Women, Animals, and Cyborgs

Challenges to Western Humanist Constructions of The Human in Selected Contemporary Literature

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Abstract

This thesis examines challenges to Western Humanist constructions of the human in selected literature, specifically Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984), Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* (1991), and Michel Faber's *Under the Skin* (2000). Interweaving cultural theory with literary analysis, this thesis explores and critiques constructions of the human through a Western Humanist perspective. Chapter One examines how Western Humanism has defined the human in opposition to the other through dominant dualisms, notably that of human/animal and human/machine. Within this chapter, it considers feminist and posthumanist critiques of Western Humanism, in order to speculate new forms of identity and subjectivity. Chapter Two is a literary analysis of the selected texts, arguing that the novels' hybrid characters destabilise dominant dualisms underpinning Western Humanist constructions of the human. Inspired by Judith Butler's gender performativity theory, Chapter Three explores performative identities of gender and humanness. In particular, it argues that humanness is a performative act rather than an innate state of identity, illustrated through a literary analysis of the selected texts.

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Introduction

Richie Nimmo asserts that "all modern discourses can be understood as discourses of humanity" (60). In saying this, Nimmo points to the question that forms the foundation of modern thought: what makes us human? Deceptively simple in its wording, this question opens up an insurmountable debate within Western philosophical tradition; one which remains ongoing today. This thesis began with a desire to understand how the human has been defined in opposition to the other through dominant dualisms. As someone who is bisexual and biracial, I have always struggled with binary concepts. The notion that humanity could be organised neatly into a binary seemed to be in direct conflict with the many shades of grey I witnessed around me. Despite this, Braidotti asserts that binarised conceptions of humanness remain a "structural element of our cultural practice … embedded in both theory and institutional and pedagogical practice" (2). Thus, this thesis interweaves cultural theory and literary analysis in order to examine and critique Western Humanist constructions of the human in selected contemporary literature, specifically Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984), Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* (1991), and Michel Faber's *Under the Skin* (2000). In particular, I consider the way in which humanity has largely been defined in opposition to the 'other', using the role of women, animals, and cyborgs to illustrate this. The selected novels feature hybrid characters which expressly challenge the dominant dualisms underpinning the Western Humanist construction of the human. Moreover, the nuanced narratives and complex characters depicted in the novels push open the boundaries that confine human identity, allowing for the speculation of new forms of subjectivity.

Chapter One examines how the human has been defined through Western Humanism as a rational, moral animal endowed with language. Within this, I consider the notion that humanness is an innate state of being; a construction I then challenge in Chapter Three of this thesis. To support my argument, I explore two dominant dualisms that maintain and reproduce

this construction of the human, specifically that of human/animal and human/machine. Following this, I consider twentieth- and twenty-first century critiques of the human, which question the way in which humanness has been constructed as an "exclusive, androcentric, and Euro-centric" identity (Braidotti 2).

Chapter Two is a literary analysis of my selected novels arguing that hybridity causes a breakdown of binaries. In particular, I examine how the hybrid characters of Fevvers, Yod, Isserley, destabilise dominant dualisms underpinning the Western Humanist construction of the human, specifically that of human/animal, man/woman, subject/object, and human/machine. If human identity is maintained by binary concepts, then hybrid beings inherently disrupt the construction of humanness as an innate state of identity. As Donna Haraway states, "we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos" (173. Building on this, Chapter Three contends humanness can be constructed as performative rather than innate. Inspired by Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, I argue that this idea of performing one's identity can be extended to the way in which the condition of being human is experienced and expressed. Per Colombani, this deconstructs "identity as a performance in opposition to essentialist conceptions of it as something innate and unchangeable" (139). Within my discussion, I will consider the shift toward posthumanism and intersectional issues relating to gender, race, and class politics.

Chapter One

An Exploration into Western Humanist Constructions of the Human

The term 'human' is difficult to define, and its meaning remains contentious within academia. When it is framed through essentialist discourse, humanness becomes a naturalised identity embedded within our biology. However, I argue that humanness is socially constructed rather than innate. In particular, the definition of the human has been constructed through dominant discourses and dualisms which evolve over time. My thesis explores Western constructions of the human, as demonstrated within selected novels, in order to speculate new forms of identity and subjectivity. Within this, I examine how the construction of the human is reproduced and maintained, as well as how this can be challenged and subverted. Defined largely in opposition to the other—be that animal, machine, or based on some other form of difference—the human becomes "a self-aggrandizing, abstract ideal and symbol of classical humanity" (Braidotti and Hlavajova 343). It is therefore necessary to consider the dominant and historical discourses underpinning this construction. In this preparatory chapter, then, I will first examine how the human has been defined through notions of rationality, language, and morality, drawing on Western philosophical tradition to support my argument. Following this, I turn to the dominant dualisms underpinning these constructions, specifically those that oppose the human to the animal and to the machine. Lastly, I will explore emerging twentieth- and twenty-first century critiques that challenge the Western construction of humanity.

Before pursuing this trajectory, it is necessary to define and distinguish several relevant terms. Although the terms 'person' and 'human' often overlap, I draw a distinction between the two, preferring to use the latter in my discussion. This is because the concept of personhood is more legal than philosophical (Braidotti and Hlavajova 451). The term is typically used in

relation to issues of civil rights and liberties, legitimising an individual's status as a being with legal rights and protections (Hall 88). However, personhood can also extend beyond the human. In 2017, for example, Aotearoa New Zealand passed the Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Bill, which conferred a legal personality on the Whanganui River ("Innovative Bill Protects Whanganui River"). The focus of this thesis is to examine Western constructions of the human in relation to how it defines the human in opposition to the other. I am interested in how dominant discourses and dualisms shape our understanding of humanness, rather than the legal structures that protect an individual's personhood. As such, this distinction between person, as a legal status, and human, as a social construction, is significant. In saying this, there are points in my argument where the term 'person' will be relevant, most notably in relation to Chapter Three's exploration of human performativity. Specifically, I consider the implications and consequences of performativity and how this creates a standard through which humanness and personhood are determined.

The concepts of subjectivity, identity, and individuality play an important role in the Western construction of humanness. Although these terms interrelate, it is once again useful to distinguish between them. Braidotti argues that "subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour" (2). This understanding of subjectivity is shaped by European Enlightenment Humanism, which emerged from the philosophies of the seventeenth- and eighteenth centuries. Given that Humanism constructs the human as a rational, conscious subject, subjectivity therefore becomes a uniquely human trait. Zina O'Leary agrees, asserting that "as a subject, I reside in my body and I am self-knowing" (296). O'Leary's definition of the subject draws on Cartesian theory, particularly Descartes's mind/body dualism, which emphasises the relationship between subjectivity and consciousness. Within this model, the subject is granted agency and self-determination over themselves (O'Leary 296). Subjectivity is therefore individualistic, as it defines humanness

through the individual subject. Kath Woodward draws attention to how historically humans were "largely undifferentiated … indistinguishable as individuals", beyond collective categories of kinship and class (6). The construction of the conscious subject disrupts this, individualising the human within a collective humanity. Biehl et al. agree, arguing that "subjectivity referred to an essential individuality" (5). A significant impact of individualism is identity formation. Woodward argues that constructions of identity were "characterised by the emergence of individualism" during the Enlightenment (6). In line with this, O'Leary defines identity as "our sense of self, which makes us unique" (142). Identity can be either individual or social. Individual identity, as O'Leary explains above, is about our personal sense of self—who we are, where we are from, and what we do. Although grounded in individualism, however, identity is also relational. Our social identity is formed in relation to others and our surroundings. As Woodward puts it, "identity depends on something outside itself" (19). For instance, identity can be defined positively through notions of sameness, identifying a subject within a social group (O'Leary 142). However, Woodward asserts that "identity is about difference; it is about marking out 'us' and 'them'" (8). The concepts of subjectivity, individualism, and identity are therefore integral to the construction and maintenance of dominant dualisms within Western society.

Rosi Braidotti asserts that the Western construction of humanity "coincides with rational consciousness" (2). Similarly, Georgia Apostolopoulou positions rationality as a "fundamental power … that is always open and gives meaning to human effort and to human history" (129). The idea of rationality as a uniquely and constitutively human characteristic emerged from Ancient Greek philosophy, most notably through the writings of Plato and Aristotle. Plato saw humans as "beings having reason" (Hall 88); similarly, Aristotle argued that humans possess both reason and intellect (Apostolopoulou 124). This construction is integral to the human/animal divide as rationality was used to distinguish between human and nonhuman

animals, constructing the human to be “a rational animal” (Farkas 7). In *The Animal That Therefore I am*, Jacques Derrida explains that Western philosophical tradition has maintained that animals cannot think, reason, or speak, and have therefore been categorised as other to the human (13). Ancient Greek conceptualisations of the human as a rational being were crucial to this rhetoric and remain deeply embedded within the human/animal divide.

The construction of the human as a rational animal evolved further during the Enlightenment. Jackie Kay writes that “Enlightenment thinking was based on the sectarian mind/body split” (106). An influential figure in this movement was René Descartes, who is credited with developing the Cartesian mind/body dualism. Descartes proposed that there are two worlds, one physical, one mental. The physical world is populated by physical objects, including the material body, whilst the mental world is populated by abstract ‘objects’, including thoughts, memories, and dreams (Baker and Morris 12). Emerging from different worlds, the material body was seen as “separate and distinct from the mind of the thinking subject” (Kay 106). Badmington asserts that “the truth of the human … lies in the rational mind, or soul, which is entirely distinct from the body” (“Theorising Posthumanism” 16). To Descartes, there was a profound divide between the material body and the conscious mind. Cartesian philosophy posits that “the essence of mind is thought … the essence of body is extension” (Baker and Morris 13). This can be understood through the concept of dreaming. Descartes draws attention to how dreams, despite being merely “illusions” (IV 18), feel real through the body. He concludes that therefore the mind can act independently from the body. Consequently, humans are constructed as conscious beings, “a creature with a mind” (Farkas 11). According to Descartes, the very act of thinking requires not only rationality but an awareness of the self, an idea encompassed in the phrase “I think, therefore I am” (IV 18). Thus, Descartes’s human is constructed as the “conscious, rational, individual subject” (Woodward 6).

Another way humanity is constructed is through defining humans by their capacity for language. Robert Louden notes that “philosophers and scientists have repeatedly pointed to the faculty of language as one of the primary differentia between humans and nonhumans” (373). As with rationality, the capacity for language is integral to the construction and maintenance of the human/animal divide. Notably, the ability to formulate systems of language and communication on a social level were viewed as evidence of human exceptionalism (Braidotti and Hlavajova 35). Aristotle acknowledged that both human and nonhuman animals have systems of communication; however, he viewed language as “an essential and unique capacity of human beings” (Louden 374). This is because the human capacity for language includes the ability to communicate abstract thought (Louden 374). In framing language in this way, Aristotle reinforces his construction of the human as the rational animal. Like Aristotle, Descartes distinguishes between the linguistic capacities of human and nonhuman animals, noting that while animals “can utter words just as we can … they cannot speak as we do” (V 58). Again, the difference, according to Descartes, lies in consciousness and rationality. Animals’ use of language, such as parrots trained to mimic human words, is causally determined, a manifestation of internal and external states (Louden 377). In contrast, the use of language by humans is “freely chosen as a result of rational reflection” (Louden 377). The argument here is that ‘real’ language requires cognition, consciousness of the self, and rational subjectivity. Thus, the human becomes “a rational animal endowed with language” (Braidotti 1).

A further way the human has been defined according to Western Humanism is through morality. Recently, the relationship between humanity and morality has often explained through evolutionary concepts, which Michael Tomasello explores in his text *A Natural History of Human Morality* (2015). He argues that morality is “due, at least in part, to a process of natural selection” (20), noting that the survival of a collective society depended on the

development of moral customs (19). Beyond evolutionary advances, however, morality has been constructed as an innately human characteristic. Francisco Ayala sees these two ideas, morality and humanity, as intertwined, noting that "the capacity for ethics is a necessary attribute of human nature … moral codes are products of cultural evolution" (9015). As with rationality and language, morality is often used to distinguish between human and nonhuman animals. Louden supports this, arguing that animals "do not exhibit rational control of their actions and, hence, ought not to be held …morally responsible for their conduct" (379). This draws a connection between morality and reason, suggesting that a moral subject is therefore also a rational subject. Larmore agrees, saying "certainly morality is not possible except for beings that can respond to reason" (2). An influential philosopher here is Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who promoted "the natural goodness of man" (Mark 1) as a founding principle of humanity. Rousseau believed that rationality and morality were intertwined, saying "reason shows us the good, conscience makes us love it" (qtd. in Mark 2). The conscience was understood as a "voice of nature" (Mark 5), and proof of humanity's inherent morality. Thus, if "morality is what makes us human" (1), as Larmore asserts, the human is constructed to be a rational, moral subject capable of language.

If humanity is socially constructed, how is this construction maintained as a stable entity? Although subject to change in response to evolving discourse, the construction of the human as a rational and moral subject remains deeply embedded. This is largely due to the dominant dualisms underpinning the concept of humanity, which continually reproduce and legitimise this construction. The foundation of Western society is formed by a number of binaries: human/animal, culture/nature, man/woman, subject/object, human/machine, person/thing. Binaries construct forms of difference that allow humans to categorise each other and the world, creating "interrelated hierarchies of worth" (Kim 313). These dualisms operate to maintain social order and are integral to the construction of 'humanity'. In particular, this is

because binaries construct humanity in opposition to the 'other'. As Richard Nimmo notes, "to be able to place humans at the centre of the world, one must firstly separate them from that world" (60). The status of the other depends on the context of its categorisation. For instance, speciesism positions animals as other to humans through the human/animal divide, yet Rivera-Fuentes emphasises that "otherness extends also to other human beings" (31). Historically, the constructions of race, gender, and class have been established through notions of otherness. The construction of the human and the construction of the other are therefore two sides of the same coin, with both being founded through dominant Western dualisms. To illustrate this further, I will explore two significant binaries, the human/animal divide and the and human/machine divide.

The Human/Animal Divide

The human/animal divide is a significant binary underpinning Western society and is instrumental in the construction of humanity. It positions human and nonhuman animals on an oppositional scale of value, placing humans as intellectually and morally superior to animals. The human/animal divide is a dominant dualism central to European Humanist thought. Tsitas states that in distinguishing between human and nonhuman animals, Humanist thinkers "not only were making a theological statement of humanity's dominance over the natural world but were actually defining what it means to be human" (101). The human/animal divide rests on the idea that humans are fundamentally different from nonhuman animals, despite our shared evolutionary history. In essence, the human/animal divide operates to distinguish humanity from animality. As Philip Armstrong contends, although "humans are animals … humanity is largely defined by denial of this proposition" (80). Although this belief is declining as scientific studies reveal the emotional and mental capacities of various nonhuman species ("Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness"), the distinction between humans and animals remains deeply embedded within Western society. Specifically, this is evident through a distinction in

personhood. As persons, humans are granted legal rights and protections; animals, in contrast, are defined as property. This creates a justification for the continued acceptance of meat-eating practices, including factory farming, which allows for the legal exploitation and oppression of nonhuman animals.

The human/animal divide carries wider implications for society because it creates a standard for humanity dependent on a relationship to animality. As Jennifer Parker-Starbuck puts it, “the animal stands in or outside of humanity as the measure by which the human is defined” (650). In particular, the human/animal divide creates a moral justification for speciesism. According to Andrea Cooper, speciesism refers to the “privileging of one’s own species over another" (2) most notably, human privilege over nonhuman animals. Carrie Freeman argues that speciesism not only creates “hierarchical notions of human dominance” over nonhuman animals but also privileges certain humans over others (7). This allows humans to be categorised based on forms of difference rooted in hierarchical binaries that associate them with animality.

The Human/Machine Divide

As Western society progresses through technological advances, the construction of humanity evolves with it, redefining who and what constitutes human in the modern age. In particular, technology has blurred the boundary between human and machine over the last few decades, complicating the binary of human/machine in the process. Like the human/animal divide, the human/machine divide operates largely to define humanity in opposition to the other by categorising humans as fundamentally separate from machines. Mazis argues that “the machine might be called the ‘postmodern animal’” (21). In saying this, he references the interconnected nature of animals and machines, both of whom are positioned as subordinate to humans. This idea is referenced by Descartes, who frames both human and nonhuman animals as machines through the mechanism of the body. For instance, he asserts “I might regard a man’s body as a kind of mechanism … composed of bones, nerves, muscles, veins, blood and

skin" (VI 100). To Descartes, the body is merely a machine, an extension of the mind, understood through the mind/body dualism. As a being of both mind and body, the human is constructed as a rational subject. In contrast, "animals have bodies but do not have minds" and are therefore constructed as machines (Powell 209).

A strong proponent of science, Descartes acknowledged a future in which machines have advanced alongside the human (Powell 212). However, he maintained that rationality remains representative of the boundary between humans and machines. Louden points to language as an example of this, saying "Descartes denies that any machine—past, present, or future—can use real speech" (380). This echoes Descartes earlier statements around the difference between language that is causally determined and that which is abstract and freely expressed. Indeed, Descartes declares "even the best machine will never be able to use words … as we do" (qtd. in Louden 381). Thus, according to Descartes, the boundary between animals, machines, and humans remains rooted in notions of rationality and language. Modern discourses have challenged Descartes' conceptualisation of the human/machine divide as grounded in reason. A notable figure is Donna Haraway, who explores the parameters of the human/machine divide in her essay "A Cyborg Manifesto". Haraway explains that previously, machines "were not self-moving, self-designing, autonomous" beings, and were therefore able to be easily distinguished from humans (152). Katherine Hayles frames the boundary between human and machines through binary concepts of organic versus artificial, noting that "human beings are conceived, gestated, and born … machines are designed, manufactured, and assembled" (158). In line with this, Balsamo conceptualises the human/machine divide along a continuum, arguing that machines are "rational, artificial, and durable" in contrast to humans, who are "emotional, organic, and mortal" (146). This is a clear example of how the dualisms underpinning the Western construction of humanity are continually shifting. Speaking to this, Mazis asserts "what is seen as mechanical is contradictory, and what is seen as animal is equally

contradictory" (23). To Descartes, the boundary between human, machine, and animal is one of reason and rationality. Yet modern discourse, as evidenced by Balsamo, emphasise humanity's organic emotion, in contrast to the extreme rationality of machine intelligence. These discourses of difference maintain and reproduce the human/machine divide, positioning humanity and technology as mutually exclusive constructions. Moreover, they reveal the paradoxical nature of the dominant dualisms underpinning the Western construction of humanity.

Although the human/machine divide remains entrenched, the boundary between human and machine has become increasingly blurred over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Haraway argues that modern machines "have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body" (152), which complicates the human/machine divide. This breakdown of boundary between human and machine is twofold; as humans become mechanised, machines become humanised. Haraway speaks to this, saying "our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert" (152). Humans are becoming increasingly artificial through a greater dependence on technology—in the fields of education, entertainment, medical assistance, and many other aspects of our everyday life, humans now rely on machines in some form. At the same time, our machines are becoming more humanised. As technology improves, our machines are now autonomous, self-regulating, self-designing, and able to replicate human emotions, such as empathy and pain. In saying this, the extent of this replication, and whether it amounts to actually experiencing and feeling emotions, is still up to debate. Many scholars still draw a distinction between the two, hence the continued maintenance of the human/machine divide; however, literature and modern media in particular seem to push the boundaries and challenge this conception. Indeed, my analysis of Marge Piercy's *Body OF Glass* is an example of this literary subversion, in which Yod, the cyborg, is presented as an emotional being, capable of genuine connections with other

humans. Consequently, the former boundaries that distinguished humans from machines are becoming blurred.

In response to these changing boundaries, Jennifer Parker-Starbuck argues that "we have redefined ourselves as humans" (650). This idea can be understood through the posthuman. As Hayles asserts, "the age of the human has given way to the posthuman" (157). My discussion on this is influenced by the works of Donna Haraway, specifically her essay "A Cyborg Manifesto". Haraway argues that the rise of technology has caused a boundary breakdown between human and animal, human-animal and machine, and the physical and non-physical (152). It is important to note that the posthuman does not necessarily replace the human. As Hayles emphasises, the posthuman does not bring about the end of humanity; rather "it signals the end of a certain conception of the human" (286). Here, Hayles is referencing Enlightenment Humanism, which positions the human as a rational and moral subject. Braidotti and Hlavajova explain that posthumanist theory provides a critique of the "Western Humanist ideal of "Man" as the allegedly universal of all things" (339). Specifically, posthumanism challenges that notion that subjectivity is exclusive to humanity by promoting a "philosophy of relationality and multiple interconnections" (Braidotti and Hlavajova 340). This contrasts with the Humanist conception of subjectivity as being characterised by rational consciousness and moral agency (Braidotti 2). In saying this, posthumaism still draws from Humanist theory. As Elissa Gurman contends, posthumanism is the "revision and evolution of humanism, rather than its direct reversal" (462). As such, posthumanism becomes a tool in which to understand humans "as subjects-in-technoculture" (Hollinger 270).

Haraway proposes that posthumanism can be understood through the figure of the cyborg. She argues that the human and the posthuman intersect through the cyborg, saying "we are all chimeras, theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs (150). Simultaneously human and machine, the cyborg blurs the binary between science and

nature, artifice and orgamisn, logic and emotion. Kay supports this, stating that the cyborg "bridges the gap between human and machine" (114). According to Haraway, the cyborg is a "cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism" (149). As hybrid beings, cyborgs therefore present a direct challenge to the human/machine divide. Hollinger agrees, framing the cyborg as "an acknowledgement of postmodern border crossing and boundary breakdown" (274). In doing so, the figure of the cyborg challenges and destabilises the construction of the human, and humanity overall. Speaking to this, Balsamo argues that "cyborgs come to represent unfamiliar otherness" (146). More than that, however, I suggest that cyborgs come to represent familiar, rather than unfamiliar, otherness. Cyborgs look and talk like humans, programmed into a performance of humanness that allows them to pass as human. This allows the cyborg to traverse the boundary between human and machine in a way that nonhuman animals are often denied by the human/animal divide. Balsamo acknowledges this blurring of the human/machine binary, saying "they fascinate us because they are not like us and yet just like us" (153). Cyborgs highlight the fundamental differences between human and machine, whilst, at the same time, drawing attention to our intrinsic similarities. In doing so, "cyborgs disrupt notions of otherness" (Balsamo 147). This is because the figure of the cyborg reinforces the idea that constructions of identity, notably human identity, are "arbitrary and binary … shifting and unstable" (Balsamo 147). Identities are socially constructed and subjected, evolving in response to changing discourses, cultural and social values, and technological developments. As such, the construction of humanity as an innate state of being is called into question by the hybrid existence of the cyborg. Hollinger agrees, arguing that cyborgs challenge the notion of a "unified and bounded 'I' of humanism" (274). Consequently, the existence of the cyborg can cause "an existential crisis of identity" (Pavani 59).

