FRAGMENTED IDENTITY IN YOUNG ADULT FICTION:

THE IMPACT OF SELF-CONCEPTION ON PERSONAL AUTONOMY

by

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(Under the Direction of Channette Romero)

ABSTRACT

Due to the rising popularity of the genre, this paper examines a trend in Young Adult Fantasy and Science Fiction of the 2010s to determine its effect. The trend examined is the protagonist struggling with a dual identity. This paper examines three texts closely: *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline, The Throne of Glass Series by Sarah J. Maas, and the Lunar Chronicles by Marissa Meyer. This paper finds that these texts use protagonists with a broken sense of identity in order to reassert the need for a unified autonomous identity to maintain mental health and functionality.

INDEX WORDS: Young Adult, Identity, Fantasy, Science Fiction, Autonomy

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Over the past decade, Young Adult Fantasy and Science Fiction has taken the world of popular culture by storm with an abundance of new books and film adaptations. In light of this rise in popularity, I think the time is ripe to examine what exactly these books are presenting which the public has so eagerly consumed.

Of course, such a point of interest is much too broad. To narrow the focus of this study, I have selected a trend which seems unique to the YA science fiction and fantasy of the past decade: the protagonist with fragmented identity. Many YA fantasy and science fiction books feature protagonists who have two names, two personalities, two sets of allegiances, two competing goals, etc. These books either start with the protagonist juggling two lives or have them thrust into this situation through some unforeseen circumstance. Either way, they end with the protagonist having found a way to combine their two identities into some semblance of unity. Examples of this basic plot include *The False Princess* by Eilis O'neal, The Ascendance Trilogy by Jennifer Nielsen, the Incarceron series by Catherine Fisher, The Chronicles of Nick by Sherrilyn Kenyon and more. This is certainly not to say that all YA science fiction and fantasy of the past decade follows this trend, but that it is such a prevalent theme that it requires further study.

Three series, which are incredibly popular and use the fragmented identity theme in similar and yet different ways, are *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline, the Throne of Glass series by Sarah J. Maas, and The Lunar Chronicles by Marissa Meyer. All of these books have been on the New York Times Best Sellers list. *Ready Player One* was adapted into a film in 2018 and

won the Alex Award from the Young Adult Library Services Association (Ready Player One Penguin Randomhouse). Sarah J. Maas's books have sold more than 8 million copies and been translated into 36 languages (Bloomsbury). Maas's books have appeared on the New York Times Bestseller list multiple times and on Amazon's list of their websites' current best-selling teen category authors Mass herself is the 4th best-selling author, selling above Suzanne Collins, the author of the Hunger Games series, and Cassandra Clare, author of the Mortal Instruments. Marissa Meyer is currently Amazon's 36th bestselling teen category author, which although quite a drop from Maas is still more than such icons as John Green and Veronica Roth, author of the Divergent series ("Most Popular Authors in Teen & Young Adult Books"). Because of their popularity and their heavy incorporation of fragmented identity into their plot, I have chosen to analyze these three texts to discover the overall effect of this recent plot trend.

Before continuing, we must pause to consider what exactly is meant by identity and fragmentation. In the broadest terms, I use identity to mean how a person perceives themselves. Fragmented identity occurs when a person views themselves as two or more non-compatible pieces. The issue is not whether this self-conception is accurate or not, but that such a viewpoint restricts autonomy and prevents a person from becoming a unified autonomous subject. In my analysis I will show how fragmented identity serves as an obstacle to the autonomous subject. Because fragmented identity can hinder people from becoming autonomous subjects, its use in plot and theme allows for an exploration of the benefits and drawbacks of believing we are autonomous subjects.

Having established what I mean by fragmented identity, the next step is to address what function this recent trope of protagonists with fragmented identities serves. My analysis will show that the overall effect of this plot is to suggest that the healthiest form of identity is to see

ourselves as unified autonomous subjects. Several theorists have noted that popular literature encourages readers to view themselves as unified autonomous subjects, and by examining some of these theories I will expound upon the differences which make my study a point of interest.

