

## “I am humanity”: Posthumanism and Embodiment in Rick Yancey’s The 5th Wave Series

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THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON OUR DAILY LIVES CAN SCARCELY BE overstated. Innovations in the digital realm have revolutionized the way we move, work, interact, learn—in short, the way we are. It is important then for popular literature for young adults to consider these issues, especially as it addresses a readership that is often the most directly affected by these technological changes at a time of formative “physical, cognitive, social, and psychological development” (Latrobe and Drury 4). If the speed of technological change has thus resulted in a renewed interest, within YA literature, in technology and its impact, for science fiction writers, Victoria Flanagan argues, “the effects of technology on human beings and society” have been a topic of anxiety ever since the 1980s, resulting mostly in “dystopian hyper-technical futures” that young adults then have to navigate and resist (1-2). Indeed, most science fiction works are built around the themes of a technologized world and the corresponding consequences it bears on individuals and communities. As Farah Mendlesohn notes, these unfold as “extensions of adult concerns about the world,” and thus tend to promote an attitude of “continual rejection of changing knowledge transfer technology” (173). Reflecting adult fears at the prospect of being left behind by new digital technologies and socially replaced by new scientific advancements, these works often lead to bleak futures and thus present little value to a new generation of teenagers. Offering “warnings to refuse the future entire, or an advocacy of utopian retrenchment” (Mendlesohn 173), these texts ultimately seem to oppose a genre that has defined itself by its interest in human adaptation when confronted with new technologies.

Though one can look with concern at the approach taken by some of science fiction’s texts written for adults, a recent wave of publications for younger readers has been marked by a significant shift in how these technologized futures are negotiated. Opening up avenues in which “young people might achieve agency through their interactions with technoscience” (Flanagan 2),

this series of YA science fiction texts makes use of the “category of the posthuman as the means for producing a new understanding of human selfhood and experience—one that emphasises the plurality and fragmentation of posthuman subjectivity” (Flanagan 3). Rick Yancey’s young adult novels *The 5th Wave* (2013), *The Infinite Sea* (2014), and *The Last Star* (2016) undertake such a negotiation of the posthuman in relation to new and radical technology. Allowing readers to explore the “various possibilities for agency” resulting from technological progress, Yancey’s series provides a discursive field from which readers can evaluate the ethical consequences of this change and assess “whether such technology acts to empower or disenfranchise child subjects” (Flanagan 5-6).

Yet, the books are also unusual in their approach towards the posthuman. Disguising their central premise of a humanity changed by technology behind an alien invasion story, the series follows a group of teenagers in their fight against an alien force referred to as “the Others.” The aliens arrive on Earth in a large mothership and wage war on the population through several waves of mass destruction. Without establishing any physical presence on earth, the effects of their weapons are nonetheless ever clearly identifiable. The story begins after the third wave have already hit and decimated humanity to the point only a few scattered groups of survivors remain. The 1st Wave, a global EMP, killed all electronics, the 2nd Wave, giant tsunamis, wiped out coastal areas and drove survivors inland, and the 3rd Wave, a deadly virus spread by birds, killed 97 percent of the remaining human population. The central premise of the books centers on the 4th Wave, that is, on the introduction, within the human population, of aliens who look like humans, intruders in bodies indistinguishable from those of their prey. These hunters, called “Silencers,” aim to generate the kind of paranoid response described by Brian Stableford, David Langford, and David Pringle as a cornerstone of the invasion narrative. Promoting a sense of “paranoid anxiety that the invaders might already be lurking undetected in our midst” (Stableford, Langford, and Pringle, n.pag.), this response in turn paves the way for the eponymous 5th Wave. The last weapon in the war against humanity, the 5th Wave consists of human children gathered and recruited purportedly to fight against the Silencers. Collected and manipulated by the actual Silencers via alien technology, these children are in fact trained as military units and sent out to hunt and kill the remaining humans, believing them to be the alien infiltrators.

Addressing how distrust and xenophobia result in the erosion of social bonding and cooperation, the series does not mobilize the alien invasion as a source of humanity’s demise, but rather uses it and the idea of the posthuman it brings forth in order to focus on the progressive embrace of technology and its consequence for human development. In interviews, Yancey himself reveals his intention to expose how our present “information age” has “enabled hate

and xenophobia” by using new technologies as a means to return humans to tribalism. As he explains, by destroying “trust and cooperation [...] two indispensable qualities of human achievement and advancement,” technology, both in real life and in the series, is used to transform “any outsider into a potential enemy who must be eliminated” (qtd. in Pedro np). Building upon this critique and introducing alien technology as a catalyst, the series presents a variety of possible posthuman engagements. From fantasies of power generated by technological enhancement to challenges in self-actualization and embodied subjectivity, the series explores how technological changes can challenge human ideals. By rejecting the possibility of a return to humanist notions of what the human means while simultaneously denying any possible escape from society, Yancey’s series forces its young readers to conceive new ways of dealing with posthuman technologies and the future they produce. This article proposes to explore the new forms of hybridity it offers as well as the different responses these produce. Focusing on the depiction of the posthuman presented by the series, it highlights how technology, more than a threat, may in fact offer a way of generating a new and more inclusive society.

### Posthumanism, Technology and Transitional Stages

Yancey’s series participates in a broader movement, within recent young adult science fiction, that has sought to address the variety of ways in which issues of the posthuman can be negotiated. On the one hand, novels such as M. T. Anderson’s *Feed* (2002) and Scott Westerfeld’s *Uglies* (2005) have envisioned a society in which technology has already drastically changed our conception of the human. These novels present their readers with closed-minded dystopias in which young adults have to “break from enclosed, decaying societies” in order to escape “into the reinvigorated wild” (Mendlesohn 2). The posthuman landscape they offer is essentially rejected as deficient, the narratives preferring instead a return to a more conservative ideal, at least from the point of view of their reader. Repeating a motif that Perry Nodelman noticed in young adult fiction in the 1980s (293), these texts contrast with books such as Mary E. Pearson’s *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* (2008) and Nnedi Okorafor’s *Binti* novellas (*Binti* 2015, *Binti: Home* 2017 and *Binti: The Night Masquerade* 2018) in which new technologies are seen as sites of potential development, enabling the creation of the posthuman. Though the worlds that these texts present remain limited and restricted by societal norms and laws, their stories deal with the definitions of what can be accepted as “human,” challenging contemporary notions of humanism and allowing more nuanced perspectives on what a posthuman subjectivity could mean.