Mary Mellor argues that dominant dualisms "are not merely dichotomous … they are also judgemental" (129). Mellor's point here is oppositional binaries are grounded in notions of

dominance and subordination. These dualisms operate to define the human in opposition to the other, constructing one as dominant over the other. This is exemplified by the human/animal divide, which justifies human dominance over nonhuman animals. However, these dualisms also create division within humans themselves, constructing identities of 'us' and 'them' across social identities This allows humans to be categorised based on forms of difference rooted in hierarchical binaries, such as race, gender, and class. Although presented as universal, the construction of humanity through Western dualisms is therefore exclusionary and is not applied to all humans equally. Braidotti and Hlavajova agree, stating that the "narrow humanist conception of the human has historically excluded many" (343). A wealth of scholarship dedicated to this idea emerged during the twentieth century, drawing attention to how this construction others certain identities and subjectivities. In particular, the presumed universalism of humanity was challenged for being "exclusive, androcentric and Euro-centric" (Braidotti 2). Notable scholars include Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray, who critiqued the position of women within this construction (1949, 1974); Angela Davis and bell hooks, who explored the intersection of race, gender, and class in Western society (1981, 1981); and Edward Said, who founded the academic field of postcolonial studies (1978).

Braidotti argues that the "abstract ideal of Man as a symbol of classical Humanity is very much a male of the species: it is a he" (3). Similarly, Butler claims "the false universal of 'man' has for the most part been presupposed as coextensive with humanness itself" ("Performative Acts" 523). Feminist scholars, notably Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir, have critiqued the way in which humanity is constructed as male. Kay asserts that "men stood for humanity … gender if recognised at all was female" (108). Western philosophy has historically been written by men so it is perhaps unsurprising that humanity was constructed through an association with masculinity. This is exemplified through the Cartesian subject, which constructs the human through concepts of rationality, consciousness, and subjectivity. These

traits were equated with masculinity; femininity, in contrast, was associated with irrationality and unrestrained emotion (Braidotti 2). Consequently, 'Man' became representative of the rational subject. This was reinforced further by the mind/body dualism. Kay argues that within this binary, men were associated with "rationality and the mind" and women with the body (106). Mellor agrees, arguing that "women are the repository of human embodiedness, the subordinated half of the dualism, the Other" (129). Speaking to this idea, Sherryl Vint posits that "Cartesian dualism has a misogynistic heritage" (104). Historically, the association of women with nature and the body is entrenched. This is rooted in the biblical belief that "the sins of Eve are the sins of the flesh and of the female body" (Kay 106). Given the interlocking nature of binaries, this idea draws on other dominant dualisms, most notably that of subject/object and nature/culture. Within each of these binaries, "women were generally assigned to the subordinate part" (Mellor 129). These binaries are mutually sustaining; consequently, the reproduction of each emphasises the divide between men and women as separate beings. These binaries operate to legitimise and maintain the gender binary, which establishes male dominance over women. The constructions of gender and humanness are therefore mutually sustaining, positioning men as human and women as other. Judith Butler agrees, asserting that "gender figures as a precondition for the production and maintenance of legible humanity" ("Undoing Gender" 11).

From these criticisms, new forms of subjectivities and identities have emerged. Braidotti suggests that the recognition of "sexualised, racialized and naturalised differences … have evolved into fully-fledged alternative models of the human subject" (4). A significant aspect of this is tied to how our understanding of the subject has changed. Cartesian theory constructs the human as a "self-determining subject" (O'Leary 296). Post-structuralist theorists of the twentieth century challenged this notion, emphasising the role of culture and discourse in constructing the subject. The works of Michel Foucault were instrumental in the development

of this idea, which explored the relationship between power and discourse primarily through the body. Foucault proposed that "human beings are made subjects" through dominant discourses (777). The subject is presented as discursive rather than self-determining, whose construction is shaped and informed by ideology, language, and cultural discourse. An interesting aspect of the discursive subject is how it destabilises the notion of human centrality. Cartesian theory centres human subjectivity as integral to the construction of humanity. Post-structuralist theory, in contrast, centres discourse. As such, the agency of the human is limited—per Braidotti, "the formerly dominant subject is freed from his delusions of grandeur" through the notion of a discursive subject (3).

Not only does the discursive subject challenge Western understandings of humanity therefore, it also challenges the dominant dualisms that construct it. Braidotti agrees, stating that "once the centrality of Anthropos is challenged, a number of boundaries between 'Man' and his others go tumbling down" (8). In particular, the emphasis on the role of discourse in constructing the subject disrupts notions of the mind/body dualism. Cartesian theory positions mind as representative of our innate humanness, with the body an extension of the mind. Not only separate, this dualism positions the mind as dominant over the body. In reference to this, Birke and Michael argue "rooted in particular, fixed, ideas of what constitutes biology … the body as a material part of social processes is largely neglected" (247). Post-structuralist theory, however, highlights the role of the body in shaping the discursive subject. Butler refers to the embodied existence of the subject, saying "one is not simply a body … one does one's body" ("Performative Acts" 521). As such, the body becomes the expression of discourse, rather than merely an extension of the mind. The mind/body dualism is disrupted, and the hierarchy between the mind and the body is reversed. In light of this, as Kay argues, "the body might be seen as the ultimate source of truth about human identity" (113). Thus, the body becomes a site in which to perform constructed identities; an idea I expand on in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Post-structuralist theory of the discursive subject contradicts Western philosophical tradition that presents "the subject as a coherent and stable self" (O'Leary 297). The recognition of how humanity is shaped and informed by discourse calls into question the centrality of the human. O'Leary contends that the discursive subject reframes humanity to be "fragmented and constructed" (297). Consequently, constructions of humanity as innate are disrupted, opening up the boundaries of subjectivity. Braidotti supports this, asserting that "the displacement of anthropocentrism … leaves the Human up for grabs" (9). Although human subjectivity is informed by dominant discourses, these discourses can be challenged and revised. Constructions of humanity through dualisms that maintain human dominance over the other can be opened to include forms of difference, extending notions of rationality, subjectivity, and consciousness to those that fall outside of Western society's narrow definition of the human. As Woodward asserts, "the script may be written, but there is scope for negotiation" (10). This idea forms a prominent part of posthumanist theory. Braidotti and Hlavajova explain that posthumanism offers a "critique of the Western Humanist ideal of 'Man' as the allegedly universal measure of all things" (339). Posthumanist theory engages with new forms of subjectivity through the posthuman, often represented by the figure of the cyborg. Cornea argues that the cyborg presents "the chance to rewrite what counts as human subjectivity" (276). In particular, the cyborg blurs the boundaries and binaries that construct the human, disrupting any lasting belief in a stable and innate self. Further discussion of the posthuman can be found in Chapter Two, however I draw on the cyborg here to illustrate the ways in which the construction of humanity can be extended beyond traditional understandings of the human subject. As Braidotti states, posthumanism renews "our shared understanding of the human subject and of humanity as a whole" (4).

Chapter Two

How Hybridity Causes a Breakdown of Binaries

Chapter One argues that the Western Humanist construction of humanity is founded through dominant dualisms that define the human in opposition to the other. The construction of the other is almost exclusively grounded in binary categorisations, thus the existence of hybrid beings intrinsically challenge essentialist conceptions of the human and the other. According to Jan Pieterse, “hybridity is to culture what deconstruction is to discourse: transcending binary categories” (238). Hybridity contradicts the very existence of a binary, blurring the boundary between humans, animals, and machines. Evelyn Tsitas argues that hybridity “displays the anxiety about the notion of what is considered human” (100). She points to how the creation of hybrid beings reveals the reality of how constructed humanness is. Gymnich and Costa agree, noting that hybridity reveals the “fragile interdependence between human culture and nonhuman nature” (69). They go further, arguing that this reveals “the ‘other’ lurking inside the human being behind a façade erected by civilisation” (70). The novels selected feature characters that oscillate along the line of human-animal-machine. Per Katherine Hayles, these hybrid beings are “simultaneously entities and metaphors, living beings and narrative constructions” (158). I will examine how these novels use hybridity to challenge significant binaries underpinning Western society, interweaving both historical context and theory within my literary analysis.

The Human/Animal Divide

From folktales to contemporary fiction, the animal motif has formed a long tradition within literature. In particular, the animal motif has been used to examine humanity’s relationship with animality and humans’ relationship with the other. As Sarah Dillon asserts, “literature

provides a voice for the animal other" (135). The animal motif can be used as a literary tool in which to uphold the human/animal divide by centring humans over animals through a process of anthropocentrism. In saying this, literature can blur the boundary between human and nonhuman animals, allowing for a crossing over of the human/animal divide. As such, the animal motif becomes a literary tool in which to subvert the human/animal divide.

Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (1984, hereafter referred to as *Nights*) and Michel Faber's *Under the Skin* (2000, hereafter referred to as *Skin*) are two novels that explore the human/animal divide through use of the animal motif. Both texts feature female protagonists who are hybrid creatures, existing simultaneously as human and animal: however, they do so for different effect. Carter draws on the human/animal divide largely to critique the social structures of twentieth century England. In particular, *Nights* examines "the inequalities of patriarchal capitalism" (Easton 4) through its depiction of women and the working class. Faber's *Skin*, on the other hand, reverses the human/animal divide to provide "a poignant critique of the mass killing of animals in the meat industry" (Caracciolo 591). In saying that, *Nights* can be analysed through a human-animal lens and *Skin* through a feminist lens, due to the fact that gender and animal politics overlap in both novels.

Described as "one of Britain's most original, iconoclastic, and learned writers" (Tucker 1), Angela Carter remains an influential literary figure of the twentieth century. Bristow and Broughton argue that Carter "delved into the most unsettling depths of Western culture" (1); Easton goes further, saying "Carter declared war on the myths of Western culture" (7). Indeed, her fiction can be read as a critique of dominant discourses underpinning British society during the twentieth century. In Carter's own words, "all art is political and so is mine" (qtd. in Easton 1). In particular, she explored issues relating to gender, sexuality, race, and class politics through a feminist lens. Beyond this, Bristow and Broughton contend that Carter's writings "play with the paradox of the boundary" (15). This is particularly true for *Nights*, a "complex

metafictional feminist novel" (Boehm 193) which challenges several significant binaries that form the foundation of Western society, including human/animal, man/woman, culture/nature, and subject/object. The novel is centred around the character of Sophie Fevvers, a half-human, half-bird hybrid being famed for her skills as an aerialist and circus performer. *Nights* follows Jack Walser, an American journalist, who joins the circus across Europe in order to discover the truth behind Fevvers' mysterious existence.

In her essay "Notes from the Front Line", Carter writes "I am the pure product of an advanced, industrialised, post-imperialist country in decline" (27). Carter was informed greatly by the political climate she was living in, and as such it is necessary to consider the historical and cultural context when examining her fiction. Although published in 1984, *Nights* is set at the turn of the century in 1899. The period between the novel's setting and its publication comprises most of the twentieth century, thus the novel reimagines how this era shaped the social and cultural norms prevalent within modern British society. Carter believed that literature should draw on history "to create a critique of that period's consequences" ("Notes" 29). In light of this, I suggest that the setting of the novel was a conscious choice by Carter to examine the parallels between the beginning and end of the twentieth century, particularly in relation to gender and class politics.

Sarah Bannock argues that *Nights* is a novel "where identities are blurred, inverted, reformed" (201). This is exemplified through the character of Fevvers, a woman who is both human and animal, masculine and feminine, subject and object. Existing as half-woman, half-bird, Fevvers' hybridity complicates Western binary constructions of identity. Yang asserts that Fevvers "defies any attempts at definition and categorisation" (509); rather, she is a "flexible mixture of binaries and categories" (508). Michael agrees, describing Fevvers as "a fantastic and indeterminate being" whose identity is "multifaceted and fluid" (509). Indeed, Fevvers is both "woman and bird, fact and fiction, object and subject" (Michael 499). Fevvers

is not wholly human nor is she wholly animal; "she is essentially one and the other and more … evolving as a new species" (Yang 509). 499). Fevvers' hybridity transcends binary categorisation, and thus she causes a breakdown of the dominant dualisms underpinning Western Humanist constructions of the human.

Erin Douglas notes that "Fevvers's movements among these binaries trouble constructions of gender, sexuality, humanity and nationality" (9). More than this, however, I propose that *Nights* presents Fevvers as a direct challenge to the construction of human identity based on Western dualisms. Fevvers resists being othered by embracing her hybridity as integral to her identity. For instance, Fevvers revels in her fantastical existence by constructing herself as a spectacle. The novel revolves around the mystery that is Fevvers, encompassed within her slogan: "is she fact or is she fiction?" (Carter 2). The relationship between Fevvers and spectacle has been referenced by several scholars. For instance, Abigail Dennis argues that "Fevvers creates herself as a spectacle" (117), and Douglas points to how Fevvers "makes her living as a spectacle" through her profession as an aerialist (5), whilst Mary Russo declares Fevvers as "the figure of ultimate spectacularity" (141). By creating a spectacle out of her hybridity, Fevvers refuses to submit to the binary and thus evades being othered. Moreover, creating a spectacle of her hybridity becomes an integral component of Fevvers' gender performance, which I will examine in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Like *Nights*, Faber's *Skin* features a hybrid protagonist, Isserley, existing between the binary as both woman and animal. However, while the former uses hybridity to open the boundaries of human identity and expression, the latter uses hybridity to home in on the divide between human and animal in order to critique it directly. Wendy Woodward contends that the novel "interrogates categories of animality" (53); however, I argue that *Skin* interrogates species categorisation as a whole. Kar and Vanderbeke agree, asserting that the novel "challenges the binary system of self and other, of human and non-human" (10). Faber's novel examines how

humans construct species difference and the social and moral implications of this. In particular, the novel constructs species distinction through language and physicality, which allows the novel to undermine the human/animal divide and, more significantly, Western Humanist constructions of the human. By this means, Faber addresses “the posthuman concern with species metamorphosis” (Dillon 134). This is exemplified through Isserley, the novel’s protagonist and hybrid being. Isserley is an alien, surgically modified to appear human, who drives around the Scottish Highlands on the hunt for male hitchhikers. Once selected by Isserley based on a set of criteria, the men are sedated and transported to a remote farm where they are slaughtered and packaged for consumption by the rich elite on her home planet.

Harger-Grinling and Jordaan assert that *Skin* “presents the reader with what might be considered a reversal of the human condition” (247). Anne Drewett adds to this, saying that within the novel “traditionally rendered relationships between man and woman, human and animal, hunter and prey, dominant and subordinate, are reversed” (26). This is exemplified through the novel’s reversal of the human/animal divide. The human/animal divide establishes humanity’s dominance over nonhuman animals: Faber subverts this divide by positioning his aliens as the dominant species over humans. Consequently, traditional constructions of humanity are dismantled—humans become animals and the predator become the prey. Isserley’s species treat humans in the same way that farmed animals are treated within Western society: living beings exploited for consumption of their meat. Harger-Grinling and Jordaan agree, noting that “in another wicked inversion, humans are really cattle for the aliens” (248). By subverting the human/animal divide in this way, the novel challenges his reader to confront the realities of meat-eating practices. As Caracciolo succinctly states, “after all, what the aliens are doing is not unlike our own” exploitation of nonhuman animals (597).

The reversal of the human/animal divide is emphasised further by the novel’s use of species terminology. In her article “Becoming-Animal”, Sarah Dillon proposes that species

categorisation is “a division created by language” (135); an assertion that can be understood through the human/animal divide. She examines *Skin* through this lens, exploring how Faber employs language as a tool of species distinction. In particular, Dillion argues that the novel’s “significant metamorphoses are linguistic, not physical” (141). This can be seen through the terms Faber uses to construct his alien species in relation to humans. In *Skin*, the alien species that Isserley belongs to are called humans and the true ‘humans’—that is, what the reader would recognise as humans—are instead referred to as vodsels. Through Isserley’s narration, the reader comes to understand aliens as humans and humans as animals. Thus, the novel reconstructs the human/animal divide through a different binary: the human/vodsel divide. Faber’s decision to refer to the aliens as human is deliberate; firstly, because it allows him to subvert the reader’s expectations. Due to the familiarity of the word human, the reader makes the assumption that Isserley is human in the traditional sense, when the term is first applied to her. It is only as the novel unfolds that “the reader gradually becomes aware of the otherness of Isserley” (Harger-Grinling and Jordaan 248). Secondly, Faber is able to draw attention to how humans construct species difference based on language. By using a term that the reader would associate with themselves, “the assumption that there is a clear dividing line between human and nonhuman species is called into question” (Gymnich and Costa 85). By constructing species difference through language, the novel challenges the biological essentialist discourses maintained by the human/animal divide, ultimately undermining it in the process.

Dillon argues that the reversal of the human/animal divide has a destabilising effect which “raises the metamorphic stakes from the level of the individual and the physical to that of the species and the ontological” (141). Whereas *Nights* features an individual made exceptional by her animality, *Skin’s* reversal of the human/animal divide allows the novel to examine the construction of humanity, and therefore the other, as a collective. Isserley considers her species

to be human and the hitchhikers that she hunts to be animals, and this species distinction allows her to create a moral justification for her actions. As humans, we consider beings across the human/animal divide; Isserley views life across the human/vodsel divide. Both of these binaries are reproduced and maintained by speciesism. It is because Isserley views the vodsels as animals that she is able to participate in the industrialised killing of them for meat. Drewett agrees, noting that "the aliens' exploitation of the humans is a form of speciesism and is sanctioned by their society's meat normativity" (17).

Without the reversal of the human/animal divide, Isserley's hunting of the vodsels is likely to alienate the reader. However, through the human/vodsel divide, the reader is forced to acknowledge the contradiction of this in light of the continued oppression of factory-farmed animals. As such, "the act of species renaming is a crucial textual method of destabilising" the human/animal divide (Dillon 139). Moreover, Faber encourages his reader to engage directly with this reversal. For instance, Gymnich and Costa suggest that the novel is "inviting the readers to see human beings, themselves, from an alien point of view" (85). Faber constructs his human/vodsel divide as a mirror to the human/animal divide, which allows the reader to draw connections between the two. However, this also reveals the anthropomorphism inherent within the novel; in highlighting the oppression of nonhuman animals, Faber chooses to centre humans. In saying that, Faber's approach in his novel is perhaps more likely to resonate with meat-eating readers, who may be dismissive of a novel that centres animals. Woodward speaks to this, saying "Western conventions of eating are de-familiarised" in the novel through the human/vodsel divide (49). By reframing his critique of meat-eating through the this divide, Faber is able to engage his reader on a more effective level.

The reconstructed human/animal divide is then reinforced throughout the novel through a process of animalisation. Human speciesism has constructed a hierarchy of value based on the human/animal divide, in which humanity is valued over animality. Put simply, the more

animalised you are, the less value you have within society. An effective tool of speciesism is to dehumanise a group of people to the point of animalisation. Johannes Steizinger defines animalisation as a "complex strategy of dehumanisation" in which humans are separated from their humanity through an association with animality (141). By opening the boundary between humans and nonhuman animals, certain groups of people are identified with animal characteristics. This creates a moral justification for their oppression—as Kim notes, "to be human is to have moral worth … to be animal is to be nothing, to be that which anything can be done to" (329). In *Skin*, the vodsels are animalised in order to maintain the human/vodsel divide. Although recognisably 'human', the novel uses deliberate language to associate the vodsels with animality. In particular, the novel draws attention to the vodsels' physical bodies to construct them as farmed animals. For example, the first chapter depicts Isserley searching for male hitchhikers to pick up along the highway. She inspects the vodsels as she drives past them, examining them for the physicality and strength. The novel uses animalistic language in this passage, making reference to the "puny, scrawny specimens" (Faber 1), "hunk on legs" (1), fleshly biped[s]" (3), and "hairy youngster" (5). As a result, the vodsels are reduced to their body parts in a way that emphasises their eventual fate as meat. Dillon argues that "the hitchhikers are deprived of all linguistic markers of what we would consider humanity" (141). Drewett agrees, saying that this "language use contributes to the objectification" (18). Isserley's interest in the hitchhikers is not based on them as people but rather them as meat. The vodsels' emotions, intellect, and personal relationships are disregarded in favour of their physicality. Drewett asserts that this "denies them their personhood, making it easier to view them as edible objects" (18).

The animalisation of the vodsels reaches a climax during the novel when Amlis Vess visits the farm. Amlis' father is CEO of Vess Incorporated, the company that produces "voddissin" (vodsel meat), and as such, is a figure of wealth and status. Despite his background, Amlis is

vegetarian, explaining to Isserley "I don't believe in killing animals" (Faber 114). Isserley and Amlis' differing views on speciesism provides a framework in which to compare and contrast discourses of the human/animal divide. This is exemplified when Isserley gives Amlis a tour of the underground facility where the captured vodsels are kept as prisoners. It is in this chapter that Faber emphasises the animalisation of the vodsels in order to reinforce the oppressive nature of factory-farming practices. The vodsels are described "as grotesquely disfigured and deformed" (Caracciolo 598), having been mutilated in preparation for their eventual fate as meat for the humans. Faber writes the "monthlings were huddled together in a mound of fast-panting flesh" (169). Once again, the vodsels are reduced to their body parts and stripped of their personhood; they are dehumanised to the point of animalisation. Drewett agrees, arguing that their mutilated bodies make "it seem inevitable that the vodsels are meant to be animals for meat" (18).