Louis Althusser ties the existence of the subject closely to ideology claiming that the subject is constituted through hailing by ideology. Ideology creates subjects by addressing people as subjects. Now Althusser goes on to say that because "man is an ideological animal by nature", we are what he calls "*always already* subjects" (Althusser 262-263). That is to say that humans are always being hailed by some ideology and thus we are always subjects. Because of this relationship, "the 'obviousness' that you and I are subjects – and that that does not cause any problems – is an ideological effect, the elementary ideological effect" (Althusser 262). This means that ideologies create subjects not as a tenet of their belief system but as an assumption necessary for that belief system to exist in the first place. The purpose of ideology is to ensure people's cooperation with the dominant social system, and to do this they must treat people as subjects who can then be subjugated. The given reasons people should accept their subjugation are the tenets of the ideology. Thus in saying that the obviousness of the subject is the "elementary ideological effect", Althusser points to the fact that the subject is an assumption made by all ideologies. The unified autonomous subject is not touted as a particular belief system but rather treated by ideology as a given in order to enact belief systems.

Catherine Belsey helps us apply this concept to literature by explaining how classic realist texts hail their readers as subjects. Belsey writes "This interpellation (address) in turn facilitates the interpolation (inclusion) of the reader in the narrative by the presentation of events from a specific and unified point of view" (Belsey 70). Much like how Althusser says that ideology's hailing makes subjects, Belsey argues that classic realism addresses the reader from a

singular point of view placing the reader in the ideological position of that viewpoint. That position is "a transcendent and noncontradictory subject" (Belsey 71). Texts are themselves ideological systems which hail readers to get the readers to assume the position of a coherent subject. That position as "a transcendent and noncontradictory subject" then allows the text to have readers enact the text's ideological position. To further clarify Belsey also says that "it is in the interest of [the ideology of liberal humanism] … to present the individual as a free, unified, autonomous subjectivity" in order to promote capitalist values (Belsey 62). Belsey says that liberal humanism needs the individual to be a "free, unified, autonomous subjectivity" because it is "the *interest* of this ideology" (emphasis mine). Just as Althusser describes the creation of the subject as the "elementary ideological effect", here "free, unified, autonomous subjectivity" is not the ideology itself but rather a precept that needs to be established for the rest of the ideology to work.

I argue that my texts take as their ideological position that it is better for people to act as unified autonomous subjects. The initial fragmentation of the protagonist's identity disrupts the unified subject so that when the protagonist recovers a coherent unified sense of identity it serves to celebrate personal autonomy and encourage readers to see autonomous subjectivity as the correct and healthy identity. Essentially the ideology of these books is also what Althusser calls the "elementary ideological effect", but this produces a problem. Ideology creates subjects, and since texts are ideological positions they create subjects as Catherine Belsey argues. Thus, we have a situation in which the books are seeking to promote an ideology in which through their nature as ideological systems they already position the reader. The texts seek to encourage readers to choose to see themselves as autonomous subjects, but the texts already positioned the reader as an autonomous subject before they can even begin to prove that such a position is

healthy. The books get around this apparent contradiction by taking advantage of the difference between character and reader.

Returning to how Catherine Belsey sees classic realism operating as ideology we can pinpoint how the books in this project work. Belsey argues:

[Classic realism] performs, I wish to suggest, the work of ideology, not only in its representation of a world of consistent subjects who are the origin of meaning, knowledge, and action, but also in offering the reader, as the position from which the text is most readily intelligible, the position of subject as the origin both of understanding and of action in accordance with that understanding. (Belsey 62)

Although the texts in this study still operate as ideological systems which interpolate their readers as subjects as Belsey suggests, they do not present "a world of consistent subjects". The fragmented identity of the protagonist instead presents quite the opposite. The characters in these books experience themselves as contradictory non-consistent subjects which causes their sense of identity to fracture. Belsey says that "Classic realism tends to offer as the 'obvious' basis of its intelligibility the assumption that character, unified and coherent, is the source of action" (Belsey 67). The texts in this project, although they are classic realist, do not make that assumption. Their protagonists initially are incoherent, disparate, and lacking character consistency, and as the books progress they choose to become unified and coherent. This choice removes the unified consistent subject as an assumption and instead turns it into a decision. These books acknowledge that a person does not have to have unified subjectivity but imply that it is better if they do. Because as ideological systems these texts have already placed their readers in the position of "transcendent and noncontradictory subjects", they use the inconsistency of their character's identity to make their point.