Yet, before exploring how the series uses the concept of the alien and its technological advancement as a means to discuss posthuman development, it may be prudent to first map the territory of the posthuman and of posthuman-

ism within which this discussion itself takes place. Indeed, though most definitions tend to be concerned with technocultural changes whose prime effect is the production of “a radical transformation within increasingly globalized late capitalism from an ‘analog’ [...] to a ‘digital’ [...] social, cultural and economic system” (Herbrechter 3, viii), not all posthumanist theories align. N. Katherine Hayles, one of the leading theorists of posthumanism, for example focuses on the way in which the posthuman developed as a concept in response to the progressive “union of the human with the intelligent machine” (2). This idea of hybridity was later expanded upon by Pramod Nayar, who called for a re-conceptualization of being as both “constituted by and constitutive of multiple forms of life and machines” (2). Though this connection between humans, machines, and technology is not essential to all forms of posthumanism—some theories focus on the human/animal relationship, others emphasize the interconnectivity born out of social networks and globalization—it occupies a central role in this article’s analysis. Taking as framework the idea that the posthuman can be defined as “the technologically mediated human subject, whose existence has been transformed through technoscience—either chemically, surgically or mechanically” (Flanagan 14), the definition adopted here does not, however, require this transformation to take place at a physical level, a literal merging of human flesh with technology; instead, it only supposes that the posthuman exists “in a world that has been irreversibly altered by technology” (Flanagan 14). In other words, the posthuman is here understood as a category that is evoked when technology forces a reconceptualization of what it means to be human.

As I mentioned above, posthumanism does not refer to a singular critical position but rather to a broad spectrum over which different terms, positions, and concepts can be laid out. As the word itself suggests, posthumanism is primarily a mode of relation to humanism. More than a simple historical break with humanism, it signals, as R. L. Rutsky argues, “a change in the conceptualization of history [...] a kind of permanent cultural revolution, a performative process that continually re-conceptualizes, or changes, itself” (102). Born out of the deconstructive movement, posthumanism is built on repetition. As such, it does not purport to negate or renounce humanism, but rather repeats it “in a certain way and with a view to the deconstruction of anthropocentric thought” (Badmington 15). Intent on providing an alternative to humanist positions, posthumanism builds upon a shared “philosophical, political and cultural approach” that seeks to highlight a “new *conceptualization* of the human” (Nayar 3), one that opposes and corrects “the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon” (Wolfe xvi).

The theoretical approach to re-thinking the human in light of a posthumanist framework is not the only brand of posthumanism relevant to our

present conversation. Indeed, critical posthumanists such as Wolfe, Hayles, and Nayar have tended to promote a posthuman stance in which it is the definition of the human that requires updating; however, other thinkers have approached the posthuman as a way to move beyond humanity, in essence to transcend our own humanness. Reacting to the technologization of the world, thinkers such as Nick Bostrom have approached technology as a means “to transcend our biological limitations” (np). For them, the posthuman is but the logical result of humanity’s progressive ability “to overcome any number of natural human limitations such as aging, death, suffering, intellectual capacity, moral shortcomings and so forth” (Philbeck 175). Often referred to as transhumanism, this sub-current of posthumanism sees the emergence of new technology as a paradigmatic change whose effect is not only to transform people themselves, but to “transfor[m] how people, and entire societies, interoperate” (Philbeck 173). For this strand of posthumanism, technology is a means towards enhancing and bettering the human itself.

As this already suggests, one of the core differences between transhumanism and critical posthumanism is their approach to embodiment. Whereas transhumanism believes in “the complete transcendence of the human body,” in a decoupling of consciousness and selfhood from our embodied existence—a decoupling best captured by what I would refer to as the “utopian fantasies of better-abled (cyborg) or non-embodied (virtual) existence beyond the biological confines” (Schmeink 37-38)—this move is perceived by critical posthumanists as a fundamental misstep. As Hayles argues, this desire to transcend the human is naught but a “grafting of the posthuman onto a liberal humanist view of the self” (286-87); its belief in the possibility of transcendence amounting to little more than a “fantasy of escape from the finite materiality of the enfleshed self” (Braidotti 91). Though posthumanists would thus argue that transhumanism maintains at its core a humanist subject whose echoes of individualism, essentialism, and free will ultimately restrict its claim to a real form of post-*humanism*, in terms of the discussion to follow, its vision of a technologically-enhanced humanity nonetheless provides an interesting framework within which to analyze and explore how these humanist features or privileges operate within posthuman fiction.

Though The 5th Wave series primarily unfolds as an alien invasion narrative, it nonetheless presents a great opportunity to explore how the advanced integration between humanity and technology becomes a signifier for a certain kind of posthuman status. In his work on the subject, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. lists the different functions the alien as a cultural figure has tended to play in fiction over the years. As he explains, one of its main roles has been to provide a support upon which the human subject could project Otherness: “aliens are necessary because the human species is alone” (5). Arguing that “the lack that creates them is an Other to whom we can compare ourselves,” he posits

the alien as “the fictive event horizon of a parallel singularity from which we may derive what we are” (5). This paradoxical projection outside ourselves of an essential part of who we are partially accounts for our cultural fascination with aliens. But more importantly, it also explains the ambiguous role aliens themselves have come to play in most Western fiction. As Neil Badmington indeed argues, the response produced by the alien presence usually falls within two categories: either they are perceived as absolutely othered, absolutely malevolent, and absolutely opposed to the interests of human beings, in which case their portrayal only reaffirms a dominant set of binary oppositions—“human/alien; good/evil; Us/Them; real/fake, life/death” (22)—and results in a violent form of antipathy; or their presence results in a fascination so strong it borders on love, in which case, though the “aliens are allowed to invade ‘our’ lives on a daily basis, ‘we’ love ‘them’, quite simply, as a ‘them,’” their otherness becoming itself a site of attraction (152).

Bringing together both responses, Yancey’s series uses the figure of the alien as a stand-in for a form of posthuman technological development in which it becomes humanity’s futuristic double, a screen upon which the human subject (and the reader) is allowed to project both its anxieties about and fascination for the posthuman. Revisiting the humanist perspective which suffused the two responses described by Badmington, the 5th Wave series invites us to read the dualism between human and alien, and by extension human and posthuman, as semiologically interdependent. Whereas “humanism would insist that the two categories are entirely and naturally distinct,” this approach promotes a different reading in which “rather than the human and the alien being absolutely different from each other, they actually inhabit a scene of *différance* [...] the meaning of each term depend[ing] upon the trace of the other” (Badmington 156-57). Borrowing from Jacques Derrida, Badmington’s reading of the alien here not only defers the possibility of a fixed and certain signification—as Derrida argues, through *différance*, meaning is always “provisional” (9)—it bridges the gap between the signifiers of humanness and those pertaining to alien otherness. Negating the possibility of an absolute distinction between human and alien, as well as between human and posthuman, this reading defines these respective positions as in a continuous state of relation where any final and fixed meaning is thus endlessly deferred. Promoting the kind of posthumanism called forth by Wolfe when he argues that posthumanism in essence stands against the notion of a true posthuman, a transcendental mode of being other than human (xv), this approach breaks down the distinction between species and highlights instead their invariable and inescapable proximity.