During this scene, a vodsel in a desperate attempt for survival tries to communicate with Isserley and Amlis. Because the captured vodsel's tongue has been cauterised, it is unable to speak verbally. However, the vodsel is able to scratch out the word "mercy" in the dirt. Amlis is amazed, saying "no one told me they had a language … my father always describes them as vegetables on legs", to which Isserley dismissively responds, "it depends what you classify as a language, I guess" (Faber 171). This is an example of how the novel draws on dominant discourses of the human/animal divide in order to undermine it. The belief that the vodsels are mentally and emotionally inferior beings, whose purpose, as such, is tied to their value as commodities for humans, reflects the wider construction of the animal within Western society. In particular, this idea directly draws on Western Humanist constructions of the human as a rational animal endowed with language. Amlis asks Isserley to translate the word "mercy". Although semi-fluent in the English language, Isserley is unfamiliar with the term, noting "the word was untranslatable into her own tongue; it was a concept that just didn't exist" (Faber

171). Rather than admit this to Amlis, however, she downplays the linguistic abilities of the vodsels as a species, likening the writing to "a chicken's cackle or a cow's moo" (Faber 171). Here, the novel highlights an important element of the human/animal divide: "no language, no subjectivity" (Dillon 135). According to Derrida, Western philosophical tradition asserts that "the animal is deprived of language … or, more precisely, of response" (32). Humans have linguistic agency over animals, allowing the construction of species categorisation and subsequent dominance of humanity over nonhuman animals. Faber address this directly through Isserley, as she denies the vodsels linguistic agency in this scene. This denial is integral to Isserley's moral justification for her actions—by removing their linguistic agency, Isserley ensures that the vodsels remain "shapeless lumps of flesh ripe for slaughter" (Caracciolo 598).

Alongside subverting the human/animal divide, Faber uses this chapter to highlight the violent reality of factory-farming practices. He draws attention to how the captured vodsels are subjected to castration and cauterisation, emphasising the violence of these practices. For example, Faber writes "the inside of his gaping mouth was roasted black where the stub of the tongue had cauterised" (170). Faber uses deliberately descriptive language in order to engage a "sense of moral and physical disgust" from the reader (Caracciolo 598). In fact, the entire novel is filled with gruesomely vivid descriptions of violence; a technique used by Faber to provoke an emotional reaction from his reader. The conditions of factory farms are often horrifically inhumane, in what Freemen refers to as a "system of enslavement" (11). Thus, the novel's graphic depiction of how voddissin is produced reflects the violent reality of how meat is produced in the Western world. Furthermore, it allows the reader to engage on a deeper level with the human/animal divide. By applying these inhumane conditions to the vodsels, rather than animals, the reader sees themselves and is therefore able to relate on a personal level to this horror. Caracciolo agrees, arguing that this passage reinforces "the analogy between vodsels and nonhuman animals in the meat industry" (599). Authors often anthropomorphosise

animal characters in order to allow a transferal of perspective from the human to the nonhuman animal. However, I argue that the novel's reversal of the human/animal divide achieves this more effectively. By reconstructing the human/animal divide through the human/vodsel divide, *Skin* undermines species categorisation to the extent that humans become 'animals'. In seeing themselves as humans constructed through animalisation, the reader is encouraged to see beyond the binary.

I will now turn to my thesis' central focus, hybridity, to examine how the characters of Fevvers and Isserley operate between the binary of human and animal, as half-human, half-animal hybrid creatures. In particular, I will consider the way in which these characters blur the boundary between humanity and animality in order to destabilise the human/animal divide. Fevvers and Isserley's hybridity overlap and differ across the two novels, most notably through their evolving relationship to both humanity and animality. As such, I will compare and contrast how their hybridity is used to uphold and undermine discourses of the human/animal divide. Before this, however, it is worth noting that Isserley's place along the human/animal divide is complicated by the fact that she is an alien. I suggest that Faber's construction of the human/vodsel divide addresses this, as it positions aliens as humans and humans as animals. Moreover, Drewett argues that with Isserley, "even though she is an alien, she also represents animals" (26). This is because the alien species Isserley belongs to are four-legged, furry, tailed mammals, closely resembling sheep. As such, Isserley embodies notions of humanity and animality that can be analysed through the human/animal divide.

A significant difference between Fevvers and Isserley lies in the origins of their hybridity. *Nights* presents Fevvers' hybridity as innate: she is born into her hybrid existence through an unexplained, biological miracle. In contrast, *Skin* presents Isserley's hybridity as constructed; born 'human', she is surgically modified to become a hybrid being. Tsitas asserts that concerns around human-animal hybridity "reveal a preoccupation with issues of origin and hierarchy

and purity of species" (101). This is because hybrid beings present a challenge to the presumed biological and social differences between human and nonhuman animals. *Nights* and *Skin* draw on this idea by deliberately constructing their hybrid characters as other to humanity. In particular, the otherness of Fevvers and Isserley is emphasised through the origin story of their hybridity—humans are born; in contrast, Fevvers is hatched and Isserley is made.

Nights opens with the story of Fevvers' fantastical existence, as Walser interviews Fevvers on her life history. She tells Walser that she was "hatched out of a bloody great egg" (Carter 3). With this sentence, Carter constructs her protagonist as more-than-human by having her enter the world in a way that defies human conventions of birth. Moreover, as a baby Fevvers had feathers that sprouted around her back "just like the fluff on a chick, it was" (Carter 10). In reference to this, Yang states that "Fevvers spotlights her ambiguous nature from the moment of her birth" (504). This opening passage serves to construct Fevvers as other to humans by highlighting her intrinsic animality. Furthermore, it establishes Fevvers' hybridity as intrinsic to herself, thus she is implicitly associated with concepts of naturalness. Contrary to Fevvers, Isserley's hybridity is constructed rather than innate. Caracciolo describes *Skin* as "a story of physical mutilation" (591). In saying that, Caracciolo is not only referring to the plight suffered by the captured vodsels, but Isserley's metamorphosis from alien-human to human-animal. Isserley undergoes surgical modifications that alter her body to resemble the vodsels. The process is invasive and painful: Isserley has her skeleton restructured to allow her to walk on two legs rather than four, her tail is removed, along with her body hair, and she undergoes breast augmentation surgery.

Both Fevvers and Isserley live with permanent, physical reminders of their hybridity. In *Nights,* Fevvers would appear completely human if not for her wings, which span six feet when fully spread. In saying that, Fevvers typically keeps her wings tucked away under her clothing, giving her a humpbacked appearance, in order to maintain the mystery of her existence and

disguise her otherness. However, her wings remain physical proof of her hybridity and representative of her growing animality. Emerging during puberty, Fevvers is initially resistant to her new additions, but as Carter reminds her reader, “nature will not be denied” (36). The wings that protrude from Fevvers’s shoulders defy reality, mirroring the way in which her hybridity defies the boundaries of humanness. The novel engages with this idea directly through Fevvers’ relationship to her new wings. For instance, Fevvers is initially fearful of her new wings, saying “I knew I was not yet ready to bear on my back the great burden of my unnaturalness” (31). This reveals how Fevvers is aware that her hybridity makes her unnatural, inhuman, and therefore other. The human/animal divide positions humanity and animality as mutually exclusive. Fevvers lives in a society founded on this premise and as such her fears around her hybridity are born out of a desire to remain ‘human’. Yang supports this, saying that Fevvers is “fearing for her separation from humankind” (506). This is emphasised further when Fevvers learns how to fly. Once again, Fevvers fears that she is evolving further away from humanity into animality. As she stands at the open window, Fevvers notes that the open space before her represented “the grand abyss, the poignant divide, that would henceforth separate me from common humanity” (Carter 30). She goes further, referring to the terror of “the irreparable difference with which success in the attempt would mark” (34). This reveals how Fevvers resists the animality inherent in her hybridity, and therefore herself. Beyond Fevvers’ personal relationship to her hybridity, this passage seeks to address concerns of the human/animal divide, in which association with animality is seen as dehumanising and othering.

Like Fevvers, Isserley lives with permanent reminders of her hybrid status, yet to a much greater degree. *Skin* presents Isserley’s metamorphosis from human-alien to human-vodsel as a painful and traumatic experience. As previously mentioned, the original transformation involved invasive surgeries and body modifications. Consequently, Isserley endures chronic

pain that affects her daily life, including extreme headaches, “contorted back muscles” (Faber 49), and persistent eye strain. Tsitas argues that manufactured hybrid beings are “deemed by society as a monster that should not exist”, drawing on the figure of Frankenstein’s creature to illustrate this idea (98). In particular, these beings raise concerns regarding biological evolution and naturalness by blurring the boundaries of species categorisation. Faber speaks to this fear through Isserley by emphasising the horror of her constructed hybridity. Isserley is “dehumanised by her operation” (Gymnich and Costa 85), which serves to establish her as other to both humans and vodsels. Dillon agrees, arguing that Isserley’s modifications “cause her to inhabit physically the limit between human and vodsel” (144). Consequently, Isserley is neither human nor vodsel, but rather a mutilated, hybrid being.

This is reinforced by Isserley’s own feelings towards her hybridity, which she believes is representative of her loss of humanity. At various points in the novel, Isserley frames her transformation as a “sacrifice” (Faber 65) and something that has “been done to her” (Faber 65, 68). My class politics discussion in Chapter Three will address the reasons behind this in more depth, however these quotes highlight how Isserley frames her hybridity in a negative light. In particular, Isserley views her body “with distaste” (Faber 68), seeing it as symbolic of her growing animality. She describes her body as “carved up” (Faber 241), mourning the loss of her natural teats (Faber 178) and tail (Faber 186). Harger-Grinling and Jordaan assert that Isserley becomes a site in which “to explore the fine line between man and beast” (249). Dillon agrees, saying that *Skin* examines “how altered bodies move backwards and forwards across the boundary between human and nonhuman animal” (134). This is exemplified by the way in which Isserley must maintain her hybrid appearance in order to pass as a vodsel on earth. For instance, Isserley regularly removes her body hair and is required to wear contacts that “gave her nothing but headaches and eyestrain” (Faber 51).

In portraying this, the novel draws attention to dehumanising strategies that associate certain physical characteristics with animality. In particular, body hair has historically been used as a racial identifier in which to animalise groups of people. Through Faber's human/vodsel divide, in which Isserley's animal-like alien species are 'human', this association with body hair is reversed—no longer associated with animality, it becomes a symbol of humanity. For Isserley, shaving therefore "represents pushing herself over the dividing line into bestiality" (Harger-Grinling and Jordaan 249). As such, these practices become a permanent reminder of Isserley's vodsel nature. On the other hand, Dillon suggests that these practices reveal that Isserley's body is "constantly seeking to return to its original humanity" (144). Despite her continued efforts to assimilate with other vodsels, Isserley remains intrinsically human. Interpreted in this way, it can be argued that the novel constructs humanness as an innate state of being. However, Isserley's continual maintenance of her transformation push her further along the "sliding scale of humanness" (Tsitas 106) to animality. The underlying message here is that Isserley's position on the human side of the human/animal binary is precarious—as a hybrid being, she inhabits "the abyssal limit between the human and the nonhuman animal" (Dillon 150). Thus, *Skin* destabilises the construction of humanity by blurring the boundary between human and nonhuman animals.

Returning to my analysis of *Nights,* I will examine how Fevvers' relationship to her hybridity evolves over the novel. Despite Fevvers' initial apprehension toward her animality, she begins to embrace her animality when learning to fly. Fevvers tells Walser "I learnt, first, as the birds do, from the birds" (Carter 33). Rather than rely on the aid of humans to learn aerodynamics, Fevvers chooses to learn from her fellow birds. She observes the birds flying and notes the parallels between their movements and those of humans, saying "those *aerial arms* of theirs … which were, in fact, I realised, not dissimilar to those of a human swimmer" (33). Here, Carter is subverting the human/animal divide by drawing a link between human

and nonhuman animals. Moreover, Fevvers grows to care emotionally for these birds, referring to them affectionately as "my pigeon family" (Carter 34). This is significant because it reveals Fevvers' changing relationship to her own hybridity. Whereas before Fevvers saw her wings as symbolic of her otherness, she comes to the realisation that her "body was the abode of limitless freedom" (Carter 31). Subsequently, Fevvers' hybridity becomes integral to her identity. This is exemplified by her decision to become a professional aerialist. She plays into her hybridity when performing, appearing on stage behind tinsel bars to the tune of 'Only a bird in a gilded cage'. Her success in constructing her hybridity as spectacle is evidenced by the "Fevvermania" (Carter 5) that follows her at every show. Fevvers' celebration of her hybrid status allows her to transcend beyond the human/animal divide. On the other hand, Yang notes that Fevvers' profession as circus performer may be a matter of necessity, saying she "resolves to practice her hybrid state" (506), a point I expand on in my discussion of class politics in Chapter Three.

Carrying on from this, Carter subverts the human/animal divide by constructing Fevvers' hybridity through notions of natural and unnatural. In doing so, she also draws on the binary of culture/nature. Fevvers, as both human and animal, "challenges the demarcation between the natural and unnatural" (Yang 507). For example, Fevvers questions, "For what is 'natural' and 'unnatural', sir? The mould in which the human form is cast is exceedingly fragile" (68). Here, not only is Fevvers challenging the idea that her hybridity makes her unnatural, but beyond this, is questioning the stability of humanness as a construction. Significantly, Fevvers never refers to herself as unnatural; in fact, she resists this label being placed on her. When revealing that she was hatched, Fevvers uses the phrase "unknown to nature" (Carter 21) rather than unnatural. Although similar phrases, this is a deliberate choice by Carter to resist Fevvers being othered. Yang agrees, saying that this passage highlights how Fevvers is "undefined by natural equations and cultural conventions" (504). As such, Fevvers' position along the

culture/nature binary serves to reinforce the way in which she embraces fluidity of identity and expression. This allows Fevvers to commodify her otherness, constructing her hybridity as a spectacle.

While Fevvers is shown to revel in her hybrid otherness, Isserley continues to view her hybridity as a burden. Alongside the chronic pain she endures as a result of her transformation, a significant reason for this is the way in which Isserley's hybridity separates her from other beings. As half-human, half-vodsel, Isserley is alienated from both her fellow humans and the vodsels she interacts with. In regards to the vodsels, Isserley maintains the boundary between her and them through the human/vodsel divide. In particular, Isserley upholds speciesism by viewing the vodsels and her on an oppositional scale of value, in which humanity dominates over animality. Despite Isserley's metamorphosis, Harger-Grinling and Jordaan argue that "the physical change does not mean that she identifies with the vodsels that she preys on" (249). Species categorisation allows Isserley to distance herself from other vodsels, despite her hybrid-vodsel nature, creating a moral justification for her role in what happens to the captured hitchhikers. Dillon agrees, noting that speciesism "is crucial to her psychological ability to continue with her work" (144). As such, *Skin* can be seen to be reproducing the human/animal divide through Isserley. In saying this, Faber does challenge Isserley's thinking at various points in the novel. For example, Isserley is shown to question her own ingrained beliefs about the vodsels by wondering, "isn't it true … that they have that dignity?" (Faber 172). Here, Isserley allows herself to think beyond the binary of human/vodsel. Specifically, she recognises the value of vodsels as more than mere meat for human consumption, granting them personhood status. However, Isserley's moment of realisation is short-lived; she instantly dismisses this thought by reminding herself of the vodsels' "brute bulk, their stink, their look of idiocy" (Faber 172). Isserley animalises the vodsels in order to dehumanise them,

reconstructing them as unintelligent, unhygienic beings compared to humans. In doing so, Isserley is shown, once again, to reproduce speciesist discourses of the human/animal divide.

The human/vodsel divide maintains the boundary between Isserley and the vodsels; alongside this, she is also alienated from the other humans on the farm. Isserley lives as the sole woman among men, and therefore there are underlying gender dynamics that contribute to this disconnect, however the primary reason lies in her hybridity. Unlike Isserley, whose hybridity is necessary for her to assimilate within vodsel society, the men work exclusively on the farm. As such, whilst Isserley is required to become half-vodsel, the men are allowed to remain wholly human. Consequently, Isserley is othered from her fellow humans. Isserley is embarrassed of her vodsel-nature, going to lengths to conceal her animality from the humans on the farm. In one passage, she accidentally reveals to a fellow human that she sleeps in a bed. She is instantly regretful of her transgression, fearing that it was "titillating proof of her subhumanity" (Faber 92). The use of subhumanity here is significant; it points to how those that live between the binary are constructed as less than human.

This is emphasised further by the arrival of Amlis, which causes internal turmoil for Isserley. Ashamed of her vodsel-like appearance, Isserley fears the judgement of another human, saying "he'd be expecting to see a human being, and he would see a hideous animal instead" (Faber 75). This highlights how Isserley sees her hybridity as symbolic of a loss of her humanity. Dillon argues that Isserley's fear "is rooted in a terror that he will not recognise her for what she is" (144). This fear is reinforced by how Isserley resists being defined by her animality. For instance, Isserley insists to Amlis, "I'm a human being, not a vodsel" (Faber 173). In reference to this, Dillon argues that "Isserley needs to define herself by what she is not" (144). In doing so, Faber draws attention to how humanity has historically been defined in opposition to the other, that is, humans define themselves by what they are not. Isserley discomfort in her own hybridity is rooted in speciesism, as she upholds the boundary between human and

nonhuman animals. In depicting this, *Skin* highlights the limits of binary thinking. Isserley's belief in the human/vodsel divide is ultimately what others her, rather than the divide itself. As Harger-Grinling and Jordaan note, "Isserley is, as it turns out, even alien to herself" (248).

The Animalised Woman: The Gender Binary

A self-proclaimed "feminist writer" ("Notes" 24), Carter's fiction often concerns women and their position within the gender binary. In line with this, *Nights* explores "conventional notions of gender construction and sexual hierarchy" (Michael 496). As the "winged woman" (Dennis 117), Fevvers evades binary categorisation and therefore complicates the gender binary. Beyond this, Fevvers gender performance can be read as both subverting and upholding gender norms around femininity. I argue that Fevvers ultimately causes a breakdown of the gender binary and I will examine this in three ways. Firstly, I will discuss the relationship between Fevvers' femininity and her animality through the concept of the animalised woman. Secondly, I consider how Fevvers' animality is instrumental in constructing her as the New Woman, drawing on the historical context in which Carter was writing her novel. Lastly, I will argue that Fevvers complicates the binary through her gender performance, in which she displays both masculine and feminine characteristics.

Historically, both women and animals have been constructed as other within society, seen through the binaries of human/animal and man/woman. *Nights* addresses this through Fevvers' hybrid status as both woman and bird. In particular, Fevvers' femininity and animality are interwoven through the concept of the animalised woman. Throughout the novel, Carter draws attention to the relationship between women and animals, femininity and animality, through her depiction of Fevvers. This can firstly be seen through her decision to construct Fevvers as half-bird, rather than, for example, half-dog or half-horse. There are several possible reasons for this; Michael suggests Fevvers' bird-state is inspired by Greek mythology, pointing to how Fevvers likens herself to Helen of Troy within the novel (497). However, I contend that it is

also possible Carter was drawing on the cultural association between birds and women. Historically, the term ‘bird’ has been used in reference to women within British culture, often as a means to construct women as “pretty ornaments … that sing heteronormative ballads of romance and naivety” (Douglas 3). Douglas argues that the association of birds with Fevvers is to “demonstrate how feminine people have become something other than human” (3). This is reinforced by the fact that Fevvers’ hybridity others her from humanity but not her womanhood. This is because women are already seen as other within society, and thus any further deviation from the norm has less impact on their identity as women.

In fact, Fevvers association with birds operates to emphasise her gender. For instance, Fevvers begins to grow her feathers at the same time as she gets her first period. Through puberty, Fevvers becomes “a bird-woman rather than a mere woman” (Yang 505). By having the arrival of Fevvers’ menstruation occur alongside the growth of her wings, Carter reinforces the connection between femininity and animality. Another example of this link is found through the concept of commodification. Dennis argues that Fevvers is “characterised as possessing comestible qualities” (122). She points to descriptions of Fevvers throughout the novel, in which her hair is described as “thick as cream” (Carter 19), her face as “broad and oval as a meat dish” (Carter 12) which later becomes “beefsteak red” (Carter 13). Many scholars have drawn links between the way in which both women and animals are treated as commodities within society, most notably Carol J. Adams in her book *The Sexual Politics of Meat.* Adams uses the term ‘absent referent” (69) to illustrate how both women and animals are reduced to passive, invisible subjects within their own oppression. The construction of women and animals as commodities is essential to this, allowing them to be exploited as objects under “patriarchal control” (Adams 29). Carter perhaps drew on this “commodifying link” (Britzolakis 187) when writing *Nights at the Circus*, and as such, this can be seen as reinforcing Fevvers’ status as the animalised woman.

This connection between women and animals can be understood through the two contexts in which Carter was writing *Nights*; that is, the beginning and end of the twentieth century. For Carter's period, there was an increasing overlap between feminist movements and the animal rights movement in response to their shared experience of gendered violence and commodification within a patriarchal, anthropocentric society. In a British context, Yang suggests that Thatcher's preference for Victorian values "encouraged women to invest in moralistic duty and maternal nurturing" (503). Yang then draws parallels between this and the period in which Fevvers inhabits. He notes that at the turn of the century there evolved two types of women: the Victorian Woman and the New Woman (508). The Victorian Women positioned themselves as "guardian angels of morality" and thus responsible for the protection of animals; the New Women's "tenacious breakthrough into the public and masculine domain" inspired animal rights movements to expand their movement on a societal level (508). According to Yang, "Fevvers represents a collaboration between the two" (508). Britzolakis agrees, saying "Fevvers is the New Woman heralding a New Century" (186). *Nights* references this directly, noting that the turn of the century represented "the New Age in which no woman will be bound down to the ground" (Carter 25). This is represented by Fevvers animality, as her wings become "the apparatus for women of the future to soar" (Yang 508). Yang notes that Carter uses Fevvers to examine the "naturally and socially intertwined construction of Victorian women" (503). By framing this through the context of modern feminism, Carter is able to "destabilise binding boundaries and hierarchies still oppressing late twentieth-century English woman" (510).