Fragmented identity is key to these books' ideology because it provides a space in which to examine life without autonomous subjectivity. Fragmented identity disrupts ideology's constitution of the subject because it creates two objects to be hailed rather than one. If there is a piece of my identity which I do not acknowledge then that piece cannot be addressed. If ideology can only hail part of me then it can only create a partial subject. Since this constraint originates in the addressee rather than the ideological addressing, it must be presented within the world of the text through character because the text cannot be certain of the reader's understanding of their own identity.

How then does having a character come to the realization that they should act as a unified identity and become an autonomous subject convince readers of the same thing? Again turning to Belsey can aid us in our understanding. Belsey explains that "Perhaps the commonest pattern in the novel is the gradual convergence of the voices of the subject of the *énoucé* and the subject of the enunciation until they merge triumphantly at the point of closure" (Belsey 72). The characters are "the subject of the *énoucé*" and the text itself "the subject of enunciation". The reader shares the same position as the text, the subject of enunciation. The book ends when the character reaches the same ideological standpoint as the text so that "the protagonist's discovery also has the effect of confirming the wisdom of the reader" (Belsey 73). My texts treat the reader as a coherent subject and thus place the reader in a position of unified identity, and then have the characters work to arrive at the same understanding confirming the wisdom of the reader for already being an autonomous subject. Here, these books affirm the thing most classic realist books treat as an assumption, which is that people see themselves as unified autonomous subjects.

One last point of clarification before delving into the texts revolves around genre. If we consider the most basic definition of the Bildungsroman in "A novel that has as its main theme the formative years or spiritual education of one person" ("Bildungsroman" OED), then it appears obvious that these Young Adult books should be classified as Bildungsroman. Whatever quest or objective these novels set for their young protagonist, it proves to be the most dynamic and formative time in that person's life. In this sense most if not all Young Adult fiction is Bildungsroman to a degree. This is readily apparent in the books for this project in that they have their protagonist's journey centered on the development of a new identity. There is conflict and instability represented in the fragmented identity device through which the protagonist must progress towards a coherent view of themselves. The characters have to form into a person that believes in their own coherence and agency, and the texts are thus centered on a formative process.

Now if one turns to theory on the *Bildungsroman* which looks at not only its contents but its effect on the reader as well, then we find that these texts are *Bildungsroman* with a slight twist to emphasize American values. Joseph Slaughter says that:

> the social work of incorporation that the *Bildungsroman* illustrates and performs for its readers and protagonist tends to be conservative of the prevailing egalitarian imaginary, if not of the actually existing sociopolitical institutions in which it is instantiated; the normative genre is tendentially reformist rather than revolutionary. (Slaughter 28)

Slaughter's argument is that the *Bildungsroman* incorporates its readers and protagonist into the larger social world, and that social world into which that incorporation occurs tends to be close to if not the same as the society in which that *Bildungsroman* was produced. The *Bildungsroman* encourages and produces harmony between society and the individual: both with its protagonist

and its reader. The texts analyzed here, although *Bildungsroman*, will break this tendency in one way to achieve their goal. In order to promote personal agency over all else, these books portray their protagonist as overcoming rather than harmonizing with society. Like with Belsey, we see a break from the classical understanding in how these books use their characters. However, in doing so these books still encourage the reader to harmonize with American society because American culture believes in the power of the individual. Explaining the failure of what he calls "postmodern jurisprudence" in the American legal system, Stephan Feldman writes "Given our Constitution, with its emphasis on individual rights such as free expression and religious freedom, scholarship denigrating the self, autonomy, and agency will probably fall on deaf ears" (Feldman 284). American society places great emphasis on the individual, and therefore, despite the appearance of paradox, books which portray the individual as greater than society are in fact encouraging readers to accept American social values.

Although I largely agree with Slaughter's discussion about the function of the *Bildungsroman,* I argue that the disconnect between the reader and character in which harmony with society is achieved for the reader by harmony not being achieved for the character displays the difference between European and American social values. Theory on the *Bildungsroman* was developed by looking at the texts from which the genre originated. These original texts were European, and because of this focus in my texts, which are part of American popular culture, there exists a slight point of disconnect with Slaughter's explanation. Because my study focuses on these books as elements of popular culture and therefore symptomatic of general social outlooks, I judge it imperative to highlight this small missing piece from Slaughter. My books mostly align with Slaughter's theories, but in their difference between character and reader there

is a slight transformation from *Bildungsroman*, which historically has been Eurocentric, to an American *Bildungsroman*.