Having now outlined the three dominant approaches which have historically surrounded the figure and concept of the posthuman, I propose, throughout the rest of this article, to explore how Yancey’s series itself engages

with these three different modes of approach and how, by highlighting their differences, we can better understand how to process the kind of otherness produced by technological advances in a true posthumanist fashion.

### Silencers, or Fear of the Other

The story of *The 5th Wave* begins *in medias res*, when 16-year old Cassie encounters a young man in a gas station, several months after the arrival of the alien mothership. Three attack waves have decimated humanity and Cassie has already endured a lot, including the death of her father and the disappearance of her little brother. Caught up in the middle of the 4th Wave, and unable to ascertain with confidence whether the young man she finds in the gas station is one of the aliens posing as human, Cassie instantly feels the need to kill him. As she herself explains, her instant rejection stems from the man's indeterminate ontological status. Being "still not sure if the 4th Wave is human or some kind of hybrid or even the Others themselves," Cassie finds relief in re-ascertaining difference in the presence of doubt: "I don't like to think that the Others look just like us and talk just like us and bleed just like us. I like to think of the Others as being... well, other" (5). For Cassie, the simple act of naming the aliens as Others allows her to re-establish their differential status, that is, to re-asertain ontological difference where closeness threatens the purity of the human status.

Cassie's reflex here does not so much rely on providing the Other with an ontological status of its own. Rather, it simply ascertains the ontologically-negative value of the alien. Without actually conferring any other relevant marker of meaning to the Other, this marking nonetheless establishes a fundamental schism upon which a set of basic binary oppositions—us/them, good/evil, human/Other—can in turn be projected. Within the series, the second set implicit in this binary approach is most evidently represented by Colonel Vosch, the leader of the military operation controlling the attack waves, and by Grace, a character only encountered in *The Infinite Sea*. Both characters indeed unfold as emblematic presences of the notions of non-human, evil and unknowable Otherness. When Cassie first meets Vosch, his troops are in the process of gathering children refugees and transporting them from the camp they currently occupy. As the soldiers begin rounding up the adults, Cassie manages to escape, realizing already that the soldiers are nothing but "the beginning of the 4th Wave" (90) and that every human in the camp is thus about to get killed. During this first encounter, Cassie presents Vosch and the other soldiers as non-human. Helped by the fact that their faces are hidden behind gas masks, her perception of the military men is presented through animalistic and superhuman descriptions. Vosch moves with "catlike grace" and is greatly attuned to what Cassie refers to as his "Spidey sense" (90). His soldiers are similarly defined by their ability to run "like a couple of cheetahs"

(91). Confronted with an Other she refuses to recognize as human, Cassie relies on animalistic tropes to re-asertain a difference she cannot entirely establish in visual terms alone. In essence, her approach simply asserts that if they are not human, they have to be Other.

During her escape, Cassie is, at some point, confronted with a dead soldier. Driven by curiosity, she kneels "beside the dead soldier. Grasped the top of the mask firmly, and pulled until I could see his eyes, very human-looking brown eyes, staring sightlessly into my face" (94). As she is about to reveal the soldier's complete face, she suddenly stops, arguing that it in fact "really didn't matter if the soldier had a mouth like a lobster" (95). As this shows, Cassie's rejection of the alien as Other is not grounded in physiological difference—as she herself explains later, "they didn't have lobster mouths or tentacles growing out of their chins. They looked like perfectly ordinary human beings" (97); instead, it is the product of what I would call the alien's posthumanness. Ontologically too close to the human, the alien is nonetheless different in enough respects—whether through its superhuman or inhuman attributes—that it calls for a re-establishment of absolute difference.

A similar dynamic is at play when Cassie first meets the Silencer Grace in *The Infinite Sea*. As described by Cassie, Grace indeed appears superhuman and beyond the scope of Cassie's own reality: "a tall girl with a cascade of honey-blond hair and striking Norwegian-model-type features, piercing blue eyes, full, pouty, collagen-packed lips, and the willowy figure of a runway fashion princess," Grace's posthuman essence is reinforced by a voice that is "deep and slightly scratchy like every seductive villainess ever conceived by Hollywood (2014, 160). As Cassie herself recognizes, Grace's body is not so much the product of a non-human imagination, but precisely stems from a very human, eugenic dream of enhancement and perfectibility. As her rhetoric suggests—"if you can download yourself into any sort of human body, why not pick an impeccable one?" (162)—the logic animating the alien, posthuman Grace's body is one which takes as starting point a conception of the human whose roots are to be found in humanist philosophy. In his work on the posthuman, Rutzky argues that "these sorts of changes continue to take 'the human' as a starting point" (105). Maintaining, if not directly reinforcing, "the traditional conception of the human as an autonomous subject, defined by its mastery over the object world," Cassie's depiction of Grace materializes what Rutzky calls "an all-too-human fantasy: a fantasy of becoming, not posthuman, but superhuman" (105).

Confronted here again with a superhuman being whose existence only seems to signify the obsolescence of the human itself, Cassie is "forced" to re-asertain Grace's difference in order to maintain her own human privilege. As she explains, "deep down, [the Silencers] are an effigy, a mask over a faceless face that probably ten thousand years ago looked like a squid or something"

(162). Reaffirmed in her own exceptionalism, Cassie finds in the old humanist binaries of them/us, alien/human, fake/real a comforting set of ideological markers whose essentialism seem to anchor the absolute otherness of this discomfiting Other. During the fight that ensues, Grace is thus once more presented in non-human terms: floating, putting a spell on Evan “with her otherworldly überwiles” and finally moving “cartoon fast” (162-63). As Grace fights the whole group, displaying physical abilities beyond human capacity—she can jump several stories, has lightning-fast reflexes and extreme accuracy as well as the strength to hurl people across the room—Cassie’s terminology, indebted as it is to the human/Other binary opposition—allows her to reaffirm the non-human nature of the alien and to confirm the privileged status of the human self. Most evidently materialized in her own wish to tear out Grace’s “pseudo-human heart” (163), this linguistic re-differentiation highlights the dominance of human purity over any alternative form of hybridity.