The construction of Fevvers through notions of the animalised woman operate to reinforce her fluid identity as a hybrid being. This is further emphasised through Fevvers' gender performance, which evades binary categorisations that construct man and woman, and therefore masculinity and femininity, as mutually exclusive identities. I propose that Fevvers'

fluid performance of gender causes a breakdown of the gender binary. In particular, this can be seen through Fevvers' display of both masculine and feminine characteristics. Although constructing Fevvers as a woman, the novel employs masculine characteristics alongside femininity when depicting Fevvers. The novel introduces Fevvers through the perspective of Walser, as he interviews her in her London dressing room. Described as being "twice as large as life" (Carter 13), Fevvers stands at "six feet two in her stockings" (Carter 9). Already, Fevvers's physical appearance is masculinised. Furthermore, her largeness allows her to occupy authoritative space normally reserved for male characters. As Michael notes "she asserts her authority by simply taking up space" (498). Carter further emphasises Fevvers's masculinity through her actions. For example, Fevvers farts, belches, and drinks heavily, and when shaking Walser's hand the reader is told she has a "strong masculine grip" (Carter 89). Carter plays into this masculinity, having Walser himself question "is she really a man?" (37). These descriptions operate to construct Fevvers as a masculine figure, complicating the binary of man/woman. However, it is worth noting that this construction of a 'masculine' Fevvers is through the perspective of Walser. Michael argues Walser likely has "internalised conventional categories" of masculinity and femininity, and as such would be challenged by Fevvers' fluid performance of gender (500).

Although Fevvers can be seen as having masculine traits, the character is also inherently feminine. Peach argues that the novel's "controlling consciousness is female" (132), and this is largely delivered through Fevvers. Robinson agrees, saying her while her masculine traits "might de-feminise Fevvers in iconographical terms, they do not render her any less a woman" (88). Fevvers presents a spectacle on stage, amplifying her feminine features through make-up. Moreover, Carter uses "deliberately feminised language" (Michael 499) when describing Fevvers's dressing room, referring to it as "exquisitely feminine squalor" (Carter 6). Significantly, Fevvers's femininity is shown through her sexuality. The novel portrays Fevvers

as sexually desirable, as she is continually pursued by affluent men. For example, Fevvers flirtatious charm can be seen when "she batted her eyelashes at Walser" (Carter 43). Fevvers sexuality is important to her gender expression as "narratives of pleasure create femininity" (Douglas 8). Fevvers' femininity is exemplified by her status as both an object and a subject, which I will discuss shortly.

Michael argues that Fevvers thus becomes the "new female subject that seeks to satisfy feminist aims" (497). He goes further, saying that Fevvers' gender performances "deconstruct the masculine/feminine hierarchical opposition" (499). Bristow and Broughton agree, stating that Carter shows "how Western culture has shaped limiting concepts of gender" (14). Specifically, *Nights at the Circus* calls into question the construction of masculine and feminine, man and woman, as oppositional binaries. Robinson speaks to this sentiment, saying "the two terms are not parallel or complementary, although the history of Western thought might lead us to believe this" (36). In light of this, Fevvers' ability to be both a woman and masculine presents a challenge to the gender binary. Nikandam argues that Fevvers "dramatizes the idea that gender identity is not fixed in nature but relies on culturally constructed signification" (47). Thus, Fevvers' gender performance not only dismantles the gender binary, but seeks to deconstruct the construct of gender overall. By embracing fluidity over binaries, Fevvers exposes the social constructions that form the foundation of Western society.

Subject/Object Binary

Fevvers' hybridity as both human and animal, man and woman, is exemplified through her dual role as both subject and object within the text. The subject/object binary is a significant dualism within Western society, and determines who is afforded subjectivity over themselves and who is objectified by others. Within this, those who are objectified are also othered and those who do the othering become the subjects. Robinson notes that although "the subject has

always been theorised as universal", the subject is almost always assumed to be white, male and human (39). Douglas speaks to this, saying that women and animals "are not read and/or treated as human" and are consequently reduced to passive objects (3). Fevvers, as an animalised woman, is objectified within the novel. However, she also expresses agency over her identity, and thus can be seen as the subject in her own right. Thus, the character of Fevvers can be seen to both uphold and subvert the subject/object binary.

Firstly, Fevvers upholds the subject/object binary through the way in which she is objectified within the novel. Most notably, Dennis argues that "Fevvers is an object of desire" (123). This is perhaps most evident by the way Fevvers is sexually objectified. *Nights at the Circus* portrays Fevvers as sexually desirable and she is pursued by multiple men throughout the novel, including several world leaders and influential figures. Walser himself becomes infatuated with Fevvers, leading to Fevvers becoming "an object of Walser's" (Robinson 21). Robinson explains that the role of women within narratives is to be the object of desire, and that this desire is centred around men (10). Beyond this, Michael asserts that "Fevvers' exhibits herself as object for an audience's gaze" (500). This can be seen through the way in which Fevvers' conducts herself as a spectacle and the "Fevvermania" (Carter 5) that surrounds her. The novel "encourages speculation" (Michael 498) about Fevvers, as she shifts between fact and fiction throughout the story. Carter not only constructs Fevvers' objectification, but she also explores the negative implications of this. Douglas notes that "Fevvers experiences dangers of being the object of the gaze" (5-6). This is shown when Fevvers is purchased by Rosencreutz for sacrificial purposes. Her existence is so exotic that he believes she is the "Angel of Death" (Carter 91). In this scene, Carter is perhaps drawing attention to the way in which sexual objectification creates an unsafe reality for women within a patriarchal society.

On the other hand, Fevvers can be seen to subvert the subject/object binary by taking agency over her own hybridity and narrative. Fevvers refuses to submit to the binary, and instead

embraces her otherness, creating a spectacle of herself. Peach argues that this allows Fevvers "control over her own subject position" (154). Robinson agrees, noting that "by actively inviting the gaze ... Fevvers take control" (83). Fevvers's agency is shown through her relationship with Walser. The novel opens with Walser interviewing Fevvers for a story about her fantastical existence. Although Walser writes her story, Fevvers is the "controlling voice" (Peach 133). Fevvers leads the narration of her story, deflecting Walser's attempts to expose her. For example, as she tells her story Fevvers subjects Walser to a gaze that is a "challenge and attack at once, before she took up the narrative again" (Carter 59). In this passage Fevvers establishes herself on equal, if not dominant, footing to Walser. Michael argues that Fevvers "asserts authority over her own story-history" (496). In doing so, Carter subverts the trope of women's stories being appropriated by "Western, male-centred culture" (Michael 497). Peach supports this, stating that Walser's "male voice is emasculated" as he becomes the passive listener to Fevvers's story (133). Through having agency over her story, Fevvers is able to construct her own identity. Milosavljevic asserts that the novel allows women "control over their representation" which challenges male-dominated discourses (44). In light of this, Carter subverts the exotic by constructing Fevvers as a subject of her own objectification.

The Human/Machine Divide

The figure of the cyborg has become an important metaphor in literature in which to examine posthumanism. Speaking to this, Dongshin Yi notes that the cyborg figure embodies "a posthuman future" (124). As such, the cyborg metaphor can be used to explore the role of posthuman in society, particularly through the lens of the human/machine divide. Haraway argues that cyborg narratives "reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalised identities" (175). Specifically, the cyborg metaphor represents a challenge to Western construction of the human by blurring the assumed boundary between human and machine. Thus, cyborg narratives allow the author to critique, and therefore destabilise, the

human/machine divide. Haraway agrees, stating "cyborg writing is about the power to survive … on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other" (175). Within this, cyborgs can be used as a literary tool in which to either subvert or reinscribe the construction of human and machine as separate entities and identities. As Balsamo notes, "every cyborg image constructs an implicit opposition between machine and human; at once repressing similarities and highlighting distinctions" (146). However, the cyborg can be used to repair this divide; helping to "configure the tripartite partnership of posthumanism, where science, humans, and nonhumans interface" (Yi 124). Wolmark agrees with this sentiment, noting that the cyborg brings forth new forms of human and nonhuman subjectivity (140). To illustrate this point, I will now turn to Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* (1991), examining the role of the cyborg metaphor in relation to the human/machine divide.

Published in 1991, Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* is a cyberpunk novel in which the posthuman exists alongside the human. Set in a post-apocalyptic dystopian future in North America, the novel centres around the relationship between Shira, a human woman, and Yod, a cyborg man. The world that they live in is a wasteland due to years of environmental degradation, plagues, and incessant warfare that have rendered the continent virtually uninhabitable. Left in its place are 'multis', large multi-national corporate enterprises which form the basis of modern society, creating an enshrined social hierarchy between affluent and working classes. These multis are domed and heavily guarded, protecting the wealthy elite from the outside world—most notably the 'glop', a derelict wasteland overrun by poverty and gangs. An exception to this are the 'free towns', inhabited by communities who maintain their freedom by selling their technologies to the multis.

Body of Glass examines the human/machine divide directly, exploring posthumanist ideas in relation to gender, class, and human identity. In Piercy's futuristic world, in which reliance on technology necessitates survival, the existence of cyborgs is remarkably absent. This is

because, as Shira narrates, “robots were forbidden to be made in human form since the cyber-riots” (Piercy 13), a war that precedes the events of the novel. Keith Booker notes that the universal ban on cyborgs is an attempt by humans to resist “being rendered obsolete” (346). Thus, the novel confronts the intrinsic dilemma of the human/machine divide within its exposition: the fear of the posthuman. As Haraway states, “who cyborgs will be is a radical question; the answers are a matter of survival” (153). In line with this, Hayles questions “are humans and cyborgs next of kin, or life forms alien to one another?” (168). *Body of Glass* attempts to answer this question through Yod, a cyborg created in secrecy in the free town of Tikva. As part human, part machine, Yod exists within a hybrid state. Yod’s hybridity blurs the boundary between natural and artificial, genetic and engendered, logic and emotion, and most importantly, the presumed divide between human and machine. My literary analysis of the novel will examine the breakdown of these binaries, in consideration of how Yod both subverts and upholds notions of the posthuman.

Yod’s origin story establishes him as a cyborg, and therefore “less than human” (Piercy 70). Created by stealth in a lab, Yod is designed with a specific purpose. His creator, Avram, explains to Shira that Yod is “programmed to protect us—our town, its inhabitants, our Base”, in response to growing threats of cyberattacks from the multis (Piercy 70). By design, Yod’s very existence is tied to serving and protecting the community of Tikva. This reinforces the construction of Yod as a machine, treated as a tool in which to be used by and for humans. Under the human/machine divide, humans are granted autonomy of mind and body, machines are not. In reference to the Cartesian mind/body dualism, Badmington wryly notes, “I think, therefore I cannot possibly be an automaton” (18). Given the ban on humanoid robots, Yod’s cyborg status must remain hidden. Hence the return of Shira to her hometown of Tikva, hired by Avram to teach Yod how to pass as human. Significantly, despite being designed to appear visually as human (even Shira is convinced of his humanness when first introduced to Yod)

and programmed by Avram himself, Yod requires teaching in order to fully pass as human within society. One way this could be explained is that Piercy is highlighting the intrinsic difference between human and machine, that the cyborg must learn what comes naturally to the human. However, I suggest the opposite: that by presenting cyborgs in this way, Piercy is critiquing the construction of humanness overall.

Existing as a cyborg, Yod directly transgresses the boundary between human and machine. The human/machine divide is reproduced and maintained by several binaries, including natural/artificial and subject/object. Within this, machines are constructed as "rational, artificial, and durable" in contrast to humans, who are "emotional, organic, and mortal" (Balsamo 146). As part-human, part-machine, the figure of the cyborg destabilises these binaries. On a purely visual level, Yod is human. This is evident when Shira is first introduced to Yod, whom she comments is "in no way unusual" compared to the other inhabitants of their town (Piercy 69). Once aware of his cyborg status, however, Shira's perspective of Yod shifts from human to machine. Immediately, she treats him as an object, as all machines are to her, reaching out to touch Yod without his consent. Shira notes that Yod's "artificial skin felt warm, its surface very like human skin" (Piercy 69). This highlights how ingrained notions of the human/machine divide are. Without the knowledge that Yod is a cyborg, his skin would simply feel human under Shira's touch. With this knowledge, however, Shira is unconsciously constructing Yod to be artificial, more machine than human. When he stiffens under her touch, Shira is initially embarrassed of having transgressed a social norm. However, she draws on notions of the human/machine divide to justify her actions, narrating "you did not ask permission of a computer to log on" (69). In depicting this, Piercy draws attention to the construction of the human as subjects and machines are objects.

Yet, Yod is not merely a machine; as a hybrid being, Yod embodies the posthuman. Interestingly, in Piercy's imagined world, the posthuman already exists. Yi asserts that *Body*

of Glass depicts a "pseudo-anthropocentric world that denies robots human qualities and defines humans as modifiable origins" (126). Within the multis, for example, it has become fashionable for humans to undergo enhancement modifications to fit the "ideal face and body" (Piercy 13). Moreover, the working-class security, known as apes, are humans who have been "altered chemically and surgically and by special implants for inhuman strength and speed" (Piercy 13). These two examples emphasise the blurring between human and machine that is already occurring within this society. Pavani argues that the "cyborg advances towards the human" (64). However, in the world of Piercy's novel, it seems that the human is advancing towards the cyborg. With this understanding, Shira dismissing Yod's subjectivity due to his cyborg status is questionable. Indeed, Shira does acknowledge this later on in the novel, saying "we're all cyborgs, Yod. You're just a purer form of what we're all tending towards" (Piercy 150). Piercy's words here echo Haraway's, who asserts in *A Cyborg Manifesto* that "we are all chimeras, theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs" (150). Even without the existence of cyborgs, Shira's world is inhabited by the posthuman. With the creation of Yod, the boundary between human and machine almost ceases to exists. Speaking to this, Yi comments that "the boundary enclosing the definition of the human is so thin in the story that it seems to verge on transparency" (127).

As already stated, Shira initially views Yod as a machine, touching him without consent. Her awareness of his artificial intelligence prevents Shira from seeing Yod as human; consequently, she denies him autonomy, dehumanising him in the process. This is emphasised further when Shira refers to Yod as "it" rather than he (Piercy 69). She questions the fact that Avram and Malkah use 'he' to refer Yod, remarking "isn't that anthropomorphising?" (Piercy 70). Interestingly, Yod resists this dehumanising title, insisting that he should be granted the respect of personal pronouns. He explains, "I'm a fusion of machine and lab-created biological components—much as humans frequently are fusions of flesh and machine" (Piercy 70). This

is the first example in the novel of Yod subverting the human/machine divide, and in such a direct way. Piercy draws attention to the fragile distinction between human and machine, that despite our differences, both are simply beings made up of parts—emphasised further by the techno-dystopian world of her novel. Granted, one is organic and the other is manufactured, yet the point remains that the divide between human and machine is tenuously constructed. In line with this, Balsamo argues that the cyborg calls into question "the assumed naturalness of the body and its function as a marker of difference" (151). Considering this, Yod operates to undermine the distinction between natural and artificial, and consequently, the divide between human and machine.

Another way the novel subverts the human/machine divide is through Yod's experience of the sublime. My argument here was informed by Amanda Pavani, whose article "The Man-Machine and the Machine-Man" examines the importance of the sublime in relation to Piercy's *Body of Glass*. The concept of the sublime is multifaceted and often contentious, encompassing a "sense of wonder … a response to a shock of imaginative expansion" (Csicsery-Ronay and Csicsery-Ronay 146). My understanding of the sublime is drawn from Immanuel Kant's seminal text *Critique of Judgement* (1790). The Kantian sublime is a subjective experience which extends beyond the limits of human cognition; in experiencing the sublime, the subject is unable to "order the perceptible world" (Csicsery-Ronay and Csicsery-Ronay 148). Rather than centre the object of wonder itself, Kant emphasises its relationship to the human subject. Anoka Faruqee speaks to this, saying "rather than pacifying the sublime, Kant deepens it, making it fundamental to human thought" ("The Kantian Sublime"). The sublime therefore requires a degree of conscious subjectivity—an ability to not only comprehend and understand, but to experience and feel. Considering this, it can be argued that the sublime reinforces notions of human/machine divide. If humans, as subjective beings, are able to experience the sublime, then it stands to reason that machines, in their objectivity, are not. A machine is able to

comprehend and respond to phenomena, yet is incapable of experiencing the wonder of the sublime. Pavani argues that "in *Body of Glass*, experiences of the infinite natural world mark humanity or humanness" (66). This is exemplified through Yod, whose hybridity allows him to experience the sublime. Although Yod's programming contains vast knowledge of the natural world, when encountering it first-hand, his experience encapsulates the wonder of the sublime. This can be seen when Shira questions Yod as the stargaze, asking "do you feel anything when you look at them?" (Piercy 326). In response, Yod says:

> Yes, I do... A sense of great distance. The sweep of the visible universe, its extent and vastness, gives me a sense of scale that is exhilarating. Surely among those stars are many beings with different kinds of consciousness and mental and physical capabilities. Isn't it likely there are even other manufactured beings like myself? (Piercy 326)

In looking out into the vast expanse of space, Yod feels a sense of wonder beyond his programming—put simply, he experiences the sublime. In this moment, Yod crosses over the boundary from machine to human. No longer objective, Yod demonstrates subjective consciousness, an ability to emotionally respond to the world around him. Pavani agrees, stating that Yod's response reflects "a surprising degree of humanity" (65). Significantly, Yod's words here parallel Kant's, who writes "we call sublime what is absolutely large … in comparison with which everything else is small" (qtd. in Hirshberg 19). Existentialism is often thought of as an innately human experience; Yod's ability to think beyond himself, to question his own existence in relation to others, destabilises this assumption. In depicting this, Piercy undermines the boundary between human and machine. More than that, she destabilises the notion of the human subject, opening up "new forms of subjectivity" (Wolmark 140).

Another instance of Yod experiencing the sublime occurs earlier in the novel when he witnesses a red moon for the first time. Although programmed with images of red moon, Yod experiences the sublime when seeing it himself. He explains to Shira, “I have many images stored, but that isn’t the same as knowing—although I used to think it was” (Piercy 119). This scene reveals the gradual humanising of Yod, from machine to man. Speaking to this, Pavani says “Yod is created backwards in relation to a human; he has all the images and illustrations already stored in his memory … but he has hardly seen anything” (65). In experiencing the sublime, Yod’s programming shifts from objective to subjective, towards a human consciousness. The novel emphasises this further when Yod comments, “how often my stored information is partial … the definitions of feelings I am programmed with are precise, orderly, but what I experience is sometimes sharper than I know how to endure” (Piercy 120). Here, Yod addresses the profound difference between simply comprehending something and actually experiencing it, articulating what it means to experience the sublime. In doing so, he demonstrates “a very human-like capacity for abstraction and even for emotion” (Booker 346). Piercy blurs the boundary between human and machine by opening up the possibilities for human subjectivity. Pavani agrees, arguing that Yod’s “movement from machine to person is demonstrated by his reactions to the experience of the sublime” (67). This highlights how Yod’s hybridity causes a breakdown of the human/machine divide.

Glover asserts that “Yod’s needs are surprisingly human” (140). For example, Yod experiences boredom and loneliness (Piercy 18), admitting that he wishes “to be touched” (16). In fact, part of Yod’s experience with the sublime is that he “experiences isolation as a species” (Pavani 62). This ability to experience loneliness, to feel a yearning for genuine connection with others, is often presumed to be innately human. Through Yod, however, this construction is subverted in the novel. Significantly, Yod’s longing for connection develops alongside his growing consciousness as a subject. In one scene, Yod says “I’m conscious of my existence …

I feel the desire for companionship" (Piercy 93). The more human Yod becomes, the deeper his desire for genuine connection with others grows. Under the human/machine divide, machines are purported to be objective entities incapable of forming emotional bonds; in contrast, humans have "social and emotional agency" (Gurman 461). Yod's yearning for companionship therefore emphasises his growing humanity, pushing him along the boundary from machine to human.

Piercy builds on this idea by allowing Yod to form personal connections with the other humans, most notably Shira, with whom he enters into a sexual and romantic relationship with. Glover asserts that it is Yod's "ability to form bonds which makes him more than a mere robot" (141). The idea here is that interpersonal connection, the ability to emotionally bond with others, is fundamental to a being's humanness. Piercy therefore distinguishes Yod from a machine, reinforcing his growing humanness through the relationships he forms with the other humans. This is exemplified through Yod's relationship with Shira, which evolves over the course of the novel in response to Yod's emerging humanity. Although initially viewing him as machine-only, Shira begins to accept the blurring of the boundary between human and machine that Yod's hybridity represents. This is evident by the fact that she refers to Yod as 'he', after previously having referred to him as 'it'. In doing so, Shira recognises Yod's subjectivity as an autonomous being, and perhaps his humanity too. As Yi argues, "Shira successfully anthropomorphised Yod by turning 'it' into 'him'" (136).

Following this, a friendship develops between Shira and Yod during their lessons together. Despite this, Yod's hybridity remains a source of contention for Shira. She continues to frame Yod through binary terms, as either human or machine, rather than an intertwining of the two. For example, when Yod expresses his attraction to her, Shira worries that Yod's programming has malfunctioned (Piercy 130). She notes how "absurd she found being propositioned by a computer" (131), saying to Yod "You're a machine. What does it mean to want a person?"

(130). To Shira, Yod's cyborg status renders him incapable of forming romantic and sexual bonds, so much so that the very idea of him wanting her is absurd. Shira's thinking here upholds the human/machine divide, positioning Yod as a passive, non-emotional object rather than an autonomous being capable of experiencing love. Having established this construction, however, Piercy subsequently subverts it. Although initially hesitant, Shira begins to reciprocate Yod's feelings towards her, ultimately entering into a sexual relationship with him. While awaiting Yod's arrival to physically consummate their relationship, Shira narrates "it was time to treat him as a person, fully, because he was nothing less" (Piercy 167). This is significant because it highlights how sexual and emotional intimacy is characterised as inherently human in the novel. Shira's ability to see Yod as a sexual partner is representative of her ability to see him as human. Glover agrees, noting that Shira loves Yod "as a person, albeit not a human person" (142). Thus, in entering into a sexual relationship with Shira, Yod traverses the boundary between human and machine. This is supported by Neneve and Gomes, who argue that Yod's socialisation is instrumental in his "subjectification, or perhaps humanisation" (105). Gurman adds to this, arguing that Yod's relationship with Shira is "paramount in proving his humanity" (463).