To some the promotion of such an ideology may be unimpressive. Joseph Slaughter writes that "The idealism of the classical, affirmative *Bildungsroman* seems to have lost much of its social and aesthetic appeal in the ages of modernist irony and postmodern suspicion – except in popular, "subliterary" culture, where its ideological (and rather naïve) optimism seems stronger than ever" (Slaughter 27). I agree with Slaughter in that the books I examine, which are part of the "popular, 'subliterary' culture", do maintain an idealism by promoting the ideology of the autonomous self. However, I take issue in Slaughter declaring such optimism naïve, and my analysis will show that these books use form and narrative to deliberately promote this affirmative idealism. Slaughter in calling such optimism naïve without presenting any examples or analysis as evidence only proves his own disapproval of the ideology of these books. My project analyzes these books to say that they are purposely optimistic and aware of the set of beliefs which their narratives encourage. These books set out to confirm something which other books take as an assumption. They are not simply representative or reflective of American society's ideological values, but they actively choose to support those values.

To further clarify my argument about these texts as self-affirming, I turn again to Catherine Belsey. Belsey summarizes her argument about the classic realist text's interpellation of the subject.

> Initially (and continuously) constructed in language, the subject finds in the classic realist text a confirmation of the position of autonomous subjectivity represented in ideology as "obvious". It is possible to refuse that position, but to do so, at least at present, is to make a deliberate and ideological choice.

Belsey argues that classic realist texts confirm that the reader possesses autonomous subjectivity and that to refuse that conclusion requires a "deliberate and ideological choice". I argue that the books I analyze position the confirmation of autonomous subjectivity as a choice, albeit the correct choice. In this case either accepting or rejecting the autonomous subject is a choice, but the books strongly encourage us to see acceptance as the correct choice. By acknowledging that autonomous subjectivity is not the only option, these books imply that it is better for humans to accept this position. Instead of hiding autonomous subjectivity as the "obvious" and thus only position, these books encourage us to accept autonomy because they see it as the best position. These books encourage the ideology of the unified autonomous individual because they view it as a position from which it is easiest for a person to maintain their mental health and happiness. This trope in the YA of the past decade argues that you do not have to see yourself as an autonomous individual, but that you will feel and function better if you do.

In summary this study looks at a recent trend in Young Adult Science Fiction and Fantasy of the past decade: fragmented identity. These books use this fragmented identity as a device with which to disrupt and then promote the ideology that individuals are free and autonomous. Although these books hail their readers as autonomous subjects already, they utilize character development and sympathetic protagonists to openly affirm rather than assume unified coherent identity. These books and their function can be explained through their position as *Bildungsroman*, but in doing so I find it essential to highlight their specific ideological goal which results in some slight departures from the Eurocentric understanding of the *Bildungsroman* to more accurately capture American society. It is because of this ability to illustrate the values of contemporary American society that these books should not be overlooked but rather examined in an effort to remain conscious of our society's condition.

Ready Player One, the Throne of Glass series, and the Lunar Chronicles argue that a unified autonomous subject is not inevitable, but it is crucial in that it allows us to function more effectively and maintain our mental health. These books pull back the illusion of the consistent autonomous subject, which ideologies cause us to assume, only to reassert that illusion as necessary for humanity's well-being.

Chapter 1: *Ready Player One*

The Basics of Fragmented Identity

Introduction:

Published in 2011 at the start of the decade, *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline offers one of the first examples of the trend in Young Adult fiction which I have denoted fragmented identity. As an early example of fragmented identity as a device and a popular story of the decade, *Ready Player One* presents a place to begin looking at the basics of a device which my other texts will then complicate.

Ready Player One takes place on Earth around the year 2045. The book follows protagonist Wade Watts, also known as his online avatar Parzival, as he competes to find Halliday's Easter Egg, inside the world's largest virtual reality game, the OASIS. Halliday's Easter Egg was developed and hidden by the OASIS' creator, James Halliday. The winner of the contest will receive not only Halliday's massive fortune, but also control of the OASIS itself, which in a world made grim by overpopulation and environmental problems has become humanity's place of refuge.