Indeed, as the reader learns later in the novel, the Silencer is in fact but a form of human enhancement via nanotechnologies. Triggered by the injection of “forty-four thousand microscopic robotic invaders” into the human host body supposed to enhance the eleven biological systems already present in the human body (circulatory, respiratory, limbic etc.) (Yancey, 2014 218), this hybrid process marks the Silencers as essentially posthuman in the transhumanist sense of the term. Having augmented their human ability beyond their natural embodied limitations, these enhancements indeed do not drastically transform the human form but rather “serve to fulfil the audience’s fantasies of distinctiveness, self-sufficiency, potency, and mastery” (Rutsky 106). Embodiments of the humanist dream, the posthuman Silencers in essence present both Cassie and the reader with what Rutsky sees as an answer to our becoming increasingly “powerless in the face of the complexities of contemporary technoculture” (106). Perfected posthuman existence, granted by the power of technology, is thus marked as both appealing and frightening. As it entrenches the flawed power dynamics of liberal humanism, the posthuman presence signaled by Grace and Vosch can but be violently rejected by a human subject whose own privileged position is suddenly revealed as groundless.

As critical posthumanists have argued, the enhanced posthuman obtained through technological mastery therefore does not signal an abandonment of the autonomous liberal subject; rather, it marks the expanding of its prerogatives into the realm of the posthuman (Hayles 287). Built upon humanist principles, Cassie’s description of the Silencers is thus continuously underscored by a belief in the moral and ultimately embodied dominance of the human. Representing “an *intensification* of humanism” (Wolfe xv), the Silencers are powerful, full of agency and individual determination, and their actions matter personally and historically.

In addition to their physical enhancement, the novel also suggests that Silencers have been psychically altered. Here, the series seems already to step close to posthumanist territory. Indeed, one of the primary features of posthumanism has been its tendency to conceive of mind and body as the two interwoven parts of the self. To one inevitably corresponds the other. Changing the body thus invariably involves changing the mind. As Cassie explains when she realizes that Silencers are repeatedly upgraded through the addition of “gifts [...] delivered in the night” (2014, 80), the Silencers are thus not only non-human because to their non-human bodies; they are non-human because this non-human body can only correspond to a non-human mind: “for the designers of the invasion had understood a simple, though counterintuitive, truth: Where the body went, the mind followed. Give someone the power of the gods and he will become as indifferent as the gods” (81). Yet, if in this instance the series appears to bridge the gap between self and embodiment and thus to adopt a posthumanist stance, it also quickly returns to a humanist approach in which mind and body are again separated. When the narration explains that there is an “entity hiding inside Grace’s body” (87), or when it describes the process of implantation as waking up “inside the human body chosen for him” (Yancey 2013, 136), Yancey’s portrayal of the alien is based on an understanding of the body as a separate entity whose nature seems irrelevant to the subjectivity it harbors.

In her essay on “Posthuman Voices,” Elena Gomel notices that “novels of alien infestation are textual sites where the narrative techniques of humanism splinter under the thematic impact of posthumanity” (180). Drawing from a variety of texts, she argues that the narrative voice in these texts is inseparable from humanism. Because they usually adopt an external focalization, these novels not only avoid the problematic issue of representing a truly alien mind, they also ultimately tend to side with a humanist perspective in which the human privilege is invariably re-affirmed. Throughout most of its course, Yancey’s series works according to a similar pattern. Indeed, only two chapters in *The Last Star* present the events from the Silencers’ perspective. Yet, even in this instance, the supposedly alien aspect of the posthuman Silencer is never allowed a unique voice of its own. Narrated hetero-diegetically, these two chapters instead produce a parasitical form of subjectivity in which the alien internal focalization is undercut by an overt narrative commentary. Depicted as invariably disembodied, the alien mind is thus presented as incomprehensible: “ten millennia adrift. Ten thousand years unbounded by space or time, stripped of the senses, pure thought, substance without form, motion without gesture, paralyzed force” (267). Referring to the Silencer only as an “it” and as an “inhuman thing” and focusing on the casualness with which it killed what it itself referred to as “vermin”—“it snaps the juvenile’s neck. The others it kills with equal efficiency and speed”—these chapters reinforce both the alien’s

ontological distinctiveness as well as its antipathy to human values (268).

Beyond identifying the posthuman alien as essentially different from its human host, these chapters also reinforce the series' equation of *posthumanity* with *inhumanity*. Presenting the perspective of the Silencer only a page later, the series appears, at first at least, to reinforce a perspective in which the ontological difference of the alien is matched by psychological difference:

The fundamental flaw in humanity was its humanity. The useless, baffling, self-destructive human tendency to love, to empathize, to sacrifice, to trust, to imagine anything outside the boundaries of its own skin—these things had driven the species to the edge of destruction. Worse, this one organism threatened the survival of all life on Earth. (Yancey 2015, 269)

Comparing this humanity with the shark, an epitome of “immaculate design,” the Silencer seems indeed to suggest that the alien essence is as fundamentally different from the human as the shark itself may be. Whereas the human was loving, trustful and sympathetic, the shark is defined by its “complete indifference to everything except feeding, procreation, and defending [its] territory. The shark does not love. It feels no empathy. It trusts nothing. It lives in perfect harmony with its environment because it has no aspirations or desires. And no pity” (270). Yet, this attempt at differentiation ultimately only reinforces a humanist perspective in which human and animal are perceived as essentially different. Reinforced by the narrator's reference to an absent embodied history—referring to its host body, the Silencer explains that “it has no memory of childhood [...] no recollection of the human family who loved and nurtured it” (268-69)—this passage presents the posthuman as yet another iteration of humanism. Suffused by the same kind of binary logic underlying humanist thinking, the Silencers' approach to life ultimately signals less a posthumanist thinking than a different form of human subjectivity. As such, its claim that there is “nothing human left in it; nothing human at all” (269) unfolds as an attempt at differentiation itself built upon the kind of dualism that, throughout the series, defines what it seeks to distance itself from, that is, the human.

As this shows, Cassie's representation of Vosch and Grace, like the Silencer's own narration, both present the posthuman as a materialization of Badmington's repetition or re-visiting of the human. In its depiction of the alien Other, the series builds upon a cultural fear of the posthuman understood as a future iteration of the human. While it appears to present enhanced and technologically perfected humanity as fundamentally alien to us, it ultimately reveals the foundations of this posthuman to firmly lie in the humanist project itself. Built upon the same power dynamics that suffused humanism—notably the idea that power lies with those who control the technology, dominate the

biopolitical decisions, and have the authority to rule—this first incarnation of the posthuman supported by technological enhancement does not represent an opening up of agentic possibilities or a form of cultural, social, or biological empowerment; it instead reminds us that all technologies, ground-breaking as they may be, when employed within the same structures of power, merely serves their continuation.

