisation.

But even an old building can be put to a corrupt use, as is the case with the Parisian opera house, which the wolf gang uses for its headquarters. Scarlet walks straight into a trap and is captured, led away deeper into the eerie building. As a nod towards the traditional version of "Little Red Riding Hood", a part of the opera house explicitly evokes the forest: "A

maze of fake stone walls and painted trees filled the shadows to her left. The door slammed behind her and she ran into the wooden forest, grabbing a wrought-iron candelabra" (Meyer 382). Transferring the connotative meaning of the forest as a locus of danger onto the human building cements the city's position of a negative presence.

Finally, at the end of the novel, Cinder comes to Scarlet and Wolf's rescue, and the pair join Cinder's team onboard a spaceship. While there, Scarlet once again longs for the freedom of the rural life: "the confinement of it still pressed in around her, almost suffocating. She knew that her grandma had probably been stationed on a similar ship during her time in the military. No wonder she'd retired to a farm, with all the sky and horizon a person could want" (Meyer 441). Yet again, she confirms her desire for the peace and freedom of the countryside, underlining the fact that her experience in the pastoral was not merely for the sake of personal growth and a subsequent return to "civilization". Instead, the novel highlights the merits of living closer to nature and expresses hope for humanity to preserve this way of life even in the far future.

CONCLUSION

In applying an ecocritical analysis to *Scarlet,* it becomes clear how the novel uses elements of speculative fiction to address environmental issues. *Scarlet* provides commentary on the contemporary human experience, points out what is amiss, and offers hope that problematic issues can be resolved. The text combines the conventions of speculative fiction and several natural motifs to communicate a message promoting a lifestyle entwined with nature. Like other science fiction works, it utilises a futuristic setting to draw the reader's attention to humanity's current relationship with our planet, which will inevitably influence life on Earth in the future, such as the issue of food production and agriculture, currently impossible on any other astronomical object besides Earth. While the message may be a simplistic one in this case, it implicitly evokes the huge discrepancies between resource availability on different parts of our planet: metaphorically, the real-life contrast between overconsumption and food scarcity in our societies is comparable to the bountiful Earth of Meyer's universe and the lack of resources on Luna. Finally, through the comments on canned goods, the novel also criticises a market flooded with GMO produce.

As a retelling of the "Little Red Riding Hood" story, *Scarlet* features the character of the wolf and the setting of the forest but represents both in strikingly different ways than traditional versions, with important ecocritical implications. Whereas the wolf was a symbol of a human male preoccupied with the murder and/or rape of a young girl in these tales, the novel makes a point of allowing wolves to be regular animals. Entwining the elements of science fiction (a futuristic setting linked to the current one) with discussions of the wolf population, the text also promotes the protection of wolves in our contemporary world, even if it does not present a concrete itinerary on how this should be done.

When wolves *are* figured as a dangerous presence, this is simply because they are natural predators. Instead of using real wolves as villains, the novel transfers the danger onto people genetically engineered to have the physical attributes of wolves. The work thus sheds a negative light on the human action of genetic meddling. Furthermore, the sexual connotations ascribed to wolves in fairy tales are reserved for Scarlet's love interest in the novel, rather than being indiscriminately applied to all of the wolfish kind. In this manner, the novel illustrates the changing stance towards animals (and animal characters) in the twenty-first century, where real wolves are allowed an identity autonomous of humans, instead of being constantly exploited in literature and other media, and are freed from their metaphoric and symbolic associations.

The novel weaves its journey around two other major ecocritical motifs: the countryside and the forest. The former is represented in an idealistic manner; at the same time, the novel does not fall back onto the trope of featuring a pastoral haven as a mere retreat from the city, into which the character inevitably returns. Later, when Scarlet sets off on her journey, she enters the forest. Unlike in the traditional stories, the forest is not dangerous because it stands for sexual maturation and predation; instead, it is represented in a realistic way, as a place perhaps dangerous for humans, but only because of the natural predators that live in it. Furthermore, it is a place in which Scarlet also recognises beauty and finds safety from humans and human-made technology. Both the countryside and the forest are juxtaposed against a negative representation of the city as unnatural and garish. While older parts of the town mostly escape this negative criticism (which should, perhaps, make readers appreciate our current cities more and not strive for unchecked technological progress), the city is shown to be the ultimate place of danger for Scarlet. Nevertheless, this representation promotes a binary of the city and the countryside that current ecocritical thought is moving away from.

In comparison with the three traditional versions of the "Little Red Riding Hood", the novel illustrates the changed stance towards topics and motifs that can be read ecocritically. The novel illustrates a trend among many contemporary authors to recognize the autonomous value of these natural elements and argue for their protection: they are still present in works but are no longer only exploited as metaphors. Finally, the analysis has shown that Scarlet's journey from the countryside into the city paints a flattering picture of the former and a bleak version of the latter, urging readers to embrace a life closer to nature. In this manner, the novel reflects the current ecologically mindful worldview and has the ability to further it, due to its reach as a popular work of contemporary speculative fiction. While not without its faults, *Scarlet* is a valuable contribution to the body of fictional works not necessarily focusing on environmental issues but dealing with them to some extent. Investigating similar works through an ecocritical lens would result in a more comprehensive understanding of how environmental issues are represented and dealt with in popular speculative young adult fiction, consumed by readers living in the world where such issues are not the stuff of fantasy but part of our lived experiences.

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