The virtual world of the OASIS allows people to literally have a dual life, where they are able to construct an avatar with whatever characteristics and name they may desire. Although in 2020 we do not yet have the technology to allow for such an extreme creation of a virtual identity, social media and the increasing prevalence of other communication technology has caused virtual identity to gain more and more significance. The split in *Ready Player One* between a person's real world identity and their OASIS avatar mirrors the present day adopting

of different identities for various social platforms, whether it be online through social media or in person. One can think of this split as the divide between *who I see myself* as and *who I show to others*. Such a divide affects autonomy when a person acts as though their virtual and real world person are truly separate identities. What Cline's portrayal of Wade also captures in *Ready Player One* is that often this distinction is pursued willingly as people celebrate their ability to present themselves in a way they find more pleasing than who they really are. However, *Ready Player One* warns that when identity fragmentation becomes extreme, a person becomes two competing cores of cognition, desire, and action. If these cores split enough then only one can be autonomous at a time, creating a partial subject.

Ready Player One presupposes increasing fragmentation of identity as new technology allows more control over self-presentation. Starting with the initial appeal of this increased fragmentation, the book then goes on to suggest that such fracturing is harmful to the health of the individual because it prevents the exercise of personal autonomy. Through this fracturing and reconciliation *Ready Player One* encourages readers to see the unified autonomous subject as the natural and correct mode of understanding our consciousness.

Part 1: Splitting Identity

In *Ready Player One* Wade attempts to live two lives: one in the virtual world of the OASIS as Parzival and one in the real world as Wade. Because he tries to maintain a distance between these lives, the actions and desires of Wade become not only separate but in conflict with Parzival. The deep split which results in Wade's understanding of himself, and which the novel makes a point to rectify, is what I am calling fragmented identity. Whether this self-conception is accurate is not the concern of these texts or this project, but rather what fragmented identity does to the subject and autonomy.

As the novel begins, Wade and his OASIS avatar, Parzival, maintain a clear separation and lack unity. Furthermore, Wade's initial encouragement of the divide between his online and real persons suggests that there is an element of choice within the ideological system of the novel. *Ready Player One* clearly thinks it is better to act as a unified individual, but the mere presence of fragmented identity implies that one does not have to accept this ideology.

Before the reader even meets Parzival, *Ready Player One* foreshadows the relationship between his two identities in Wade's name, and in doing so prepares to reader to accept the book's ideological conclusion. In Chapter One Wade tells the reader that, "My mom once told me that my dad had given me an alliterative name, Wade Watts, because he thought it sounded like the secret identity of a superhero. Like Peter Parker or Clark Kent" (Cline 15). This reference to the origins of Wade's name hints at the relationship between Parzival and Wade. Parzival lives in the spotlight as a famous gunter (person searching for Halliday's Egg) in the OASIS, while Wade functions anonymously in the background. However, this reference to superheroes also suggests that Wade's attempt to keep Parzival and Wade separate will prove problematic. Many superheroes, especially Spiderman (Peter Parker), struggle to maintain their dual identities. Their ordinary lives often suffer for their superhero alter egos to flourish. Thus, this reference provides a grim sense of irony as the reader knows that maintaining a dual identity often proves troublesome for superheroes. Wade's name suggest that he has an alter ego, but for the reader it also implies that keeping those two lives apart will prove difficult. This reference foreshadows the problems Wade will have later on, giving the reader a superior knowledge position.

This position makes the reader more susceptible to the book's overall ideological standpoint. Through irony readers find themselves more aligned with the text rather than the

character, whom the reader knows to be incorrect. Thus, when Wade finally does learn that acting as dual subjects is unsustainable, he seems to have simply caught up to the reader's knowledge, confirming the beliefs which were first produced in the reader through irony and foreshadowing. Catherine Belsey explains how this technique works in "Nineteenth-century protagonists learn by experience until they achieve the wisdom author and reader now seem to have possessed all along. (Paradoxically the protagonist's discovery also has the effect of confirming the wisdom of the reader.)" (Belsey 73). When a book uses irony to differentiate between what a character and reader know, the reader feels themselves to be in the "correct" position. As the protagonist develops towards the same knowledge, the reader will feel themselves commended on their assumptions. The assumptions, which the use of irony typically gets readers to make, are the book's own ideological beliefs. In this case by foreshadowing the struggle of maintaining a dual life with superhero names, the text causes readers to assume that a dual sense of identity is bad for the individual. When Wade eventually realizes the same thing, the reader's suspicions are confirmed and the text's viewpoint with them.