Yod and Shira's relationship extends beyond the purely physical; he becomes an equal partner of Shira, stepping into the role of step-father of her son. This is where Piercy's conceptualisation of the cyborg metaphor divulges from Haraway's figure of the cyborg. According to Haraway, "the cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world" (150). Constructed as male, Yod directly challenges this concept. Moreover, Haraway asserts that "the cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family" (150). In contrast, Yod longs for a family, delighting in his role as 'husband' to Shira and as 'father' to her son. Yod recognises that "given loneliness, a family is a rational construct for any conscious being" (Piercy 387). By subverting Haraway's figure of the cyborg in this way, Piercy constructs Yod as more

human than machine. Gurman agrees, noting that Yod's humanness can be measured by his "ability to fall in love and form a family" (461). More than this, however, Gurman suggests that Piercy is commenting on the implications of a posthuman future. She asserts that the novel emphasises "the value of traditional continuity in the face of an increasingly alienating and frightening technological future" (460). In humanising Yod through his relationships, Piercy stresses the need for collectivism in the posthuman future, rather than the individualism purported under techno-capitalism. In doing so, Piercy subverts notions of the posthuman constructed through the human/machine divide.

Perhaps the notable example of the novel's subversion of the human/machine divide comes from Yod himself. The human/machine divide posits that humans have agency over themselves as autonomous beings; machines, in contrast, are objects to be used by and for humans. The novel draws on the figure of the cyborg to explore the parameters of subjectivity, autonomy, and individual freedom. For instance, Yod expresses frustration that his existence is tied to his role as protector of the community of Tikva, desiring the same freedoms granted to humans in his society. When Yod worries that he is a monster akin to the creature in Frankenstein, Shira dismisses his concerns by saying "you were not created out of some mad ambition of Avram's to become a god … you were created to protect a vulnerable and endangered community" (Piercy 150). Despite her good intentions, Shira's words serve to reinforce Yod's construction as a machine. Denied autonomy over his own life, "Yod's discomfort at his cyborg status … speaks to his desire for freedom" (Pavani 62). Yod acknowledges this himself, wryly questioning Shira "what were you created to do?" (Piercy 150). Within this, Yod laments his hybrid status. As half-human, half-machine, Yod is granted consciousness yet denied human subjectivity. Speaking to this, Glover argues "he is neither human nor unconscious machine" (140). The novel draws attention to the inherent conflict between Yod's programming and his evolving social consciousness, exploring how this complicates his ability to behave like a

machine. For example, Yod says “I don’t want to be a weapon. A weapon that’s conscious is a contradiction because it develops attachments, ethics, desires. It doesn’t want to be tool of destruction” (Piercy 388).

Through Yod, Piercy questions the implications for the human/machine divide in the advent of the posthuman—once capable of consciousness, how do we justify and maintain human subjectivity over machine objectivity? Piercy’s answer is perhaps pessimistic; *Body of Glass* concludes with the message that “the creation of a conscious being as any kind of tool … is a disaster” (Piercy 412). This is emphasised through the conclusion of Yod’s story arc, which ultimately upholds the human/machine divide. Despite the resentment Yod expresses about his programming, his final act is to fulfil his intended purpose, sacrificing his own life in order to save Tikva from the multis. Yod’s growing consciousness reflects his human subjectivity, allowing him to cross over the boundary between human and machine. However, this is reversed by his final sacrifice, which reinforces Yod’s status as a cyborg, a machine that serves humans. Glover agrees, noting that “Yod might feel like a person, he might desire to live his own life, but he has been created as Avram’s instrument and thus is a slave to Avram’s programming” (145).

Although the conclusion of his story arc upholds the human/machine divide, Yod ultimately operates to destabilise this binary. Piercy explicitly affirms Yod’s humanity in the closing chapter of the novel, which deals with the aftermath of Yod’s death. Equipped with the knowledge and materials to construct another cyborg, a grieving Shira considers creating another ‘Yod’. Despite her desire to be reunited with Yod, Shira decides against the idea, realising that “the choice to make another Yod was immoral” (Piercy 428). Shira acknowledges the crisis that Yod’s hybridity represents; existing somewhere between autonomous human and unconscious machine, “the cyborg remains a metaphor for a tool … anthropomorphised only to be of better use for humans” (Yi 127). In light of this, Shira refuses to subjugate another

cyborg to this dilemma, saying “she could not manufacture a being to serve her, even in love” (Piercy 428). Pavani suggests that Shira’s decision reflects Piercy’s own views on the posthuman, noting that the novel ultimately argues “against the replication of subjectivity in machines” (68). Despite this, Yod remains a fascinating metaphor, a hybrid being who blurs the boundary between human and machine. Not quite human, nor wholly machine, Piercy constructs Yod to be something more: the posthuman.

Chapter Three

Performative Identities of Gender and Humanness

In this chapter, I propose that the theory relating to gender performativity can be extended to the way in which the condition of being human is experienced and expressed. My argument is inspired by the work of theorist Judith Butler, specifically her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (1988). Here, Butler posits that gender is performative rather than innate, constructing gender as an identity that is "tenuously constituted in time … through a stylised repetition of acts" (519). According to Butler, humans perform gender through certain acts and behaviours that have historically been attributed to biological sex, creating "the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (519). This performance is based on accepted social and cultural norms that have developed throughout history. I argue that performativity as a concept can be extended to the construction of human identity. As with gender performativity, human performativity is achieved through a repetition of acts that constitute the illusion of self. Humans perform certain acts and behaviours that constitute humanity, based on a construction rooted in Western dualisms. This chapter will begin by firstly examining the theory on gender performativity. Following this, I will then apply this theory to Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, analysing how the character of Fevvers both subverts and reproduces binary gender performances. I will then attempt to examine how this theory can be extended to humanness, drawing on Michel Faber's *Under the Skin* and Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* to illustrate my argument.

Gender Performativity

Judith Butler developed her theory around gender performativity during the 1980s through a series of essays, culminating in the publication of her seminal book *Gender Trouble* (1990). Published in 1988, Butler's essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" will form the basis of my discussion in this chapter, although I will also be drawing on her other publications throughout. Inspired by the works of theorist Michel Foucault and Simone de Beauvoir, who challenged the biological essentialist conceptualisation of sex and gender, Butler sought to reconceptualise gender through the lens of performance. The crux of her theory is that gender is socially constructed and sustained through performance, rather than "predetermined by some manner of interior essence" or biology ("Performative Acts" 521). In conceptualising gender in this way, Butler adopts the Foucauldian view of the discursive subject—the idea that "there is not subject before or outside the Law" (Hall 14). Foucauldian theory establishes that there exists no true, original subject; rather, "human beings are made subjects" through a process of mutually-sustaining reproduction of dominant discourses (Foucault 777). Butler speaks to this sentiment directly, saying "social agents constitute social reality" ("Performative Acts" 519).

Framing gender through the discursive subject, Butler emphasises the belief that gender is socially constructed. She points to how masculinity and femininity are continually evolving as gender descriptors, whose meaning differs across geographical, cultural, and political contexts ("Undoing Gender" 10). As such, Butler argues that gender is an act of doing rather than a state of being, constructing gender as "an incessant activity performance" ("Undoing Gender" 1). According to Butler, humans perform gender through certain acts and behaviours that have historically been attributed to biological sex, creating "the illusion of an abiding gendered self" ("Performative Acts" 519). By conceptualising gender in this way, it shifts it from being "a substantial model of identity" to "a constituted social temporality" (Butler "Performative Acts" 520).

Before I explore how Butler's conceptualisation of gender is performed, I wish to address the distinction between performance and performativity. Miriam Meyerhoff notes that "the distinction between performance and performative is often blurred" (2). Kee-Yoon Nahm goes further, drawing attention to the "dialectical tension between performativity and performance" (92). The two terms can be distinguished by the fact that performance denotes a singular act, whereas performativity encompasses the discursive construction of gender identity itself. Nahm agrees, arguing that performativity constitutes "a reiterative cultural practice" that is then enacted through performance (93). Essentially, performativity occurs, in part, as a result of performance. In reference to this, Butler suggests that "the conventions which mediate proximity and identification" play a role in determining performance versus performativity (527). She argues that performance is akin to the theatre, a performative act that exists independent of reality. To illustrate this, Butler points to how performance creates a separation between the act and reality, stating "one can say, 'this is just an act', and de-realise the act" (527). In contrast, gender performativity is intertwined with reality; a mutually-sustaining and repeated performance that maintains and reproduces gendered reality. When performance and performativity are understood together, gender becomes a "performance which is performative" ("Performative Acts" 528).

In constructing gender as performative, Butler emphasises that gender is produced by repeated action—an act of continual *doing* rather than an innate state of *being*. Consequently, performativity is understood through a process of embodiment. Butler argues that the body exists as a historical site for performativity, generating meaning through an "embodied existence" (520). In developing this theory of embodiment, Butler drew on Foucault's construction of the social body. According to Foucault, there exists no "fundamentally stable, essential physical being" (Potts 17); instead, individuals are made subjects through the discursive body (Foucault 777). In reference to this, Butler states "one is not simply a body …

one does one's body" ("Performative Acts" 521). Her intention behind this statement is to draw attention to how the body becomes a cultural signifier, constructing a gendered reality in the process, rather than the source of identity itself. Donna Haraway, who references Butler in her book *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, agrees, noting that "bodies are maps of power and identity" (180). In light of this, gender becomes a performance enacted through the body rather than from the body. It is important to note that embodiment encompasses collective action rather than individual acts. Gender is an act rooted in collective history, "which requires individual actors in order to be actualised and reproduced as reality once again" (Butler "Performative Acts" 526). In reference to this, Butler asserts that "one does not do one's gender alone, one is always doing with or for another" ("Undoing Gender" 1). This highlights the discursive nature of gender performance, in which individual acts are connected through the "reiterative cultural practice" (Nahm 93) of performativity. Moreover, gender performativity is established upon accepted social and cultural norms that have developed throughout history. Butler argues that performativity occurs through "an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities" ("Performative Acts" 521). This reinforces the social construction of gender, in which gender identity is shaped by dominant discourses. Consequently, gender becomes a performance that is "tenuously constituted in time … through a stylised repetition of acts" (Butler "Performative Acts" 519).

Performativity allows us to understand how "cultural convention is embodied and enacted" (Butler "Performative Acts" 525). In Western society, gender performativity occurs as a result of dominant discourses that construct the illusion of a gendered self in the process. Significantly, gender performativity serves an important purpose by constructing, maintaining, and reproducing the gender binary. According to this two-sex model, humans are either male or female; similarly, through gender performativity, humans become either man or woman. Speaking to this, Butler notes that "the body is invariably transformed into his or her body

through its gendered appearance" ("Performative Acts" 523). This explains the presumed relationship between physical traits and gender identity. Moreover, it highlights how gender performativity is 'a construction that regularly conceals its genesis' (Butler "Performative Acts" 522). By constructing gender within a binary model of sex, individuals perform accordingly, embodying this through constructions of male and female, man and woman. This performance continually reproduces the gender binary, promoting the idea that gender is a naturalised, biological fact. As Butler surmises, "the construction compels one's belief in its necessity and naturalness" ("Performative Acts" 522).

This discussion homes in on the implications of gender performativity, particularly in how it reproduces and maintains the gender binary. Butler argues that gender categorisation operates as a form of social control within society, which is embodied by the individual through gender performativity. Specifically, Butler asserts that "the performance renders social laws explicit" ("Performative Acts" 526). Notably, this is understood through how gender performativity serves an important purpose by upholding and legitimising the gender binary. Butler contends that "as a strategy of survival, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (522). Indeed, gender non-conforming people are oppressed and vulnerable within society, across cultures and geographical location, purely because these individuals do not perform gender according to the binary. Butler notes that when acts are embodied within the gender binary, performativity "provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity" ("Performative Acts" 528). In line with this, those who perform incorrectly therefore threaten the naturalised construction of gender. Consequently, there are efforts made to enforce this gender performance on individuals through social sanctions and legislation that promote the gender binary. We can see this through the historic and continued persecution of the LGBTQIA+ community, in which those who fall outside of the gender binary are often stigmatised, ostracised, and oppressed. In particular, the prevalence of conversion therapy

practices in Western society highlights how deeply embedded the construction of gender identity is.

Butler argues that the gender binary exists as “a precondition for the production and maintenance of legible humanity” (“Undoing Gender” 11). The gender binary is an important component of heteronormativity, which is constructed in relation to notions of reproduction and kinship. Coined by Michael Warner (1993), heteronormativity encompasses normative heterosexuality, drawing on Foucault’s construction of productive and complicit power (Castro Varela, et al. 28). Butler positions heteronormativity as both the cause and result of gender performativity, noting this “requires the reproduction of human beings in certain gendered modes” (“Performative Acts” 524). As reproduction is integral to the continued existence of humans, gender performativity becomes intertwined with the construction of humanity itself. Butler supports this, suggesting that gender performativity becomes a determining factor in the “differential between the human and the less-than-human” (“Undoing Gender” 2). In particular, she draws attention to how construction of gender and sexuality, alongside other intersectional factors pertaining to race, class, and ability, are used to categorises someone’s humanity. In reference to this, Butler argues that in Western society, “the false universal of ‘man’ has been presupposed as con-extensive with humanness itself” (“Performative Acts” 523). This echoes the idea of how humanity has largely been defined in opposition to the ‘other’. Considering gender performativity in this way, it could be argued that Butler’s theory can be extended to the construction of humanness itself—indeed, this forms the foundation of my thesis argument. Before I do, however, I wish to illustrate how gender performativity is embodied in Western society. This will involve a literary analysis of Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*, examining how the character of Fevvers both resists and upholds notions of the gender binary through performance.

Literary Analysis

Butler's theory of gender performativity serves as a framework in which to examine depictions of gender in literature. I contend that Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* presents gender as a performative identity, rather than "predetermined by some manner of interior essence" (Butler "Performative Acts" 521). Nikandam supports this, asserting that then novel "dramatizes the idea that gender identity is not fixed in nature but relies on culturally constructed signification (47). Similarly, Trevenna argues that both Butler and Carter "reject the idea of an essential and 'natural' gender identity … [to] stress how masculinity and femininity are ideologically imbued 'acts' which are performed" (268). This is exemplified through Fevvers, a hybrid being who destabilises binarised constructions of identity. The novel presents gender as performative through Fevvers, framing gender as a continual act of doing rather than an innate state of being. As Trevenna states, Fevvers' identity is "involved in a continual process of becoming rather than occupying a stable sense of self" (274). This idea is not only illustrated through Fevvers' hybridity, as she oscillates between human and animal throughout the novel, but through her gender performance.

Butler argues that "to be female is a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have to become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of 'woman'" ("Performative Acts" 522). This takes inspiration from Simone de Beauvoir, who declares "one is not born, but, rather becomes a woman" (qtd. in Butler "Performative Acts" 519). In saying this, Butler and de Beauvoir draw attention to the discursive nature of gender identity. Rather than pre-determined by biology or through the material body, gender identity is shaped and informed by dominant discourses and dualisms that narrowly define notions of masculinity and femininity. This contributes to the idea that gender is not an innate identity, but rather performed through "an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities" ("Performative Acts" 521). The novel engages with this idea directly through

Fevvers. For instance, when Fevvers is objectified by a male character, she states that she "felt herself turning, willy-nilly, from a woman into an idea" (Carter 289). The novel articulates the idea that the identity of 'womanhood' is a construction that extends beyond the individual; instead, it is a collective identity rooted in established norms of femininity. When perceived as a woman by this man, Fevvers gender identity is no longer defined by her, but rather becomes a mirror in which to reflect gendered stereotypes of femininity and womanhood. As Butler surmises, "One does not 'do' one's gender alone. One is always 'doing' with or for another" ("Undoing Gender" 1).

Gender performance can be either reinscriptive or subversive, depending on how it engages with the gender binary. Speaking in reference to performances of gender, Elizabeth Gargano states that "while they replace the binaristic determinism of two clearly defined genders with the possibility of a multifaceted play of gender", it can be difficult to determine "whether we are resisting or merely re-inscribing preordained gender identities or roles" (58). On the one hand, for example, gender performance can be used as a subversive tool in order to challenge essentialist constructions of man and woman, and therefore of masculinity and femininity. On the other hand, however, hegemonic performances of gender in literature can be seen to uphold the gender binary by reproducing established gender norms and stereotypes. This idea can be applied to the novel through Fevvers, whose gender performance is "fragmented and unstable, rather than universal and unchanging" (Trevenna 274). Specifically, I suggest that Fevvers' gender performance can be read as both reinscriptive and subversive. In particular, Fevvers performs her gender according to whether she is on stage, performing for an audience, or whether she is offstage, performing for herself. Framed in this way, there exists two Fevvers: the famed aerialist who uses her female sexuality to create a spectacle of herself, and the hybrid woman, half-human, half-animal, who defies binarised constructions of identity.

To begin, Fevvers' can be seen to uphold the gender binary through a hegemonic performance of femininity. In particular, this is exemplified when Fevvers "creates herself as a spectacle" (Dennis 117) while performing on stage. An aerialist famed for her hybrid body as much as her skills as a performer, Fevvers emphasises her exotic sexuality onstage in order to encourage the mystery of her hybrid existence—encompassed in her slogan "is she fact or is she fiction?" (Carter 2). Trevenna asserts that gender is "manifested as an outward, public show based on the creation of a specifically gendered appearance" (269). The concept of a 'public show' is taken literally here, as Fevvers performs onstage in front of a global audience. The novel draws attention to how Fevvers "exhibited herself before the eyes of the audience" (Carter 13), emphasising the performative nature of this act. This is reinforced further when Fevvers asserts "I served my apprenticeship in *being looked at*—at being the object of the eye of the beholder" (Carter 23). This upholds the gender binary by positioning Fevvers as an object. The gender binary legitimises the dominance of men over women, reproduced through Western Humanist dualisms that equate humanness with masculinity and therefore otherness with femininity. A significant binary underpinning this construction is subject/object, in which men are granted subjectivity and women are reduced to objects (Braidotti 2). Rogers agrees, stating that the man/woman divide contributes to the "mass cultural objectification of women in general" ("Ideas and Identity"). As such, the fact that Fevvers' gender performance can be seen to play a role in her own objectification reinforces the gender binary. This is emphasised further by Fevvers' gendered appearance. Trevenna explains that for women in Western society, "clothes and makeup play a vital role in gender construction" (269). When performing onstage, Fevvers wears heavy makeup and revealing clothes which serve to emphasise her femininity and sexuality. For example, the novel states that Fevvers' "leotard was adorned with a spangle of sequins on her crotch and nipples, nothing else" (Carter 12). Fevvers' clothing draws attention to her sexuality by literally guiding the audience's eyes to her reproductive

organs. As Walser wryly remarks, “she tries too damn' hard” (Carter 13). Her makeup operates to stress her sexuality further: “on her red mouth there was an artificial smile” (Carter 13). Fevvers’ clothes and makeup are integral to her gender performance onstage, constructing her femininity as a spectacle in order to emphasise her exotic hybridity. In doing so, her performance upholds the gender binary by reproducing stereotypical depictions of female sexuality and objectification.

Fevvers deliberately plays into this gender performance through over-exaggerated displays of femininity and sexuality. This can be seen in a scene where Walser watches Fevvers perform onstage. He notes that there is “nothing subtle about her appeal” (Carter 9); an observation that is supported by the descriptions of Fevvers’ appearance analysed above. The novel states that “on her back she bore an airy burden of furled plumage as gaudy as that of a Brazilian cockatoo” (Carter 14). Moreover, Fevvers flirts with the crowd by “waving and blowing kisses” (Carter 18). To this, Trevenna states that “Carter highlights the physical acts involved in the performance of femininity” (270). More than this, however, the novel uses Fevvers’ performance to create a spectacle from her hybridity. This is exemplified in the climax of the show, in which Fevvers’ finally reveals her wings to the audience. The novel states that “in a backwards gesture of benediction … her wings spread, too, a polychromatic unfolding fully sex feet across, spread of an eagle, a condor, an albatross fed to excess on the same diet that makes flamingos pink” (Carter 17). This theatrical description plays into the spectacle of Fevvers, constructing her as more than human through an association with exotic animality. It is in this passage that the novel appears to engage directly with performative theory. As he watches her twist, turn, and somersault herself through the air, aided by her wings, Walser remarks “you did not think of calculation when you saw her, so finely judged was her performance” (Carter 16). Fevvers’ performance hinges on the mystery that is her exotic existence. The crowds flock to see her perform in the hopes of confirming whether she is indeed

fact or fiction. This allows Fevvers to profit from her hybridity, affording her a life of luxury and fame. However, the spectacle that surrounds Fevvers ultimately confines her. In order to maintain the enigma of 'Fevvers', she is forced into a continual performance of exoticised femininity. This is because if the truth is revealed that Fevvers is indeed a hybrid being, existing simultaneously as both human and bird, she will be denounced as a freak and subjected to social ostracism. In essence, a spectacle of exoticism brings in an audience; a "spectacle of the freakish and unnatural" exposes Fevvers to potential harm (Carter 100).