### My Silencer, or Empathy with the Other

Technically speaking, the character of Evan Walker, a Silencer with whom Cassie falls in love, would fall within the same category. Though, like other Silencers, he occupies a human body enhanced by alien technology, Evan is, from the earliest moment, clearly differentiated from other members of his species. Indeed, not only is the reader made privy to his own point of view, thus already complicating his status as absolutely alien, but Evan is also shown throughout the series as continuously challenging the binary ideology previously outlined. Though he, at times, seems to align himself with the Silencers' perspective—notably when he explains that his role on earth is “to snuff out the human noise” or when he reminds himself that “humans are social animals” and that “the evolutionary imperative that drove them to live in groups was opportunity to kill them by the billions” (Yancey 2013, 137)—the narration goes to great pains to show how unnatural this ideology is to him. Fighting his natural impulse to “se[e] the world through human eyes” and remembering the “painful integration” that followed his waking up in a human body whose “well-adjusted, healthy human psyche was the hardest to absorb” (Yancey 140), Evan's narrative continuously challenges the human-body/alien-mind dualism that suffuses the descriptions of Vosch and Grace.

Offering a hybrid and embodied form of subjectivity, Evan's perspective allows the novel to confuse the approach to the posthuman presented by these characters and to instead suggest a more fluid and ambiguous form of Otherness. Describing his relation to the body he occupies, Evan explains how:

His host body wasn't something apart from him that he manipulated like a puppet on a string. It *was* him. The eyes he used to see the world, they were his eyes. This brain he used to interpret, analyze, sense, and remember the world, it was his brain, wired by thousands of years of evolution. Human evolution. He wasn't trapped inside it and didn't ride about in it, guiding it like a jockey on a horse. He was this human body, and it was him. (Yancey 140)

Concluding with Evan's struggle to kill Cassie before surrendering to his feelings—“if he couldn't cross that line, the battle was over, he was lost. His heart, the war. Her face, the battlefield. With a cry only he could hear, the hunter turned. And ran” (Yancey 142)—this scene introduces a perspective whose

embodied essentialism in many ways echoes the critical posthumanist position. Arguing that human beings are “first of all embodied being[s], and the complexities of this embodiment mean that human awareness unfolds in ways very different from those of intelligence embodied in cybernetic machines” (Hayles 283-84), this approach reads the body as “the net result of thousands of years of sedimented evolutionary history” and as a core feature of subjectivity affecting “human behaviors at every level of thought and action” (Hayles 284). Following a similar logic, Evan’s narrative reveals an alien whose consciousness is affected by human embodiment. Promoting a vision of the subject in which consciousness and body are by-product of each other, “co-evolving, sharing ecosystems, life processes, [and] genetic material” (Nayar 8), Evan’s perspective introduces what appears to be a first truly posthumanist approach to the alien Other.

Progressive as it may seem, Evan’s narration is also partially indebted to “the traditional sense of an individualized, unitary, and autonomous subject” that defined humanist thinking (Rutsky 111). Unable to completely move beyond the anthropocentric humanist position, Evan’s struggle unfolds as a posthuman subjectivity rooted both in a hybrid and open form of embodiment and in the partial repetition of humanist beliefs in individual autonomy and a narrative of control. Set up as a contrast to Vosch and to the concept of Silencers as it exists in Cassie’s narrative, Evan’s presence highlights the paradoxical nature of the alien’s representation. Indeed, though Evan’s perspective is made available to the reader, it should also be “immediately obvious [to the reader] that Evan is one of the aliens who appear to be human” (Van der Werff, np). Despite this instant recognition of Otherness, Evan is never presented as on par with Cassie’s perception of Vosch or the other aliens. If this choice may be read as a way for Yancey to delay the big reveal or as Cassie “miss[ing] the clues” (Van der Werff, np), I would argue that this advanced knowledge actually allows the reader access to his posthuman subjectivity, an access that is itself necessary if this same reader is to later understand why Evan might be willing to risk his privileged position for Cassie. As Philbeck argues, the narrative here sets up the conditions for “the acquisition of empathy, a connection with a familiar subjectivity within, a form of dignity” (392). Taking the example of Roy Batty in *Blade Runner*, whom the film portrays in a similar fashion, forcing the viewer to “sympathiz[e] with him and forgiv[e] him despite the fact that he had murdered” his creator (394), Philbeck highlights how, by allowing the audience to share in on the rationale underlying the posthuman’s actions, the narrative compels this same audience to empathize with this figure and thus share its position even if only briefly. The conflicting economy suffusing the series’ representation of Evan—he is both an alien killer *and* a character struggling with a very human form of morality—provides a similar setup for reader engagement through which readers are compelled to

recognize interpretational differences and thus to defer the solidification of the posthuman’s Otherness.

As the stories unfold, Cassie falls in love with Evan whom she believes to be her savior. Describing his “soft, chocolaty eyes,” “lean jaw,” and “thick hair” (Yancey 2013, 155) with teenage fascination, she seems to initially be oblivious to his obvious superhuman features. Noticing how he manages to carry a bathtub by himself “like he’s Bruce Banner mid-Hulkifying” (163), she nonetheless fails to recognize these for the signs that they are. Similarly, his confession that he grooms because it makes him feel “more human” (167) and the ambiguous answers he gives Cassie when, after she finds out he goes hunting every night she asks him whether he might “just [not] have the heart to kill?”—he simply answers that he has “the heart to do what [he has] to do” (170)—both go unnoticed. Though these signs all converge towards a similar explanation, his attention to Cassie, his nurturing and protective behavior, all act as tempering elements in any attempt to ontologically define Evan’s status with certainty. Allowing Cassie to bypass signs to the contrary, these elements all portray Evan as potentially human. Guided and blinded by her desire for Evan—“I want him to catch me before I fall too far away from the Evan-I-thought-I-knew, who saved me to save himself from falling. He’s all I’ve got now. He’s my itty-bitty bush growing out of the cliff that I cling to” (280)—the narrative purposely seems to defer the possibility of a final interpretation and thus leaves its reader pondering the exact nature of Evan’s seemingly hybrid status.

Marked by ambiguity—this is most obviously manifest in the question that suffuses the novel, that is, “what do you have the heart to do, Evan Walker?” (Yancey 2013, 273)—Evan’s portrayal provides a much more psychologically-complex picture than that of Vosch, Grace, and other Silencers. Defined by what Philbeck calls “the dignity of the posthuman life, both real and artificial” (394), Evan’s presence highlights the contradiction emerging from the encounter between humanism and the posthuman. When Evan finally reveals his posthuman abilities during a fight with 5th Wave soldiers, Cassie is completely overwhelmed by the contradictory nature of her feelings. Confused by the revelation of his ontological status, she finds herself attracted to the “soft call of the Silencer. My silencer” (Yancey 2013, 344). Whereas her early encounter with the soldier in the gas station led her to an instinctive defensive position in which she felt the need to kill in order to survive, her experiences with Evan and the empathetic response he triggers in her force her to challenge this simplistic, conservative, binary response. Her taking care of him after he is injured during the fight furthermore reinforces, by reversing their earlier dynamic, the similarity between human and alien.