Wade also treats his OASIS avatar much like a superhero identity. Parzival becomes a famous figure in both the OASIS and the real world, while Wade does his best to remain anonymous. After finding the Copper Key, the first clue in the hunt for the Egg, Wade's avatar Parzival becomes famous as the first avatar to make any progress towards the Egg. With this new found fame Wade receives several offers from businesses through the OASIS hoping that the famous Parzival will endorse their products. Wade, who is quite desperate for money, accepts these offers "under the following conditions: I [Wade] wouldn't have to reveal my true identity and I would only do business thorough my OASIS avatar" (Cline 131). Wade here takes clear steps to keep his OASIS avatar Parzival and his "true identity" as Wade separate. Parzival

becomes an icon, while Wade remains unknown, much like the superheroes for which he is named. He has embraced the alter ego idea but still remains blissfully ignorant of its potential for harm. Wade both requests that he not have to reveal his "true identity", and he also makes sure to limit business interactions to be with Parzival only. Parzival has thus become Wade's public identity, while Wade in real life remains in strict isolation. This action indicates that Wade's and Parzival's separation is self-inflicted. Although Wade encourages this separation as a method of protection, it proves entirely ineffective against his enemies.

Herein lies the importance of fragmented identity for the book's overall ideological statement. If Wade chooses to fracture his own identity, he can also choose to fix it. Wade then has never lost his agency as an individual but rather chosen not to exercise it. The self-inflicted fragmentation allows Cline's work to explore the implications of an identity that lacks unity, while still being able to reclaim that unity in the end as an ideological statement. When the fracturing is imposed by external forces rather than internal, the ability to overcome it and seize agency again becomes much more demanding. This demand is what my other texts will explore, and so for now I will simply remark that *Ready Player One* lays an important foundation, by suggesting that a person's view of themselves creates an element of choice to how much autonomy an individual claims. Wade's fragmented identity is self-inflicted, and therefore its effect on his autonomy also originates from his own actions. If fragmented identity results from how a person views themselves and fragmented identity affects personal autonomy, as I will demonstrate, then how a person views themselves impacts their autonomy.

The fissure between Parzival and Wade runs even deeper. Wade describes the appearance of Parzival in "I'd designed my avatar's face and body to look, more or less, like my own. My avatar had a slightly smaller nose than me, and he was taller. And thinner. And more muscular.

And he didn't have any teenage acne. But aside from these minor details, we looked more or less identical" (Cline 28). Here Wade tries to claim that there is not much difference between him and his avatar, but in fact for the reader he proves the exact opposite. Wade has made Parzival taller, thinner, fitter, and without blemishes. He is not Wade, but rather what Wade wants to be. Parzival is what Wade wants to present to the world. Because Wade notes the differences between his avatar and his real body, it is clear that Wade is aware of the distinction between what he wishes to be (Parzival) and what he is (Wade). Furthermore Wade later reveals that when he attended school in the real world he was bullied for his weight (Cline 30), indicating that making Parzival thinner is not a minor change but rather a step to fix something Wade does not like about his material world identity.

Again this difference gives more insight into why fragmented identity obscures the autonomous subject. Wade lives in a society whose ideology claims being thinner is better. One version of Wade (his material self) should change according to this ideology while the other version (Parzival) is acceptable. Ideology makes separate demands on Wade's various identities, and thus hails him as two different subjects. Ideology hails us when it says we should do a particular thing or act a certain way. Even though Wade and Parzival both exist under the same ideology, that being fat is bad, the ideology makes different demands on them, addressing them as two distinct versions. Parzival's appearance may have begun because of Wade's efforts to meet the demands of his society's beliefs, but since making Parzival skinny does not actual make Wade's material body more acceptable they become distinct instead. Now society says one of them is acceptable and the other is not.