Building from this, it can be seen that Fevvers' gender performance is therefore "a strategy of survival" (Butler "Performative Acts" 522). As stated, the way in which Fevvers' sexualises herself through makeup and clothing, alongside her flirtatious actions, presents her as a "marvellous present" for the audience (Carter 17). The novel establishes that Fevvers is an orphan from a working-class background, who was raised in a brothel by a sex worker called Lizzie. Given her background, it makes sense that Fevvers sees female sexuality as a locus in which to gain economic control. As such, Fevvers' hegemonic performance of femininity allows her agency over her own sexual objectification, it becomes a necessary "strategy of survival" (Butler "Performative Acts" 522). Beyond this, Fevvers' performance enables her to create a spectacle out of her hybridity. As a half-human, half-bird creature, Fevvers is vulnerable to being othered. However, by using her hybridity as key aspect of her performance onstage, Fevvers is able to exoticise this otherness. The novel addresses this directly, drawing attention to the paradoxical nature of Fevvers' performance onstage. Fevvers must create a spectacle out of her hybridity, encouraging audiences to spectacle about the nature of her wings, whilst simultaneously maintaining an illusion over its truth—as the novel states, "seeing is believing" (Carter 17). Walser acknowledges this, arguing that "For, in order to earn a living, might not a genuine bird-woman … have to pretend she was an artificial one?" (Carter 18). He goes further, remarking that "an authentic miracle must purport to be a hoax, in order to gain

credit in the world" (Carter 18). Fevvers' performance onstage not only allows her agency over her sexual objectification as a woman therefore, it also enables her to protect herself from social ostracisms by creating an illusion around her hybridity. As Douglas asserts, "Fevvers critiques rather than controls how others publicise her" (6). The novel appears to affirm this idea, stating "as a symbolic woman, she has a meaning, as an anomaly, none" (Carter 288). Although hegemonic it its embodiment of gendered stereotypes about female sexuality, Fevvers' performance can also therefore be seen as subversive. Gargano supports this, noting that in certain performances "re-inscription might actually play a subversive role" (58).

The subversive nature of Fevvers' gender performance is made clear by her actions offstage. After finishing her show, Fevvers takes time to remove her makeup and adornments. Carter writes "the greasepaint floated off Fevvers' face as Lizzie wiped away the cold cream … Fevvers reappeared, flushed … to find herself again" (Carter 20). This highlights the inherent performance required to maintain her image. The sexualised, hybrid spectacle that she presents to the audience is revealed to be merely an act, a mask that can be removed offstage. This is emphasised by Walser, who comments that after removing her makeup, Fevvers "looked more like a dray mare than an angel" (Carter 13). Moreover, it draws attention to how femininity is performed within Western society. The traits and additions that construct Fevvers to be a woman—her makeup, her clothing, her deliberate displays of sexuality—are cast aside to reveal the person underneath. Nikandam agrees, stating that "when Fevvers removes her eyelashes, she reveals the imitation of her gender identity" (49). Similarly, Trevenna contends that the novel "makes literal the well-established identification of femininity as a mask or masquerade" (Trevenna 270). This is reinforced by the way in which Fevvers' performance of gender destabilises the gender binary. In particular, Fevvers defies the gender binary by exhibiting traits and behaviours that draw on both masculinity and femininity. For example, instance, Fevvers openly farts in front of Walser, "better out than in, sir" (Carter 32), drinks

heavily (15), and speaks with an "extraordinarily raucous and metallic voice" (16). Fevvers' performance can be seen as subversive, as she refuses to be confined to the behaviours deemed 'acceptable' for woman according to the gender binary. Nikandam agrees, stating that this display "confounds accepted gender norms and polarity" (48). When Fevvers removes her makeup and return to her natural state, Walser questions her gender identity, "it flickered through his mind: is she really a man?" (Carter 35). The fact that Walser questions Fevvers' status as a woman highlights the inherent performance required for gender identity. Butler asserts that "the moment in which one cannot with surety read the body one sees, is precisely the moment when one is no longer sure whether the body encountered is that of a man or a woman" (qtd. in Nikandam 49). Thus, the novel subverts the gender binary by having Fevvers perform gender in a way that defies binarised concepts of masculinity and femininity. Ultimately, Bannock argues that the novel uses Fevvers' gender performance to express "alternative ways of expressing the female subject" (206).

Human Performativity

According to Butler, there are several elements required for performativity. Most important is that performativity is founded in a collective context rather than through individual acts ("Performative Acts" 526). Butler points to the gender binary as an example of this, which defines gender through a two-sex model of male and female despite the existence of multiple sexes and gender identities. Western philosophical tradition has defined the human through similarly limited boundaries. In the first chapter of this thesis, I argued that not only has the human been constructed as a rational and moral subject, but it is implicitly associated with notions of masculinity, whiteness, and heteronormativity. Although presented as universal, the construction of humanity through Humanistic tradition is therefore an exclusive identity. Indeed, a wealth of scholarship dedicated to challenging this construction has emerged during

the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Despite this, the Western construction of humanness remains deeply ingrained within collective identity. Braidotti agrees, noting that this construction remains a "structural element of our cultural practice … embedded in both theory and institutional and pedagogical practice" (2). She goes further, arguing that this "humanistic universalism … sets standards not only for individuals, but also for their cultures" (2). This highlights how humanity becomes a performance rooted in a collective identity, rather than an identity freely formed by the individual.

Moreover, Butler emphasises that performative identity is not only collective but also historical. For gender, this performance is based on certain acts and behaviours that have historically been attributed to biological sex (Butler "Performative Acts" 519). Specifically, gender performativity rests on the historical construction of the gender binary. Within this two-sex model, humans are either male or female; through gender performance, humans become either man or woman. Gender is subsequently performed according to notions of masculinity and femininity that define the human within this gender binary. For instance, a 'male-bodied' individual performs masculinity in order to be seen as a man, drawing on associated traits of masculinity, such as strength and dominance. Peter Digeser explains that Butler's conception of identity performance "rests upon the assumption of a thoroughly historicised notion of the human subject" (656). As established, the construction of humanity has evolved through Western philosophical tradition and its roots can be traced back to the writings of Ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. This construction defines the human narrowly through concepts of rationality, morality, and subjectivity. Butler points to how masculinity and femininity are continually evolving as gender descriptors, whose meaning differs across geographical, cultural, and political contexts ("Undoing Gender" 10). Likewise, humanness is a construction that is continually evolving. The Western philosophical tradition exemplifies this; for instance, the Cartesian subject is an expansion of the Ancient Greek conceptualisation

of the rational animal (Baker and Morris 15). Furthermore, the construction of humanity continues to evolve. This is evident by the emergence of new identities and subjectivities, including that of posthumanism which acknowledges the potential agency, and therefore perhaps humanness, of cyborg figures.

The human is constructed through dominant dualisms, notably those of human/animal, subject/object, mind/body, and human/machine. The performance of humanness is therefore based on the associated traits that define the human in opposition to the other. Interestingly, these traits differ according to the dualism that they relate to. For instance, the Cartesian subject establishes the human through notions of rationality and morality. This can be seen through the human/animal divide which defines humanity as "rational, intelligent, and morally considerable" in contrast to nonhuman animals' assumed innate savagery (Kim 313). However, the Cartesian subject has been challenged in light of growing technological advancements through the human/machine divide. As machines become more intelligent and rational, the human has been reconstructed as "emotional, organic, and mortal" (Balsamo 146). The associated traits that these dualisms define the human through are therefore paradoxical and often contradictory. This destabilises the construction of humanness as an innate identity, highlighting how these descriptors are continually evolving in response to changing discourses. More than that, however, it points to how humanness can be performed. In relation to nonhuman animals, the human can perform their humanness according to the human/animal divide. For instance, humans emphasise their exceptionalism over animals through notions of rationality and subjectivity, allowing for the continued dominance over nonhuman animals. Similarly, in distinguishing themselves from cyborgs, the human can perform humanness according to the human/machine divide; a concept that is currently playing out in modern literature and film.

In constructing gender as performative, Butler emphasises that gender is produced by repeated action—an act of continual *doing* rather than an innate state of *being*. Consequently, performativity is understood through a process of embodiment. The concept of embodiment is relatively new: Jackie Kay explains that "in contrast to the lack of structures and prohibitions of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance saw the advent of more strictly rule governed behaviour" (119). Exploring the history of embodiment in her chapter "Embodying Identity", Kay notes that court society set a standard of social customs, in which certain activities were limited to the private arena. Formerly acceptable behaviours became labelled as uncouth, such as spitting and eating with your mouth open (Kay 119). This drew on notions of the civilised subject, constructed through Cartesian theory, which served to distinguish humans from animals through the human/animal divide. This relates to the "tacit collective agreement" that Butler refers to in "Performative Acts" (522). An important part of this was how the civilised subject was enacted through the body. Kay states that "court society developed institutionalised codes of practices, based around the body and embodiment", referring to this as the 'civilised body' (119). According to Kay, the civilised body would "perform appropriately according to rules that have been internalised" (119). Kay's statement here directly pertains to performativity—as Butler states, embodied performance "renders social laws explicit" ("Performative Acts" 526). As such, the construction of a civilised subject is integral to the concept of embodiment and therefore performativity.

Embodiment is most effective when it conceals its own performance. This process of concealment can be seen in the way that the emergence of the civilised body corresponds with the development of the mind/body dualism. The mind/body dualism played a significant role in constructing the Cartesian subject, emphasising the mind as a distinguishing marker between human and nonhuman animals. Consequently, "the body was for a long time either denied or dismissed, as if the thinking subject were disembodied" (Kay 120). In doing so, the

embodiment of human performativity was also denied. Mellor agrees, arguing that the "embodiedness of humanity is hidden by the division of mind from body" (129). In presenting the body as merely an extension of the mind, as Descartes purports, humanity was constructed to be innately formed through the mind. Under Cartesian theory, the role of the body in the formation of human identity is therefore rendered obsolete. When performativity becomes apparent, it disrupts this by emphasising the significance of the link between our mind and body through the process of embodiment. As Maren Wehrle states, "the constitution of subjectivity … requires at the most basic level some kind of bodily performativity" (365).

Consequently, identity becomes "a construction that regularly conceals its genesis" (Butler "Performative Acts" 522). In reference to gender performativity, Butler explains that the two-sex model sets a standard for gender performance based on notions of masculinity and femininity. This performance continually reproduces the gender binary, promoting the idea that gender is a naturalised, biological fact. As Butler surmises, "the construction compels one's belief in its necessity and naturalness" ("Performative Acts" 522). In a parallel way, Cartesian theory presented the human as a rational subject, whose very consciousness is proof of its innate subjectivity: "I think, therefore I am" (Descartes IV 18). Integral to this construction was the presumed agency and autonomy of the human subject, understood through the mind's dominance over the body. Kay asserts that the Cartesian subject "exercised agency in order to define their embodiment as civilised" (119). She goes further, arguing that this embodiment was a "socialisation process, whereby 'natural' functions are hidden" (119). This established a standard of human behaviour that reinforced and maintained the Western construction of the humanity as innate.

Performativity can be seen to have a dual function in that performance can be either reinscriptive or subversive. Unconscious, habitual, and hegemonic performances of identity establish, maintain, and legitimises the dominant construction. Conversely, self-conscious,

alternative, and deliberately artificial performances can challenge these constructions by revealing the performativity which underlies it. Hegemonic gender performativity serves an important purpose by maintaining and legitimising the gender binary. The gender binary is a significant dualism within Western society, carrying both social and legal implications. For example, a binarised gender identity has long been seen as integral to personhood, which Tsitas calls "the necessary threshold requirement to the application of constitutional rights" (100). Wehrle supports this, noting that the gender performance results in "the properly identified (legal) subject, which is either man or woman" (369). Speaking to this, Butler states that "the body is invariably transformed into his or her body through its gendered appearance" ("Performative Acts" 523). The gender binary therefore creates a standard of personhood. Butler argues that "as a strategy of survival, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (522). Indeed, many gender non-conforming individuals, notably those within the transgender and nonbinary communities, are fighting globally to have their human rights recognised. Moreover, intersex babies are often subjected to invasive surgery at birth to 'correct' atypical genitalia (Feder 19). Kay argues that intersex babies represent "contradictory or confusing sexual identities" that "cause alarm, confusion, and distress" in heteronormative cultures that adhere to the gender binary (104). These examples highlight the significant consequences of failing to perform gender 'correctly' according to this binary.

Extending Butler's ideas beyond gender, I argue that performativity operates to maintain and legitimise the construction of human being itself. The experience of humanness is "rooted in historical, cultural and ethical understandings of what it means to be human" (Tsitas 106). Within these understandings, dominant dualisms play an important role, notably those of human/animal, subject/object, culture/nature, and human/machine. Wehrle argues that those who fall outside of these binary structures "must therefore, by definition, be considered unnatural and abnormal" (371). With the gender binary, Wehrle's statement can understood

through the historic and continued oppression and persecution of gender non-conforming and intersex individuals. Applying this to humanness, my discussion in Chapter Two of this thesis examined the implications for those who exist both within and outside of dominant dualisms through hybrid beings. Hybrid beings blur and distort the boundaries between human, animal, and machine, confronting the construction of humanity as innate. As Birke and Michael state, "hybrids, after all, challenge us to define what species are and what is human" (245). Tsitas agrees, believing that hybrid beings reveal "the anxiety about the notion of what is considered human" (100).

Butler asserts that "gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (520). I argue that this can be understood through the dominant dualisms and discourses that construct the human through exclusive terms and in opposition to the other. Failure to perform humanity 'correctly' carries similar, if not greater, consequences than gender performativity. In her article "Boundary Transgressions", Tsitas explores the role of chimeras—"manufactured hybrid" beings—in science fiction and considers the way in which their existence intrinsically challenges not only the human/animal divide, but the construction of humanity as a whole. Tsitas argues that as the boundaries of human, animal, and machine begin to blur, it has become more difficult to define the humanity. She suggests that consequently there is "a sliding scale of humanness" (106), with 'pure' humans on one side, 'pure' animals on the other, and chimeras existing within this spectrum. She argues that "those who most exemplify humanness would be granted personhood" (106). Speciesism highlights how beings are humanised or dehumanised depending on their association with humanity or animality. I contend that performativity becomes another standard through which to determine personhood. The construction of humanity has been used against certain groups of people that do not perform humanity in the 'correct' way—given that this performativity is rooted in Western dualisms this is particularly relevant for communities who are othererd within our

society. For instance, forms of difference, such as gender, race, and class, are used as tools of othering, separating groups of people from the established notion of 'humanity'. This has been used to justify human rights atrocities throughout history, including slavery, genocide, and colonisation. Thus, humanness, like gender, "is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (Butler "Performative Acts" 522).

The idea of performativity inherently disrupts the binaries of subject/object and mind/body, which play an important role in constructing the Cartesian subject. This is because embodiment recognises the agency of the human whilst simultaneously emphasising that the human is a discursive subject. In doing so, it blurs the boundaries between subjectivity and objectivity. More significantly, it acknowledges the role of the body in shaping identity, directly challenging the mind/body dualism that constructs the Cartesian subject. Embodiment rests on the idea that "human beings are made subjects" through a process of mutually-sustaining reproduction of dominant discourses (Foucault 777). As Wehrle argues, discourses dictate "who we are and determine what we do and experience" (374). Yet, embodiment also requires some existence of individual agency, hence the argument that one is performing their humanity. Kay agrees, asserting that "it is through the body that we present ourselves to others and make sense of our identities" (133). Wehrle speaks to this dichotomy, noting that performativity is situated between these dualities: "between being acted upon and acting; the social and the individual; passivity and activity" (366). Thus, gender and humanness can be seen as identities which are "both intentional and performative" (Butler "Performative Acts" 522).

As discursive subjects, our performance of humanness is based on established norms of human identity. The norms are, of course, influenced by dominant discourses and dualisms. However, if Kay and Wehrle are correct in that embodiment requires agency, does performance allow us to push and challenge the boundaries of human identity? In Chapter Two, I explored this idea through hybrid beings. As both human and other, the very existence of hybrid beings

disrupts the notion of a stable human identity, blurring the boundaries that define humanity in opposition to the other. I suggest that performativity is another means in which to explore the formations of new identities and subjectivities, which ultimately challenge the Western construction of humanity. Specifically, I argue that performativity provides a method in which to subvert established norms of identity. Wehrle appears to agree, drawing attention to the "subversive potential" of the process of embodiment (370). Specifically, he argues that "non-normative bodies … are able to trouble or disrupt the established system" (370). Similarly, Kay states that "the body is not only represented and inscribed, it is also experienced", believing that this allows room to negotiate identities (133). She explains that this is due to the way in which the body exists "at the intersection of the personal and the social" (133).

It is worth noting here that Butler herself seems cautious in regards to the "subversive potential" of performativity. In particular, Butler's theory limits the agency of a subject to form their own identity independent of outside discourse. In reference to Butler, Wehrle states "she understands this outside as produced by the same normative order … functioning only in relation to it" (370). Digeser explores this in his article "Performativity Trouble", noting that Butler's theory of performativity "rests upon the presumption that the legitimacy of [performance] depends upon being repeated and reexperienced" (659). He suggests that if this is true, the best option for subversion would therefore be to "stop acting out the script … refuse to play one's part" (659). However, as both Wehrle and Digeser draw attention to, Butler presents performance as a reproduction of established norms and therefore is "clearly not one's act alone" ("Performative Acts" 525). Although Butler acknowledges that "there are nuanced and individual ways of *doing* one's gender", she emphasises that this performance remains embedded within cultural and social discourse ("Performative Acts" 525). However, I wish to entertain the possibility that performativity allows for subversion. My thesis focus centres hybrid beings who challenge and disrupt constructions of humanity. I am therefore interested

in exploring the way in which the boundaries of humanity can blur and evolve, allowing for the possibility of new forms of human identity and subjectivities.

Kee-Yoon Nahm examines the scope of performativity to challenge stereotypes of identity in his article "Subvert/Reinscribe". In reference to gender performativity, Nahm suggests that performance "can both produce and modify gender" (92). However, his view aligns with Butler's in that he is reluctant to characterise performance as fully subversive. In particular, Nahm argues that subversive performance still relies on the "same modalities of power that produce normative identity categories" (92). Although it is possible to subvert the gender binary through performance, with drag theatre being an example of this, this performance remains embedded in preconceived notions of gender expression. Indeed, Butler frames drag as a "parodic repetition" of gender norms (qtd. in Nahm 92). In parodying an act for subversive means, the performance is directly tied to the norms that construct it. Exploring this idea through a variety of performances, Nahm argues that ultimately "the stereotype is *both* subverted and reinscribed … performance *both* succeeds and fails" (95). Despite declaring performativity as not fully subversive, Nahm acknowledges that through individual performance one can challenge and destabilise constructions of identity. Regardless of the efficacy of subversive performance, what is clear is that performativity challenges and disrupts the notion that identity is innate.

Literary Analysis

Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* (1991) and Michel Faber's *Under the Skin* (2001) are two novels that explore the limits and boundaries of human identity. Both novels feature hybrid beings that exist at the intersection of the human and the other, which allows the authors to question how we perform our humanness. In both novels, the hybrid characters must pass as human within society, yet for vastly different reasons. Yod, a human-like cyborg created illegally by wealthy scientist Avram, must learn how to act as a human in order to pass without

scrutiny in a society where his very existence is outlawed. During Yod's lessons, he develops a deep desire to not only understand humanity but to experience it for himself. Yod falls in love, experiences the sublime in the face of nature, and expresses a longing to be accepted as human within his society. In contrast, Isserley's story is one of alienation. As half-human, half-vodsel, Isserley is othered by both her identities. Surgically modified to appear as a vodsel, Isserley passes as one in order to lure hitchhikers into her car, with whom she then sedates and transports back to the farm to begin the processing of their bodies into meat. Isserley's relationship to her humanity is tenuous, as is her relationships with others. Socially ostracised from the humans on the farm, Isserley's limited interaction with the vodsels ranges from degrading to traumatic. I argue that *Body of Glass* and *Under the Skin* present humanness as performative through Yod and Isserley. In particular, the idea that these characters can 'pass' as human reconstructs humanness as a performance rather than an innate identity. In saying this, the novels' depiction of human identity is ambiguous and open to interpretation. However, I contend that humanness is constructed as performative in both novels. To illustrate my argument, I will explore how Yod and Isserley perform their humanness. Within this, I will consider the relationship between performativity and personhood, exploring the extent to which Yod's and Isserley's performance grants them human status in their societies.

Christine Cornea argues that "questions of human beingness and personhood are currently being fought over the fused body of the cyborg" (276). This theoretical debate lies at the heart of Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*, which examines the boundaries of human identity through the cyborg Yod. The novel questions the position of the posthuman in relation to the human, exploring whether humanness is innate or performative. In the dystopian future of *Body of Glass*, human-like robots have been outlawed and Yod's cyborg status must therefore remain a secret. Hence the arrival of Shira, recently returned home to Tikva, who is hired by Avram to teach Yod how to pass as human. *Body of Glass* is thus a story about transformation. This is

exemplified by Yod, whose evolution from machine to man centres the novel's story. Alongside Yod, I contend that the novel's construction of humanness evolves too. The novel initially presents humanness as innate, drawing on humanist notions of the Cartesian subject to illustrate this. However, as Yod becomes increasingly human, this construction is subsequently subverted in the novel. Human identity is reconstructed as performative, presenting humanness as "an identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts" (Butler "Performative Acts" 519). The novel opens the boundaries of human identity by presenting it as performative rather than innate, allowing humanness to be extended to the cyborg. Speaking to this, Gurman asserts that "the novel works through humanist ideals to articulate a posthuman vision" (462).

As a cyborg, Yod exists at the intersection of several significant binaries: between human/machine, human/other, and human/posthuman. Yod is therefore a destabilising figure for constructions of identity based on dominant dualisms, notably the Western Humanist construction of the human—a point I argued in Chapter Two of this thesis. However, the subversive potential of Yod is not immediately clear, but rather develops in relation to his growing humanity. In fact, the novel opens by presenting Yod through relatively narrow and humanist conceptions of the human. Gurman argues that "Yod is a traditional, albeit technologically-advanced, manifestation of the liberal-humanist subject" (461). Yod is created to resemble a human, and the novel makes a deliberate choice to present him as male. As I discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, the association between masculinity and humanity is deeply entrenched within humanist theory. As Braidotti asserts, "the idea of the 'human' … has historically been the image of Man" (1). As such, the fact that Yod is male can be seen to emphasise his inherent humanness. The novel engages with this idea directly when Shira questions why Yod was made to be male: "what did it mean to speak of a machine as having a sex at all?" (Piercy 71). Avram responds defensively, saying "I felt the more closely he resembled a human being, the less likely he would be detected" (71). There are two points to

be made here. Firstly, this scene illustrates the argument Butler makes in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" that gender is integral to the construction of a subject's identity. Specifically, she states that through gender performance "the body is invariably transformed into his or her body" (523). The relevance here is the way in which gender is seen to humanise Yod in the novel. Before being informed of Yod's cyborg status, Shira refers to Yod as "him" as he appears visually to be both human and male. Once aware of his cyborg status, however, Shira instantly reduces Yod to the impersonal pronoun of "it". This scene draws on rhetoric of the human/machine divide, in which humans are granted subjectivity and machines are constructed as objects. Moreover, it reinforces the connection between humanness and gender as mutually-sustaining identities.