Though these events only happen moments after he has finally revealed his true nature, Evan’s subsequent vulnerability and the care and protection

his injury calls for re-affirm the ontological closeness of humans and Silencers. As Cassie herself recognizes, Evan “says he’s human, and he looks like a human, talks like a human, bleeds like a human and, okay, kisses like a human” (351). Concluding that “a rose by any other name, blah, blah, blah” (351), Cassie’s reaction here highlights the paradoxical and problematic nature of the position occupied by the posthuman. The metaphor of the rose is an appropriate one for such a paradox. Not only is the rose itself another form of life, but it also contains an implicit duality, being both a sign of beauty and of danger—signaled by the thorns. This dualism is later confirmed by Evan himself when he describes himself as a shark, echoing Vosch’s earlier comment. However, whereas Vosch clearly foregrounds the superiority of the shark, implicitly linking it to the cold-hearted nature of the Silencers, Evan’s comparison is not so clear-cut. As he explains, he is a shark, but “a shark who dreamed he was a man” (358). With its implication of subjectivity—his use of the pronoun “who” clearly signals personhood—and animality, Evan’s metaphorical description denotes both Otherness and similarity and thus, on the one hand, upholds the ontological hybridity of the posthuman subject while, on the other, complicating it by a retreat into humanist notions of human/non-human distinction.

Yet, as Evan himself explains, this paradoxical co-presence is not an accident but a feature of the posthuman: “not *but*, Cassie. *And*. I am human and I’m not. I’m neither and I’m both. I am Other and I am you” (363). Slipping back and forth between categories, maintaining the dualism but crossing sides—in his own discourse, he often finds himself switching from a “we—I mean, the Others” to a “we—I mean humans” (365, 367)—his position is defined by fluidity and ambiguity. An ontological anomaly, Evan’s cyborg nature allows him to claim appurtenance to both the human and the Silencer race. Hence, it is not surprising to find that when he attempts to put into words how he came to be, language fails him. Claiming that silencers were essentially “hiding inside human bodies, hiding inside human lives,” he tells Cassie that “we didn’t have to pretend to be you. We were you. Human and Other” (368). He continues, “Evan didn’t die when I awakened. He was... absorbed” (368). Yet, when pushed to explain further, Evan finds that words do not entirely do justice to this new mode of co-presence: “maybe *inserted* isn’t the best word. I guess the concept that comes closest is *downloaded*” (369). Limited by a humanist approach defined by dichotomies, Evan’s attempt at describing his ontological nature can but fail when confronted with a mode of being whose essence is invariably dual, fluid and marked by symbiosis.

As Cassie’s earlier reference to Evan as “my Silencer” already suggests (344), Evan’s portrayal is ultimately limited by Cassie’s own perspective and by her particular affinity to *this* Silencer. As such, Evan is not processed as a Silencer, but as a unique anomaly. Informed by Cassie’s emotional connec-

tion to him, his unique status allows him to bridge the gap between Cassie’s initial humanist approach and a future marked by symbiotic posthumanism. Delineated by Evan himself when he claims that instead of “invasion,” he would define his relation to his host as a mode of “coexistence” (372), his position is one marked by liminality. Having embraced what his fellow Silencers feared, that is, that “the longer we pretended to be human, the more human we would become” (372), Evan’s promotion of co-presence as a new mode of being allows him to claim an anomalous position. Both human and alien, Evan navigates a space between Otherness and sameness, at the boundary between categories.

If this approach in many ways seems to echo some of the posthumanist theories outlined above, it also ultimately fails to fully embrace them by repeatedly claiming the possibility of becoming human through love. Outlined by Evan himself—“I wasn’t fully human until I saw myself in your eyes” (372)—this move towards humanity clearly marks a return to a humanist approach in which posthuman and human categories are again clearly delineated. Torn as he may be between the different aspects of his self, his embrace of humanity comes at the expense of his posthumanity. Indeed, over the course of the series, Evan has to choose between saving Cassie and thus sacrificing his own technological superiority, his posthumanity, or insuring his own survival. Contrasting his approach with Vosch’s—“erase the human. Leave the rest. [...] We cannot love what we do not remember” (Yancey 2015, 233)—Evan’s portrayal allows the series to introduce the posthuman in a new light while simultaneously retaining the humanist framework through which it initially perceived this posthuman. In other words, by contrasting Evan with the other Silencers, it invites its readers to “love” the alien, to find empathy for and in him. However, this love remains essentially predicated on a recognition of sameness in the Other, on Evan’s move from posthuman to human. Confirming the humanist belief in the privileged and unique position of the human, Evan’s narrative sets up posthuman technology as antithetical to humanity’s future. By forcing him to abandon his posthuman status in order to “belong,” the series negates any possibility of symbiosis and rejects the dystopian future embodied by the Silencers. The symbol of an impossible future—a future in which love is the privilege of humanity—Evan’s posthumanity ultimately acts as a conservative and regressive force whose only appeal is to re-affirm the uniqueness of the human from which it invariably departs and towards which it necessarily seeks to return.

### The 12th System, or Appropriating the Other

If, through the Silencers, the series introduces the technologically-enhanced posthuman as a symbol of a dystopian future and if, through Evan’s narrative, it confirms the need for a return to a conservative, humanist conception of the

human, it also ultimately challenges both attitudes and subverts their claim to power and hegemony by introducing the possibility of empowerment through posthuman technology by way of what the series calls the 12th System. Indeed, whereas in *The 5th Wave*, Evan tells Cassie that aliens are immortal entities made of pure consciousness that have been downloaded into their hosts' bodies, this description is in fact not entirely accurate. As the reader learns when Vosch captures Ringer, a member of the rebellious teenager group that helps Cassie and Evan, the process of "injection" that is supposed to trigger her transition to the next "stage in human evolution" more directly resembles the kind of transhumanist fantasies described earlier in section one (Yancey 2015, 217). A kind of upgrade of the human form (Yancey 2016, 219), this System involves the integration of "a microscopic command hub affixed to the prefrontal lobe of your brain [...] a CPU, if you will" (216). Limited to controlling the technological augmentation itself, this CPU of sorts does not, at least according to Vosch, direct consciousness; Ringer will remain herself, her individuality and subjectivity essentially intact.