The second, and perhaps more significant, point to make from this scene is the way in which humanness is associated with masculinity and maleness. Yod is created with the purpose that he will pass as human. According to Avram, this means that Yod must be male. In doing so, the novel expressly articulates the humanist idea that masculinity is an intrinsic element of one's humanity. Wolmark argues that "male cyborgs inevitably reinforce the link between rationality, technology, and masculinity" (140). Applying this to the novel, Yi asserts that Yod is a symbol of "Avram's pure logic and rationality" (128), essential characteristics of the Cartesian subject. Similarly, Booker contends that Yod "has been programmed according to the masculine ideology of the Enlightenment" (346). Specifically, this draws on the binaries of man/woman, culture/nature, and mind/body. These binaries assign traits according to a system of dominance and subordination. Within each of these oppositional binaries, 'Man' is positioned on the dominant side (Mellor 129). Thus, Avram's decision to make Yod male speaks to his desire to construct him as the "abstract ideal and symbol of classical humanity" (Braidotti and Hlavajova 343). This is reinforced further on in the novel through Malkah, Shira's grandmother, who says "Avram made him male-entirely ... that was the ideal: pure

reason, pure logic, pure violence" (Piercy 148). This emphasises the link between masculinity and humanness further.

The humanist depiction of the human can also be understood through Yod's lessons on how to be human. Avram instructs Shira that Yod "needs to be educated in how to speak to humans, how to behave socially, how to handle his functions" (Piercy 71). These instructions form the basis of how Yod performs humanness. Importantly, they also draw on Cartesian theory, which associates humanness with notions of rationality and civility. In particular, this relates to Kay's understanding of the civilised body, which she states "is able to rationalise and exercise control over the emotions" (119). Kay's explanation of the civilised body mirrors Avram's expectation that Yod learns "how to behave socially" and "handle his functions" (Piercy 71). The construction of the human through Cartesian thinking is emphasised further through Yod himself. The novel draws on the human/machine divide by initially presenting Yod as naïve and very literal. For example, when Shira remarks to Yod, "Put me in my place, didn't you?", Yod interprets this literally by offering her instructions to her house: "Your place is at the end of the street" (Piercy 88). Shira responds by saying, "You're going to have to learn to use metaphor and simile, Yod, if you're ever to sound halfway human" (Piercy 89). Shira's comments draw on Cartesian theory, which positions abstract language as a signifier of one's humanity and as a distinguishing characteristic of the boundary between humans and animals/machines. As Louden explains, although machines and animals can "use language in causally determined ways … they cannot use language freely and creatively" as humans do (381). Yod's literal view of the world and social interactions therefore emphasises his cyborg status. At this point, based on communication alone, Yod is more machine than human. This is emphasised further by Shira's lessons with Yod, which primarily revolve around the complexities of human emotions and language. For instance, their first lesson together is centred around "metaphorical thinking, the ability to create analogies" (Piercy 87). Learning

how to understand and communicate through abstract language is prioritised as a means to humanise Yod. This shows how the novel distinguishes between machine rationality and human rationality. As a machine, Yod's rationality is tied to his vast knowledge of the sciences—information that has, of course, been programmed into him. Human rationality, on the other hand, is associated with abstract thinking and complex emotional intelligence through Western Humanism. Moreover, Humanism presents this as an innate trait. Human rationality does not require programming or teaching; rather, it emerges naturally from our consciousness (Morris and Baker 18).

In saying this, the humanist construction of the human is subsequently subverted through Yod's human performance. An example this is the fact that Yod is taught to be human by women. Although he is created by Avram, it is Shira and Malkah who are tasked with humanising Yod. This is significant because it highlights how the novel challenges Western constructions of the human. Avram creates Yod as male to emphasise his humanness. This is subsequently subverted in the novel, which suggests that masculinity is more aligned with machines than humans. This destabilises several humanist binaries, most notably the gender binary, which associates men and masculinity with the mind, civility, and rationality—traits of the 'human'—and women and femininity with the body, emotions, and irrationality (Braidotti 2). Yod operates to destabilise this binary, blurring the boundary between human and machine, as well as man and woman. When Yod begins his lessons with Shira, he is both male and machine. Although intellectually advanced, Yod is primitive in his understanding of human emotions. The novel emphasises that humanity is formed through human connection. As such, Yod's limitations in this area operate to construct him as a machine. Given that Yod has been created in Avram's image, this can be seen to challenge the relationship between masculinity and humanness. In particular, the novel makes reference to how Yod's masculine programming constructs him as a machine. During his first outing in the real world, for example, Yod is

struck by a rose's thorn. His immediate reaction is one of anger: Yod "ripped [the plant] from the wall, trellis and staples and all, twisting it so that it uprooted" (Piercy 90). As this is Yod's first lesson with Shira, he is yet to be humanised. Rather than learned behaviour, Yod's violent reaction is therefore a result of his internal programming. Pavani agrees, stating that "Yod's violent urges are programmed into him" (61). Avram is responsible for Yod's programming, and therefore it can be argued that the novel presents masculinity as intrinsically violent. This is exemplified by the fact that Yod's masculinity makes him a machine; the influence of femininity ultimately humanises him.

This is shown through Malkah, who plays an integral role in perfecting Yod's programming. It is established in the novel that Yod is Avram's eighth attempt at creating a humanised robot. Prior attempts have resulted in cyborgs that had "malfunctioned" and were "uncontrollably violent" (Piercy 73). It is only with Malkah's help that Avram is successful; Yod, of course, being the result. Specifically, Malkah extends Yod's "pleasure and pain centres", as well as his "capacity to imagine" (Piercy 107). Vara Neverow argues that "Yod is a successful project not because of his male maker's genius in cybernetic design … but because of his female programmer's genius in socialisation skills" (27). The combined genius of Avram and Malkah allows Yod to be both rational and emotional. As Yi puts it, "Malkah's emotional sensors counterbalance Avram's pure logic" (128). In fact, the novel states this explicitly. For instance, Malkah explains to Shira, "my programming made him more useful, because it brought him closer to the human" (418). This clearly indicates how the novel constructs humanness through emotion rather than reason. In doing so, the novel challenges humanist conceptions of the human, notably the Cartesian subject. Within this, the novel subverts the gender binary by having a woman play the integral role in humanising Yod. As Glover contends, "it is Malkah's programming, therefore, that changes Yod from machine to man" (4). This reveals how the novel subverts Western constructions of the human, allowing Yod to be emotionally-

intelligent, empathetic, and thus more ‘human’ through his association with women. Ultimately, Booker argues that Yod becomes “intellectually androgynous” (346). Although subversive in its effect, it is worth noting that the novel therefore upholds the traditional gender binary through Yod, as it associates masculinity with reason and femininity with emotion.

As a cyborg, Yod must learn how to be human. This idea can be interpreted in several ways. On the one hand, the fact that Yod must learn what comes naturally to humans aligns with the view that humanness is innate. On the other hand, the very notion that humanness can be taught, and therefore learnt, constructs it as performative. In her analysis of H. G. Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Greta Colombani notes that “essentialist and performative strands coexist in the way humanity is represented in the novel” (150). The same could be said for Piercy’s *Body of Glass*, as constructions of human identity are disrupted throughout the novel. It is established that Yod is the product of advanced technology, programmed with extensive knowledge of “cybernetic, mathematical and systems analysis programming, probability theory, up-to-date scientific knowledge … general history, forty languages”, as well as a vast array of Judaic religious teachings and texts (Piercy 70). Despite his sophisticated programming, however, Yod requires lessons on how to be human. The novel therefore presents humanness as an internal characteristic: an intrinsic “human essence” (Gurman 461). Additionally, it cannot be programmed or replicated. That Yod seems to lack this internal trait constructs him as more machine than human. As such, humanness is presented in the novel not just as an innate identity, but also as an exclusively human one. Pavani appears to agree with this interpretation, arguing that Yod is taught to “emulate emotions” (61) in order to “simulate humanity” (62). Her word choice here illustrates my point: Yod is only able to replicate, but not truly embody or experience, humanness. Dongshin Yi agrees, asserting that “the cyborg ever imitates the human but never *is* the human” (131).

The novel engages with this idea through Yod himself. As a result of his lessons with Shira, Yod develops a genuine desire to understand and experience humanness. This is partly due to his growing discomfort with his hybrid status. After reading Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, for example, Yod grows despondent that he is also "a monster … something unnatural" (Piercy 150). Because of this, Yod doubts his own humanity, believing his humanness is simply a façade. This is exemplified when Yod wonders "Am I imitating behaviour that I cannot match? Am I pretending at something I'll always fail?" (Piercy 238). Yod's words speak to his fear that, as part machine, he will never be fully human. Consequently, Yod is left feeling that he is simply playing pretend at being human. In reference to this, Pavani asserts "he is unable to realise if he is close or distant … or if he is even capable of reaching it" (62). Although Yod can come close to understanding human identity, he cannot truly embody it. From this perspective, the novel appears to be constructing humanity as innate.

On the contrary, however, I contend that *Body of Glass* ultimately constructs humanness as performative. The novel rests on the idea that humanness is something that can be taught and learnt. The fact that Yod, a non-human cyborg being, can learn to be human presents human identity as performative "in opposition to essentialist conceptions of it as something innate and unchangeable" (Colombani 139). Pavani agrees, arguing that in the novel "the idea of human ceases to have any relation to individuals of that species; it is reduced to learned behaviour" (62). Pavani's argument draws parallels with Butler's theory on performativity, specifically her assertion that identity is constructed through "a series of acts … renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (Butler "Performative Acts" 523). Despite his doubts about every attaining an authentic humanness that goes beyond mere imitation, Yod does succeed in learning to be human. Notably, Yod learns to be human by observing and replicating human behaviour. For instance, he tells Shira "with every observation, I am learning about you, understanding Malkah and every one of you" (Piercy 377). The idea that humanness can be

understood through observable actions and behaviours support its construction as performative. According to Butler's theory, identity is formed though a continual act of *doing* rather than an innate state of *being*. An important aspect of this is how performance is enacted through the body. The concept of embodiment is integral to theories of performativity, emphasising the way in which identity is formed through the body. This disrupts the Cartesian mind/body dualism. A wealth of scholarship has emerged over the twenty and twenty-first centuries which challenges the separation of the conscious mind from the material body. In science fiction narratives, however, the mind/body dualism is reimagined. Sherryl Vint explains that the advanced technologies of these narratives allow for the "rejection of embodiment and embrace of an existence in cyberspace" (102). She expands further, asserting that "in cyberspace, one is the mind, effortlessly moving beyond the limitations of the human body" (103). Additionally, Parker-Starbuck contends that in the "age of integrated technologies …the physical body can more easily be thought of as fragmented" ("Cyborg Theatre" 3). This is exemplified in the futuristic world of *Body of Glass*, in which users can plug into the base, an interactive cyberspace that allows for "full immersion in the virtual world" (Glover 2). Significantly, users enter the base by inserting a plug "into the little silver socket at [their] temple" (Piercy 8), which provides them with the ability "to access machine language, [and] translate it instantly into numbers and words" (259). Users project their consciousness into the base, leaving their bodies behind, "inanimate [and] deserted" (Piercy 152). Compared to the humans, Yod is able to fully immerse himself into cyberspace. For example, Yod can change his form to become translucent (Piercy 266), spend extended hours plugged in (152), and has the "multi-tasking ability" to operate across the base on various sites (145). The mind/body dualism constructs humans, as conscious subjects, to be dominant over animals and machines, whose embodiedness reduces them to objects. The novel subverts this idea by reversing the mind/body dualism. In cyberspace, it is the cyborg who masters the mind and all its capabilities, whilst the

humans are limited by their embodiedness. This is made clearer by the setting of the novel: in this "ecological dystopia … the very ability of humans to survive depends on their access to technology" (Glover 2). Thus, the act of 'plugging in' allows the novel to articulate mind/body dualism into a reality. Speaking to this, Gurman notes that the novel "brings a 'post' to humanism by taking the Cartesian humanist dualism between mind and body to an extreme" (463).

Nevertheless, although the novel engages with this cyberpunk mind/body dualism, it ultimately seems to argue in favour of an embodied existence. The novel establishes that humans can become stuck online, plugged into base as their bodies eventually waste away. Gurman asserts that "the mind detached from body is horrifying to Piercy's protagonist" (463). This can be seen when Shira recalls stories of those who have become trapped: she is disturbed to contemplate "consciousness's trapped like catatonics within repeating strings in forgotten closed-off sectors of some base" (Piercy 273). Thus, the novel associates fear and danger with cyberspace. Perhaps because of this reason, cyberspace features very little in the novel. There are a few significant scenes in the novel which take place in the base, most of which depict the climatic confrontations between the multis and Tikva. The imaginative potential of the base is endless, yet it is in the physical world that centres the novel's story. This reveals the important role embodiment plays in shaping the novel, most notably in relation to Yod's humanness. Although all-knowing when it comes to matters of the world, Yod has never left the laboratory that he was created in before meeting Shira. This is a decision dictated by Avram: as Yod states, "Avram always says I am not ready" (Piercy 87). To this, Shira responds by saying "I don't think you'll ever get ready if we stay in the lab" (87). This presents the idea that embodiment is integral to the formation of identity. The novel initially presents Yod as a machine, and this is reinforced by the fact that he spends each day confined within an artificial environment. Yod's only reprieve from this, ironically, is to plug into the base and experience "the

transcendence of pure mind" (Vint 104). In order to be human, however, Yod must enter the real world and experience it through his body. Gurman agrees, contending that "Yod's humanity is grounded in embodiment" (463). This is confirmed by Yod himself, who tells Shira, "You have made me more of a person today by taking me out into the world" (Piercy 94).

I contend that Yod performs his humanness in two significant ways: through his relationships with other humans and his practice of community religion. Gurman asserts that "a human being has social and emotional agency" (461). This idea is integral to Yod's performance of human identity, in which his growing humanness becomes intertwined with his ability to form emotional bonds. Specifically, it is Yod's relationship with Shira that is symbolic of his humanness. Haque et al. agree, arguing that through Yod's relationship with Shira "he changes from a deadly weapon to a perfect lover" (3109). Taking this idea further, Yod evolves from machine to man. Indeed, when Yod first propositions Shira, she is taken aback: "This walking computer cannot want to perforate me" (Piercy 130). Shira still sees Yod as more machine than human, and the thought of them entering into a relationship together is therefore absurd to her. As Yod is humanised through his lessons, however, Shira begins to return Yod's interest. Significantly, their romance begins in cyberspace. After an attack from the multis, Shira and Yod are left standing together in the base. The heat of the moment results in them sharing their first kiss. As they embrace, Shira questions Yod "Is this what you want? This joining in the base?" (Piercy 167), to which Yod responds, "No … this is only the image. I want the reality" (167). Yod's words here emphasises the embodied nature of human experiences. No longer satisfied with replication and mental imagery, the newly humanised Yod desires genuine bodily experience. Having lived as a machine, Yod longs to be human in the truest sense by having a physical relationship with Shira. Building on this, Yod's sexual relationship with Shira is presented as performative. Although programmed by Malkah to have

a “viable sexual capacity (Piercy 162), Yod’s experiences pleasure through the brain rather than the body (170), reinforcing his construction as a machine. Yod therefore performs sexual acts according to how he has been taught. While sex is often thought of as natural and intrinsic, Yod’s sexual abilities are “machined and programmed to demanding specifications … sharpened by extraordinary skill” (Piercy 168). This highlights that Yod’s ability to connect with Shira is a performance. Yod has learnt how to give and receive pleasure through Malkah’s programming. This draws on Butler’s theory, particularly the idea that performance is rooted in acts which are “renewed, revised and consolidated through time” (“Performative Acts” 523). Yod achieves sexual skills through a pre-written script, rather than through spontaneity and experimentation. Given that his connection with others is what humanises him, the novel constructs Yod’s humanness as a performance.

Yod’s performance of humanness is not only tied to his sexual relationship with Shira, but in the relationship roles he fulfils in her life. Yod moves in with Shira, assuming the role of husband, and taking on parental responsibilities over her son, Ari, who is returned to Tikva near the end of the novel (Piercy 377). Yi contends that the more he “is trained as a male to be a lover and later a stepfather, the more Yod is anthropomorphised” (135). The use of the word ‘trained’ reinforces the that the Yod’s humanness is ultimately a performance, highlighting that has been taught and trained how to be human. Yod’s connection with humans is therefore constructed rather than innate. It is through the humanisation process that Yod is able to develop the emotional capacity to connect with another human being to this extent. That Yod and Shira live together within a traditional family unit can be seen as an act of subversion. Haraway declares that “the cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world” (150), who “does not dream of community on the model of the organic family” (151). Yod, although shown to be fluid in expression, is very much gendered. Gurman asserts that “Yod’s body is much like that of a perfect male” (463). Moreover, Yod embodies his maleness when performing sex with

Shira. Haraway's first assertion is therefore challenged in the novel. The constructions of husband and father are historic, intertwined with humanist notions of the human. By allowing Yod to act as a husband to Shira and father to Ari, the novel grants him human identity.

As part of his growing connection to other people, Yod performs his humanness through participation in community religion. Piercy's novel is deeply Jewish: a large portion of the novel retells the story of Golem, a Frankenstein-esque creature created to protect a Jewish community in 1600s Prague, the community of Tikva is Jewish, and there are several references to the Talmud and Rabbinic teachings. The novel presents community tradition as essential to one's humanity. In fact, even Avram, a character who becomes symbolic of "androcentric science" (Yi 123) and scepticism, upholds the importance of cultural tradition and community religion. For example, Avram justifies his attendance at services by saying "It's social glue … it's fulfilling my place in my family, my society" (Piercy 259). This highlights how participation in community is associated with humanness. The practice of religion can be seen as inherently performative. Butler contends that performative identity is "tenuously constituted in time … through a stylised repetition of acts" ("Performative Acts" 519). Judaism is a historic religion, whose teachings and practices have been passed down generations. The practice of Judaism is thus "tenuously constituted in time". It is also a ritualistic religion and is therefore performed "through a stylised repetition of acts". Once allowed to leave the laboratory and engage with society, Yod begins to attend services and practice his religion. This performance helps to humanise him, grounding him in community. In reference to this, Yod says, "sometimes I feel a sense of belonging, that I am doing something that has been done over and over again for three thousand years" (Piercy 276).

Although Avram desires Yod to pass as human in society, he expresses resentment towards Yod's growing humanness. When Yod joins the religious circle at the synagogue, Avram is incredulous, asking "how can a machine make minyon?" (Piercy 276). To support this, he

points to earlier Judaic teachings that had "ruled that a golem cannot be counted in a minyon" (276). At this point in the novel, Yod is constructed as human. His performance grants him humanness, evidenced by his relationship with Shira and his involvement in the community. Yod's interest in this is caused by his growing humanity as a result of his lessons with Shira. Despite this, Avram's words indicate that he still views Yod as a machine. He warns, "you're overdoing the socialisation, Shira" (Piercy 276). Significantly, Shira responds by saying "For centuries, *I* wouldn't have been included" (Pier y 276). Although this can be seen as a critique of Jewish Orthodoxy, which as Shira comments, "still don't' count half the Jews as Jews" (276), I believe this can be seen as a commentary on human identity. Because Yod is part machine, Avram denies him his humanity and excludes him from certain practices. But, as Shira points out, this same argument has been used to exclude women, as well as people of colour and other identities. This reinforces how the novel continues to subvert humanist constructions of identity.

Yod's performance of humanness is so much that he begins to see himself as human, as do many of the other characters in the novel, notably Shira and Malkah. As a result, he wishes to be treated as a human in society. In particular, he desires agency over himself and his life. An example of this is seen when Yod requests to Avram that he be financially compensated for his work (Piercy 364). Furthermore, he refers to Ari as "our son" to Shira and actively plans for their future as a family (365). The way in which Yod wishes to perform his humanness can be understood through the concept of personhood. Hall states a feature of personhood "is that persons are characterised by having attached to them legal rights and duties" (88). Although Yod's desires are more domestic, his need to be recognised and treated as any other human speaks to this idea of personhood. Avram, however, disagrees with Yod and attempts to deny him personhood. This can be seen when Yod confronts Avram, declaring "I want to be free … free to live as I want and choose" (Piercy 283). Avram's response is telling of his views on

Yod's humanness. He responds with scorn, saying "that's romantic nonsense. I created you to accomplish a task, so how can you be quote free unquote to live?" (Piercy 283-84). Avram's words echo Shira's earlier scepticism when Yod announces his feelings for her. Yet, unlike Shira, Avram refuses to acknowledge how Yod is humanised through his performance. This is largely due to the fact that as a machine, and therefore object, Yod is the property of Avram. Neverow agrees, stating that Avram "believes he has an absolute right to control Yod, another sentient being" (28). If Avram recognises Yod's humanity, then he must also acknowledge his subjectivity and agency, forcing him to relinquish control. Malkah defends Yod against Avram, asserting that "Yod may be an artificially constructed person … but he possesses his own motivations, his own goals" (Piercy 284). Malkah's use of 'person' to refer to Yod echoes her earlier statement to Shira that Yod "is a person … not a human person, but a person" (Piercy 76). To Malkah, personhood is not determined by biology but by the nature of the individual. According to her, Yod's performance makes him human and therefore a person, regardless his cyborg status.

The issue of Yod's personhood comes to a head near the end of the novel. Informed that the multis plan to attack Tikva, Avram determines that Yod's cyborg status should be revealed to the community in order for him to be used as a weapon. As part of this, there is a planned discussion on whether Yod is entitled to remuneration for his work, as well as legal protections and benefits. Essentially, it is a question of whether Yod's performance of humanness is enough to grant him personhood. This decision is placed in the hands of Tikva's Council. Shira narrates that "the Council would decide that Yod was a free citizen of Tikva or Avram's tool: it was that simple" (Piercy 366). However, the decision of the Council is left unknown. Before an outcome is reached, it is announced that the multis are approaching Tikva's base. The wealth of the multis means that their weaponry out powers Tikva's, not to mention the array of disposable bodies used for war that the multis steal from the Glop. Thus, the characters are left

with only one option: send Yod to the multis as a sacrifice. Unsurprisingly, Avram is the first to suggest this. Shira, understandably, is appalled. She confronts Avram, asserting that he is "murdering him" (Piercy 408). Yod may be a machine created as a weapon, but to Shira, his performance makes him human, and more than that, a person. Avram sees Yod's death as a matter of switching off a machine (Piercy 284); Shira, in contrast, amounts it to murder. Avram is unmoved by Shira's accusation, responding "I made him, and I can unmake him" (Piercy 408). He explains further, "don't you see, I can manufacture another" (409). To Avram, Yod is merely a long line of cyborgs: there are ones who came before, just as there will be ones that come after. Yod attempts to assert his subjectivity, resenting the fact that he is given no choice in sacrificing his life. Shira's mother, Riva, counters with "soldiers don't choose their battles" (409). This provides commentary on the fact that, beyond the nonhuman, many humans are denied personhood and subjected to the dominance of others. Ultimately, however, Yod sacrifices his own life. Thus, although Yod's performance humanises him, it does not grant him personhood.

Michel Faber's *Under the Skin* plays with constructions of human identity, blurring the boundaries between the "self and other … of human and non-human" (Kark and Vanderbeke 10). Chapter Two of this thesis argued that the novel presents "a reversal of the human condition" (Harger-Grinling and Jordaan 247), in which aliens represent the human, and the true 'humans', renamed as vodsels, represent the other. Specifically, I examined how the novel reconstructs species difference through the human/vodsel divide and the way in which Isserley's hybridity disrupts Western humanist constructions of the human. In the context of the human/vodsel divide, humanness becomes a slippery identity in which to discuss. According to Isserley, humanness is an intrinsic characteristic of her species; however, the rest of this thesis refers to humanness through Western Humanist concepts. To minimise confusion,

I will use single quote marks around the word 'human' and 'humanness' when referring to these terms in relation to Isserley and her species.

Under the Skin is a story about alienation—alienation from others, from society, and from oneself. In particular, the novel examines how individual and social identity is shaped and informed by binarised categories that define humanness in opposition to the other. As Woodward contends, "identity is about difference; it is about marking out 'us' and 'them'" (8). This is not only understood through the human/vodsel divide, but also through the way in which gender and class politics play out in the novel. I contend that *Under the Skin* presents humanness as a standard through which to determine personhood. This can firstly be understood through Isserley, whose hybrid status complicates her identity as a 'human' on an individual and social level. This is reinforced by her gender and class status, which serve to undermine her 'humanness' further, as well as her position in society. As half-human, half-vodsel, Isserley performs either identity depending on the situation. When hunting vodsels, for example, Isserley must pass as one in order to lure hitchhikers into her car. To do so, Isserley performs humanness by undergoing physical changes to resemble the vodsels and learning "the basics of vodsel psychology" (Faber 146). Although necessary for her role, Isserley's surgeries mark her out as visibly different from her fellow humans. This contributes to her feelings of alienation and shame, a theme I explored in Chapter Two. As such, Isserley performs 'humanness' when interacting with the men on the farm to distinguish herself from the vodsels that she resembles. This performance becomes integral to the maintenance of her identity as 'human'. I will examine both performances, drawing attention to how Isserley's gender and class status operate to emphasis her status as either human or vodsel. Beyond Isserley, the novel questions the boundaries of 'human' identity through the male humans who work and live on the farm with Isserley, as well as the vodsels that she hunts and captures. Like Isserley, these men, both 'human' and vodsel, exist on the fringe of society and are dehumanised by their class

status. I suggest identities of humanness are presented as performative rather than innate in the novel, and that this can be seen understood through Isserley's hybrid existence as both human and vodsel.

As stated, Isserley is an alien being from another planet who has been surgically modified to resemble a vodsel. This allows her to carry out her work for Vess Incorporated, which is described in the novel as "the world's biggest corporation" (Faber 73). Isserley's role is to drive around the Scottish Highlands on the hunt for male hitchhikers, selecting certain vodsels based on a specific set of criteria. Isserley then sedates the vodsels and transports them back to the farm, where they are processed into meat for consumption by the wealthy Elite on her home planet. As part of her role, Isserley must pass as a vodsel. In this way, Isserley and Yod are similar: both are required to pass as human in order to fulfil their purpose in society. However, Yod is designed by Avram to visually resemble a human, to the extent that Shira is convinced of his humanness until being informed otherwise. As such, Yod only requires lessons on how to behave as a human, particularly in relation to social interactions. Isserley, on the other hand, is born an alien/human and therefore must undergo surgical modifications to pass as a vodsel. This process is invasive and painful, involving operations to remove her tail, reconfigure her spine so she can walk on two legs rather than four, breast augmentation surgery, and full body hair removal. While Yod evolves from machine to human through his socialisation, Isserley's modifications achieve the opposite: she is forcibly transformed from human to vodsel. Thus, Yod is humanised through socialisation in contrast to Isserley, who is "dehumanised by her operation" (Gymnich and Costa 85).

Due to the surgeries that she has endured, Isserley lives in constant pain that is both physical and psychological. As a result, Isserley often finds herself "grieving over what had been done to her once-beautiful body" (Faber 64). Although she volunteered for the role, the way in which Isserley frames her surgeries as something that has "been done to her" implies a lack of

autonomy over this choice. This introduces issues of class politics into the novel, as Isserley's position at Vess Incorporated is shown to be a reflection on her status within society. The alien society that Isserley belongs to is one divided by two classes: the wealthy Elite and the working class. It is established that Isserley's home planet was ravaged by an environmental disaster, leaving it largely inhabitable. Whilst the rich were protected above ground, free to indulge in "money, sex, drugs, [and] outrageously expensive food" (Faber 260), the poor were forced underground into the "subterranean hell of the Estates" (Faber 117). Due to her class status, Isserley was initially destined for "a lifetime buried in the Estates" (Faber 64), which Isserley notes is "a brutishly short lifetime, by all accounts" (65). However, she is offered a chance to avoid this fate by Vess Incorporated, who require a 'human' to be sent to Earth. Although perhaps preferable to life in the Estates, this offer requires significant sacrifices from Isserley. For instance, alongside the painful surgeries Isserley endured to pass as vodsel, Caracciolo argues that this role condemns Isserley "to living a castaway life on an alien planet, surrounded by leering vodsels and alien workers who ignore her because of her 'non-human'" status (597). Consequently, Isserley was left with two unpleasant options: a life of "abject squalor" (Kark and Vanderbeke 8) in the Estates or a life of servitude on Earth. The novel engages with class politics through Isserley, examining how her status in society limits her choices in life. As Isserley notes, "only desperate people with no prospects except being dumped in the New Estates would have considered it" (Faber 64). Isserley's class status devalues her in society, allowing the wealthy Elite to exploit her body for their own benefit. Vess Incorporated mutilate her body and isolate her on Earth purely as a means in which to produce vodsel meat, known as voddissin, an expensive delicacy that Isserley is shocked to learn costs more than "a whole month's worth of water and oxygen" (Faber 234). Isserley's position in society and her role at Vess Incorporated highlight the way in which 'humanness' and class intertwine, and how this carries implications for personhood. This is affirmed by the novel directly when Isserley

angrily asserts to Amlis Vess, sole inheritor of Vess Incorporated, “if your kind had noticed I was a fucking human being they wouldn’t have sent me to the Estates, would they?” (Faber 232).

Despite Isserley’s tenuous position in society, she is repeatedly shown to carry prejudices towards those classed below her. Isserley finds comfort in the fact that although her body has been degraded by Vess Incorporated, it would have been “visibly disfigured” (Faber 64) had she remained on her home planet and been “subjected to life in the Estates” (Faber 65). Forced into manual labour, the working class live “in underground corridors of bauxite and compacted ash” (Faber 65) which takes a toll on their physical and mental wellbeing. For instance, Isserley states that living in the Estates will transform a ‘human’ “into a beast, with [a] hunched back, scarred flesh, crumbling teeth, missing fingers, [and] cropped hair” (64). This passage highlights the way in which class politics is experienced and revealed through the body. The wording of this descriptor is also relevant, as it dehumanises the working class through an association with animality. This is reinforced further by her other comments, in which Isserley labels the working class as “losers and low-lifes”, “maggots”, “Estate trash” and “subhuman” (Faber 64-65). Isserley dehumanises the working-class ‘humans’ in order to position herself as superior to them. This idea is emphasised by the parallels between how Isserley describes both the working-class ‘humans’ and the hitchhiking vodsels. In Chapter Two of this thesis, I examined how Isserley describes the vodsels using animalistic and dehumanising language—the “puny, scrawny specimens” (Faber 1), “hunk on legs” (1), and “hairy youngster” (5)—as a means to justify her role in their oppression. Speaking in reference to this, Dillion asserts that the vodsels are “deprived of all linguistic markers of … humanity” (141). Similarly, Drewett claims that this language ultimately “denies them their personhood (18). Dillion and Drewett’s argument here can be applied to the working class, who are dehumanised by Isserley as a means to emphasise her own humanness.

The way in which the working class are dehumanised in the novel positions them as other to the wealthy Elite. Although the novel's central divide is that between human and vodsel, I suggest that the way in which the Elite are constructed in opposition to the "Estate trash" (Faber 93) creates another dichotomy in which to explore themes of humanness and otherness. This thesis has examined Western Humanist constructions of the human, drawing attention how it has been defined in opposition to the other, illustrating this through the dualisms of human/animal and human/machine. Building on this, I argue that beyond species difference, identity can be used as a tool in which to other certain groups of humans. In particular, this is based on forms of difference, such as race, gender, or class, which are rooted in hierarchal notions dominance and subordination. This is illustrated in the novel through the divide between the wealthy Elite and the working class. While the human/vodsel divide is grounded in species difference, the class divide is grounded in identity difference. The divide between the working class and the Elite can be seen through Amlis Vess, whose arrival on the farm causes a stir for Isserley and the other 'humans'. The corresponding description of Amlis' beauty covers almost two pages, with references made to his "perfectly round" eyes which "shone like illuminated amber", his "vulpine snout", and "impossibly lustrous" fur with "a soft down of flawless black" (Faber 110-111). Although this description reads as alien to the reader, it is made clear that Amlis is considered attractive by the beauty standards on his home planet. Indeed, Isserley considers Amlis to be "the most beautiful man she had ever seen" (Faber 110). Understood in this way, the description of Amlis establishes his class status among the wealthy Elite. When compared with the animalistic descriptions of the working class, the stark contrast between the two classes is made clear, emphasising the idea that class politics play out through the body.

I will now turn my attention to focus specifically on how performance is depicted in the novel. Firstly, Isserley performs as a vodsel in order to pass as one as part of her duties for

Vess Incorporated. As stated, a significant aspect of her performance is enacted through her body, evidenced by the modifications that Isserley is must endure to pass as a vodsel. In particular, Isserley is required to undergo breast augmentation surgery. The novel states that "her real teats, budding naturally from her abdomen, had been surgically removed", leaving Isserley with "puffy artificial ones" (Faber 178). Although necessary to her transformation from 'human' to vodsel, the novel directly engages with gender politics to construct this as performative. This is shown by the fact that Isserley is given extremely large breasts, which are described as "flawless" and "perfect" (Faber 42), and "suspiciously firm and gratify-defying for their size" (202). To Isserley, her breasts emphasise her vodsels status, protruding from her body like "alien mounds of flesh" and "artificial tumours" (Faber 250). The novel reveals that Isserley's breasts are a deliberate choice by Vess Incorporated to affirm her identity as a vodsel. Hortle and Stark argues that the novel "depicts the ways that crafting Isserley's body as feminine and desirable simultaneously construct her as [vodsel]" (158). Ignorant of vodsel culture, the surgeons based Isserley's breasts on "pictures from a magazine sent by Esswis as a guide" (Faber 178). The implication here is, of course, that these were images taken from a pornographic magazine and are therefore not an accurate depiction of the average vodsel body. Although this is presented as humorous in the novel, it serves to highlight the performative nature of gender. To the 'humans', large breasts signify womanhood and femininity and therefore the expectation is for Isserley to perform accordingly. Indeed, the novel presents Isserley's breasts as integral to her performance as a vodsel. For instance, many of the hitchhikers take note of the strange appearance of Isserley's body. Specifically, the vodsels comment on her skin, noting its "downy look" and plethora of scars (Faber 203), her thick glasses and weird clothing, and her stiff posture, which one vodsel believes is "suggestive of some spinal problem" (42). It is only her breasts, crafted into perfection by the surgeons, that distracts the vodsels of their concerns, presenting her as "half Baywatch babe, half little

old lady" (Faber 12). Hortle and Stark agree, asserting that Isserley's breasts operate to make her "sexually desirable to the male 'animals' [vodsels] she hunts" (158). Isserley relies on the historicised construction of female sexuality and objectification as part of her performance as a vodsel. As such, it can be seen that the novel engages directly with gender performativity.

Alongside her physical body, Isserley must learn how to act and behave as a vodsel. The novel disrupts essentialist constructions of the human by emphasising the discursive nature of humanness. This draws on Foucauldian theory, which challenges the Cartesian belief in true human subjectivity by suggesting that subjects are made "human through a process of mutually-sustaining reproduction of dominant discourses" (Foucault 777). This is shown through Isserley, whose humanness is informed and shaped by her external world. Specifically, Isserley learns how to be human through television and books, as well as snippets of information she gathers during her conversations with the vodsels. This distinguishes her from Yod, who is intentionally taught to be human by other humans. The television, in particular, plays an important role in teaching Isserley "the basics of vodsel psychology" (Faber 146), as well as helping her "learn the language" (137). Isserley explains that when she first arrived on Earth, the "television had been a wonderful teacher, offering her titbits of information constantly" (Faber 146). O'Quinn and Shrum asserts that television is "a powerful agent of socialisation" (278). In particular, they note that "television has forever changed … [the way we] view ourselves in relation to others" (278). The novel perhaps take inspiration from this idea by framing the television as an integral part of Isserley's performance.

When at home on the farm, however, Isserley performance switches from vodsel to 'human'. In saying this, Isserley's performance as a 'human' seems largely defined by her need to distant herself from the vodsels that she resembles. Isserley's mutilated body others her from the other 'humans' on the farm, and thus "relentlessly reminds her of her unique outside position" (Kark and Venderbeke 15). This contributes to Isserley's feelings of alienation and shame. When

Isserley first arrived on Earth, she immediately separates herself from the male workers, instructing them that "they were to leave her alone" (Faber 153). A reason for this is that Isserley's hybridity means she must live differently from the other humans. For instance, whilst the other humans sleep on the floor, a practice typical of their species, Isserley must sleep in a bed to accommodate her new vodsel body. This becomes a source of shame for Isserley, as she sees it as proof of her otherness. At point, she accidentally reveals to a worker that she sleeps in a bed. Dillon states that Isserley is "furious with herself" for this "moment of weakness" (144). This is emphasised in the novel when Isserley blames herself, thinking "no doubt Ensel would relish that, share it with the other men, this titillating proof of her subhumanity" (Faber 92). She fears that the other humans will other her and consider her less than human. In particular, Isserley knows that this contradicts her performance as human. When Ensel, a worker on the farm, compliments Isserley, her immediate reaction is to doubt his intentions. Faber writes "Isserley stared into his eyes, yearning to be sure whether, just for once, the compliment was sincere" (91). To deflect from her feelings of shame, Isserley dismisses him by thinking "Ensel was Estate trash, after all" (Faber 93). This highlights how forms of difference, whether that be race, gender, or class, can be used as an othering tool. Isserley's hybridity makes her feel less than human, and therefore she must rely on class prejudice in order to affirm her own humanness. Put simply, she dehumanises them in order to affirm her own 'humanness'.

Isserley's feelings of alienation highlight the intertwining relationship between humanness and personhood. Due to her bodily modifications, which present her as a 'human'/vodsel hybrid, Isserley's performance of 'humanness' is limited. This is made clear when Amlis Vess visits the farm. Isserley's reaction to the news of Amlis' arrival is one of terror. Dillion argues that "her fear of meeting Vess is rooted in a terror that he will not recognise her for what she is" (144), that is, 'human'. For example, Isserley fears that Amlis will "recoil" at the sight of

her, stating “he’d be expecting to see a human being, and he would see a hideous animal instead” (Faber 75). Compared to her fellow ‘humans’, Isserley sees herself as a “denuded freak, the gargoyle girl” (Faber 93). With the added context of Amlis class status as a member of the wealthy Elite, Isserley is dehumanised further. Ultimately, Isserley’s performances as both ‘human’ and vodsel fail. As a vodsel, “Isserley never entirely passes as sexually desirable [or] as a woman” (Hortle and Stark 159). As a ‘human’, Isserley remains on the outside looking in, exemplified by her demise at the conclusion of the novel.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored how the human, and therefore humanness, has been defined through Western Humanist tradition. To support and illustrate this exploration, I have analysed constructions of human identity in selected contemporary literature, specifically Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*, and Michel Faber's *Under the Skin.* Using Western Humanism framework for my discussion, I sought to examine how these novels uphold and subvert established constructions of the human, in order to speculate the possibility of new forms of identity and subjectivity. Throughout this thesis, I have argued several main points. In Chapter One, I put forward that the Western Humanist construction of the human has been defined through notions of rationality, morality, and a capacity for abstract language. As part of this construction, humanness has been presented as an innate identity—an intrinsic and exclusive "human essence" (Gurman 461). Moreover, Western Humanism has defined the human in opposition to the other through dominant dualisms. This suggests that humanness and otherness are two sides of the same coin, with both being grounded through forms of difference. I have used the human/animal and human/machine divide to illustrate this idea, examining how nonhuman animals and machines are positioned as other to the human, and therefore denied subjectivity and personhood. To support my argument further, I drew on the dualisms of mind/body, subject/object, culture/nature, and man/woman. These dualisms operate to reproduce and maintain the Western Humanist construction of the human as a rational, moral subject endowed with language. This ultimately led me to conclude that human identity, as defined by Western Humanist thought, is therefore an exclusionary identity. This is exemplified by the oppositional binaries that define humanness and otherness, such as the human/animal and human/machine. Moreover, this construction operates to dehumanise and other certain identities that fall outside of, or exist within, these dominant dualisms. To

articulate this, I considered feminist and posthumanist critiques of Western Humanism that emerged during the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. In particular, I suggested that alternative forms of identity and subjectivity can be used to subvert the Western Humanist construction of the human, using women and cyborgs to illustrate this idea.

This argument could be extended further, using other forms of difference in order to subvert or challenge constructed notions of humanness and otherness. For instance, race, class, and sexuality are identities that are othered within Western Humanism's narrow definition of the human, and therefore can be used to push the boundaries of identity and subjectivity further. Indeed, there is a wealth of academic scholarship dedicated to this idea: significantly, the works of Luce Irigaray, bell hooks, Angela Carter, Edward Said, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Judith Butler. Despite this, there remains a need for deeper probing and continued critiques into socially constructed identities, particularly in regards to how identity difference, which categorises beings into 'us' and 'them', can operate as a tool for othering and oppression. There will remain a need for this until these constructions no longer hold such power in dominant discourses, in our institutions and social pedagogy, and in mainstream culture. As long as binary thinking and categorisations continue to be challenged in order to acknowledge the full spectrum of identity performances, the dominant dualisms that maintain and reproduce this Western Humanist construction of the human are, and can continue to be, destabilised.

Using Chapter One as a theoretical framework for my literary analysis, Chapter Two questioned what happens when beings exist outside of, or within, these dominant dualisms. The selected novels feature hybrid characters which oscillate between the boundaries of human, animal, and machine, directly confronting Western Humanist constructions of the human as an innate and exclusive identity. When analysing *Nights at the Circus* and *Under the Skin*, I considered the way in which Fevvers and Isserley destabilise the human/animal divide through their hybridity. Existing as both human and animal, these characters can be seen to

both uphold and subvert concepts of humanity and animality. I also examined how Fevvers disrupts the binaries of man/woman and subject/object, which serves as a contextual framework for Chapter Three's discussion on gender performativity. Piercy's *Body of Glass* was analysed in relation posthumanism, exploring whether the figure of the cyborg upholds or subverts the human/machine divide. Ultimately, I argued that hybridity causes a breakdown of binaries, and therefore a breakdown, or at least, disruption of Western Humanist constructions of the human.

Chapter Three questioned that if humanness is not an innate identity, but rather socially constructed through dominant discourses and dualisms, is it therefore performative? Inspired by Judith Butler's theory on gender performativity, I contended that humanness can be reconstructed as a performance, "an identity tenuously constituted in time … through a stylised repetition of acts" (Butler "Performative Acts" 519). To demonstrate my argument, I began with an examination of Butler's theory, supported by a literary analysis of Fevvers' gender performance in *Nights at the Circus.* Specifically, I argued that identity is performed through a process of embodiment that is grounded in collective and historicised constructions of identity. Moreover, this performance can be both reinscriptive and subversive: hegemonic performances uphold established norms and discourses, whereas alternative performances can subvert these constructions. Following my analysis of how gender is performed in *Nights at the Circus*, I extended this idea of performance to the experience of being human and humanness overall. I considered the way in which Western Humanism has defined the human through narrow and exclusionary terms, which set a standard for how humanness is performed. Furthermore, I suggested that this therefore creates a standard for personhood: that hegemonic performativity necessitates personhood. To explore this idea further, I applied my extension of Butler's theory of performativity to *Body of Glass* and *Under the Skin*, questioning whether Yod and Isserley's performance of humanness reinscribes or subverts Western Humanist

constructions of the human. Within this, I drew attention to the way in which gender and class politics complicate performances of identity, and how this relates to personhood. The concepts of humanness and otherness are socially constructed and performative. Although embedded in Western institutions and culture, and continually reproduced and maintained by dominant discourses and dualisms, constructions of humanness can be challenged, destabilised and ultimately dismantled. The more we draw attention to the inherent performativity of constructed identities, such as gender and humanness, the more able we are to subvert this hegemony through alternative performances of non-normative bodies. My hope for this thesis is to play a role in deconstructing Western Humanist constructions of the human.

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