In contrast to Evan's, Grace's, or Vosch's experience, Ringer's narrative is presented in a first-person perspective, providing the reader with a direct access to her impressions and to her consciousness. Whereas this internal focalization already invites comparison with Cassie, the only other character granted direct access to her own narration, it is not the only element complicating Ringer's ontological definition. Beginning before her transition, her narration indeed continues seemingly unchanged once she has been processed through the 12th System. This lack of any stylistic or attitudinal shift highlights the fact that Ringer's subjectivity has not been compromised by the injection of the 12th System. Rendering posthuman subjectivity both knowable and relatable, this narratorial decision thus clearly suggests that humanity and posthumanity occupy similar positions, challenging the humanist binary structure of difference that suffused both Cassie and Evan's narrative.

If at a narratorial, conscious, and subjective level, Ringer's passage from human to posthuman seems conspicuously imperceptible, what remains to assess is the embodied effect of Ringer's posthuman technological advancement. In his work on the body, Drew Leder argues that the body is never phenomenologically fixed, but that it instead continuously transforms its "sensorimotor repertoire" by incorporating skills and by supplementing its functions with tools and technology (30). Approaching "the body as living process" (30), Leder argues that skills need to be practiced to become part of the body, that the "body masters a novel skill by incorporating its own corporeal history of hours and days spent in practice" (32), and that once a tool is mastered, "one begins to feel through it to the experiential field it discloses" (33). Processed through this lens, the 12th System can be viewed as both a form of skill and a tool. Mastered by Ringer over time via practice (including some failed

attempts), it is progressively incorporated as part of her bodily structure, thus blurring the lines between skill, tool, and simple bodily function or extension. This blurring is echoed in Ringer's own description. On the one hand, she conceives of the system as a form of enhancement or augmentation of her own embodied presence as long as she is 'in sync' with it: "I run for hours. The 12th System sustains me. It reinforces my joints and bones. It bolsters my muscles, gives me strength, endurance, nullifies my pain. All I have to do is surrender. All I have to do is trust, and I will endure" (Yancey 2015, 13). Materializing another dimension of Leder's body, that is, its ability to render itself invisible as long as its functioning aligns perfectly with the subject's intentions—"it is the body's own tendency toward self-concealment that allows for the possibility of its neglect or deprecation" (69)—Ringer's description clearly marks the posthuman body as a prolongation of its human counterpart, a fundamental extension of the subject's ability to act in the world.

On the other hand, Ringer's new body is also a site of renewed limitations. When she consciously decides to sacrifice her life, this decision is instantly overruled by her nano-technological implant:

The hub's response is instantaneous. My intent alerted the central processor, which calculated the overwhelming probability of terminal failure and shut down all but the essential functions of my muscular system. The 12th System has the same order I gave Razor: Don't let her die. Like a parasite's, the system's life depends on the continuation of mine. (Yancey 2015, 267)

Defying the humanist fantasy of absolute control, Ringer's posthuman enhancements force her, and invite the reader, to accept the possibility of "differing relations to mutation and randomness," or the idea that we may be "moving beyond the dialectic of control and lack of control" (Rutsky 111). A complex system beyond human control, the 12th System highlights the uncontrollable, networked, and plural nature of the posthuman body. Integrated by and into the body, it becomes "autonomous, autopoietic, and self-sustaining" (Rutsky 104), blurring the lines between technology and biology, and rejecting any notion of humanist domination of mind over matter.

Struggling to retain a unified conception of subjectivity in the face of her hybrid and dislocated new position, Ringer resorts to presenting the 12th System as a separate entity. Pitting the system against her own consciousness, she attempts through language to re-ascertain the individual and singular nature of her own self. Mobilizing a humanist conception of the body as a distinct entity, she argues that "there's nothing that the hub can do about my snowballing panic. It can respond to emotions; it can't control them. Endorphins release. Neurons and mastocytes dump serotonin into my bloodstream. Other than these physiological adjustments, it's as paralyzed as I am" (268).

Even though the physiological systems can be controlled by the posthuman technology, the emotional and psychological aspects of Ringer's self cannot. Yet, this re-established dichotomy is itself challenged by the impact of the body on Ringer's mind, because of which neither Ringer nor the 12th System can be said to be in full control of her being. Promoting a vision in which her consciousness and the System function in symbiosis, Ringer's narrative outlines both entities as co-agent in the creation of a truly posthumanist form of subjectivity. Invariably woven into each other—"unless I change my mind, it can't let me go. Unless it lets me go, I can't change my mind" (268)—the model introduced through Ringer's narration short-circuits the transhumanist fantasy of a technologically-enhanced body controlled by a rational mind and presents instead a posthumanist perspective in which body and mind are not only connected but inter-dependent.

As she progressively accepts the potential opened up by her new embodied posthuman reality, Ringer finds a new form of empowerment. Expressed in her address to herself as Ringer 2.0—"okay, Ringer 2.0. Let's see how good you are" (269)—this new status is presented as both a break with and continuation of the Ringer she was prior to her implantation. Indebted to her own old humanist subjectivity yet revisiting it in a way that allows for change, mutation, and the introduction of randomness noted by Rutsky, Ringer's narration marks the acceptance of the physical superiority and autonomy of her new technologized body and of the computational power of the hub, acceptance that, in turn, compels her to readjust her concept of subjectivity beyond humanistic dualism. As she explains, "my body is numb. My mind is empty. I've completely surrendered to the 12th System. It isn't part of me anymore. The 12th System is me. We are one. I am human. And I am not" (271). As she learns how to use her new enhanced abilities, the 12th System becomes as much responsible for her decision-making processes as are Ringer's own fears and desires.

Though her explanation appears to echo Evan's confession to Cassie, it also differs in one fundamental respect. Whereas Evan continuously struggles to overcome what he perceives as an alien invasion and regain control over his own subjectivity, Ringer's acceptance of the dual and contradictory nature of her being allows her to move beyond the humanist dream of control and to develop a truly posthumanist form of subjectivity. In this way, Ringer's narrative more closely aligns with Vosch's. Indeed, both Evan and Grace have believed themselves to be alien; their identity was built around an essential dichotomy between human and alien. Mutually exclusive, these two signifiers required both Evan and Grace to choose sides. However, during her capture, Ringer learns that the Silencers, though believed to be alien, are but a technological extension of the human:

There are no entities downloaded into human bodies. No alien consciousness inside anyone. Because of the risk. The risk. The risk is unacceptable. It's a... a program, a delusional construct. Inserted into their minds before they were born, switched on when they reached puberty—a lie, it's a lie. They're human. Enhanced like me, but human... human like me. (Yancey 2015, 282)

Vosch's revelation, aiming to ease Ringer's transition—as he explains, it unfolds as a "bridge that connects what-was to what-will-be" (216)—thus reveals the "alien" to be but a simple belief system, an ideology. Product of the implanting into human brains of an alien technology, the Silencers' identity is not in and of itself alien, but rather is built around alienness as a dominant identificatory feature. Programmed to believe in their own Otherness, the Silencers operate as a cleansing process whose aim is to ultimately enforce the move to posthumanity.

As it progressively reduces the distinction between human and posthuman characters, the series thus moves away from the issue of trying to differentiate humanity from its posthuman future and towards a more complex question: "what's the difference between a human who carries an alien consciousness and a human who believes that he does?" (284). Posthumanity is, by the end of the series, defined not as a specific embodied mode of existence nor as the result of technological advancement. Instead, it unfolds as an ideology, a structure of thought through which the human characters are "forced" to see the world. As Ringer explains, the posthuman alien is "just us. It's always been just us" (285). Inviting the reader to consider the mutational process at the heart of the shift from human to Silencer as but another iteration of the same kind of process that "are an intrinsic and material aspect of 'our' culture, 'our' bodies, and 'our' selves" (Rutsky 111), Yancey's series ultimately highlights how the posthuman is always already inherently human.

Promoting a vision of the posthuman as a process of accretion through which "one set of humans [...] become dislocated from others much in the way speciation occurs in the natural world" (Philbeck 176), Ringer's narrative rejects the idea of technology itself as a divider. Instead, it is the approach with which this technology is processed that defines identity. In this sense, Ringer's narrative eschews the humanist tradition in favor of a truly posthumanist perspective in which binary oppositions are replaced with mutations, idiosyncrasy, and an infinity of differences. Ringer's new technological enhancements are as much part of her subjectivity as is her biological body and the process of cultural change within which both evolve. Presented by the novels as the only true promise of empowerment through technology, Ringer ultimately defies programming, denies authority, and instead signals a renewed form of agency. As such, when Vosch offers to save her and grant her eternal life as a disembodied consciousness on the alien ship, she rejects it and sets him up for

Cassie's kill. Rejecting traditional conceptions of heroism and self-sacrifice for a greater good, her decision to kill thousands of soldiers in order to survive—"I'll kill until I lose count. I'll kill until counting doesn't matter" (Yancey 2015, 309)—is presented as necessary, that is, as a direct response to the conservative violence of Vosch's humanist project.

### Conclusion

The 5th Wave series does not provide its readers with a single unified approach to the challenges and chances presented by posthumanism. Instead, it offers a series of potential approaches embodied by different characters confronted with an increasingly technologized world. Starting from Cassie's point of view, the series indeed initially presents what appears to be a traditional alien invasion narrative. Marked by a dualistic vision of the world, Cassie's story begins when, unable to discern the human from the alien, she finds herself "obligated" to preemptively kill what she instinctively can only conceive as an ontological threat. Introducing the alien presence through the lens of humanist dualism and concerned with maintaining the purity and privileged position of the human, the series then pivots to a different perspective when it introduces what will quickly become Cassie's love interest, Evan, a Silencer parading as human. Yet, if it appears at times to challenge Cassie's dichotomic ideology, Evan's narrative ultimately only reinforces the division between human and posthuman by forcing him to side with human morality and against the posthuman/alien violence unleashed by Vosch. It is only in the final novel that Yancey proposes a truly progressive model. Injected with the 12th System during the course of the narrative, Ringer is not only the object of the reader's sympathy but also presents the posthuman as a variation on the human. Negating the possibility of binary thinking, her narrative reveals a world in which humanity and posthumanity are only divided by the ideologies of identity politics. Culminating with Ringer's giving birth to a new generation of posthumans and allowing both mother and daughter to connect at an emotional level by way of their respective 12th system—"I cupped her cheek and gently curled into her, discerning her need. Ben. She wanted Ben" (Yancey, *Last* 331)—the series portrays Ringer as antithesis to the Silencers' project. Instead of increasing the fear of the Other, Ringer's narrative highlights the importance of connectivity, trust, and engagement.

Offering his reader a series of stories in which control and its abdication becomes the key to a peaceful future—as the author himself argues, the appeal of books for young adults stems from "that apocalyptic feeling as you reach the end of your teen years" when readers find themselves "wondering and maybe worrying about how much control they really do have over their own lives" (qtd. in Corbett np)—Yancey's series uses technology as a way to address posthumanism and its promotion of randomness, mutation, and uncontrollability.

Yet, whereas posthumanism has tended to approach these as welcome signs of the death of the humanist dream, Yancey's series presents a more dissonant picture. Touching on the anxieties born out of a posthuman fantasy of eugenic able-ism in which the human body is seen as perfectible, the series ultimately rejects any perspective in which identity can and should define how one sees the Other. In contrast to Vosch's call to "ignore your own humanity, to step outside yourself and see through the eyes of a wholly other species" (Yancey, *Last* 300), it invites its readers to embrace embodied mutations not as marks of difference but rather as différential sites. Creating difference, mutation links all beings *through* difference. Instead of dividing and separating populations and genomes, mutation, processed through a posthumanist lens, unfolds as a bringing together of idiosyncratic variations. By accepting the posthuman as the result of a natural process of continual change, Ringer's narrative thus compels the reader to draw connections where Cassie's only saw distinction. Questioning the sheer possibility of hierarchy, Yancey's series ultimately presents young adult readers with both a warning and a challenge: fear of social, technological, and biological changes can but lead to an increase in violence; embracing change, difficult as it may be, signals the beginning of a new society built not on fragmented social and biological identities but rather on a commonality of subjectivities that extend beyond the human and may lead us towards truly posthumanist territories.

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### Abstract

This article discusses negotiations of humanity and posthumanity in the contemporary alien invasion narrative of Rick Yancey's Young Adult novel series *The 5th Wave*, *The Infinite Sea* and *The Last Star*. Starting from the vantage point of traditional invasion narratives, the novels quickly reveal the alien Other as essentially absent and replaced by a human-alien hybridity that engages in transhumanist notions of technological enhancement and enacts paradigmatic shifts in self-realization of the human as posthuman. Over the course of three books, the ontological status of both humans and aliens is continuously questioned and redefined, shifting our view from traditional paranoid notions of an Other hiding among us to an approach which sees this alien Other as always already part of the human, a shift which forces us to negotiate the boundaries of our own hybrid becomings. These ontological categories are then projected onto the becoming bodies of the novel's young adult protagonists in order to underscore the structures of *différance* which underlie human and alien relations. Exposing the irreducible presence of the traces of each in the other and the field of discourse they inhabit, the series finally enacts this *différance* through the interplay of several variant discourses about transhumanist enhancement, hybrid posthumanity and a becoming-with that reveals the human already alien to itself. By deconstructing these different approaches, this article reveals how Yancey's series promotes an interesting framework for assessing our own potential posthumanity as well as the relation we entertain with those who do not entirely seem to fit within the traditional category of the human.