Not only is Parzival physically distinct from Wade, the personalities of his virtual and real identities differ as well. Wade describes his real world self as a "painfully shy, awkward kid,

with low self-esteem and almost no social skills". Before going to school online Wade spent his time "running away from bullies before and after school" (Cline 30). In the OASIS however Parzival is completely different. When a bully at his virtual school insults Parzival's outfit for being obviously cheap Parzival replies with "'Your mom bought them for me,' I retorted without breaking my stride. 'Tell her I said thanks next time you stop at home to breastfeed and pick up your allowance" (Cline 30). The quality of this comeback aside, Parzival talks back to his bullies. He does not run, but retorts in kind. Although it does not speak for Parzival's maturity level, this insult does indicate that inside the OASIS the shy scared Wade has gained a certain level of confidence and ease. Parzival who better fits what society's ideology deems acceptable because of his appearance is easily able to find a voice while Wade struggles.

This difference in attitude displays how fragmented identity can serve as a way to escape how society's dominant ideology constitutes the individual. Wade is socially constructed as not acceptable, so he does not stand up for himself but accepts the disapproval of society. By creating Parzival Wade can now exist within an identity that is acceptable and thus escape society's disapproval. However, this escape creates a division rather than a solution. Wade remains anonymous while Parzival becomes famous precisely because Parzival's acceptance by society does not transfer to Wade. The fragmentation of identity acts as an attempt to circumvent the pressures of social approval. However, this method does not truly alleviate those pressures but rather isolates them to one identity and often leaves that identity without any agency to then cope with those pressures. Fragmented identity holds appeal because it seems like a way to prevent being construed by society's standards, but as these texts demonstrate and I argue fragmenting identity actually makes it more difficult to overcome social construction because it limits personal autonomy.

Fragmented identity not only acts to disrupt ideology's constitution of the subject. It also gives the novel room to grow towards a conclusion that promotes the unified subject. The novel's genre reflects this aspect of growth. *Ready Player One* follows the development of a young person during his formative years, making it, under the most basic definition, a Bildungsroman. According to Joseph Slaughter in *Human Rights Inc.* the Bildungsroman features a "plot we could provisionally gloss as the didactic story of the individual who is socialized in the process of learning for oneself what everyone else (including the reader) presumably already knows" (Slaughter 3). Under Slaughter's definition *Ready Player One* remains a Bildungsroman. The retrospective narration by Wade places the reader in a position where we see Wade acting as singular "I", and therefore his development towards acting as a singularity seems to us a fulfillment of what we "already know".

Thinking back to my earlier point about how irony prepares a reader with assumptions which the character then must learn and Belsey's point that "the protagonist's discovery also has the effect of confirming the wisdom of the reader" (Belsey 73), we can see that Slaughter's summary of the plot of the Bildungsroman proves similar. *Ready Player One* is the story of Wade developing into someone who sees himself as a unified autonomous individual. Because of the tradition, which both Slaughter and Belsey reference, we tend to read such stories of development as a form of maturing. When we start a book about a young person, we expect that at the start our hero, Wade, will have some things to discern about life. This expectation is confirmed through the use of irony and foreshadowing to hint that Wade's initial outlook has some problems. The reader is then set up to expect Wade to evolve into the "correct" developed position. By starting with a protagonist with a fractured identity in such a story of development, the text normalizes the idea that such fragmentation is the undeveloped position. Since *Ready*

Player One follows Wade's development process the reader will naturally assume that wherever Wade begins is not a developed position. Since a Bildungsroman traditionally features the growth of the protagonist, the reader begins with the implicit assumption that growth is necessary. Thus starting with fractured identity implies that such fracturing is not a developed position, which makes the reader more open to accepting the unified identity that the book will promote as it continues.

As the book begins Wade is hailed as two different subjects because he has separated his two identities to the point of contradiction. Parzival is confident and brash while Wade is shy and uncertain. Parzival is a celebrity while Wade is completely unknown. The fragmented identity causes two different subject positions. Although Wade initially works to maintain this fragmentation, his position as a young person in the process of evolving makes the reader more likely to assume that Wade is wrong to encourage this separation. The situation is set so that it seems natural to the reader when as the book unfolds the negative consequences of fragmented identity begin to appear.

Part 2: The Need for Unified Identity

Thus far Wade has supported rather than felt anxiety about the division between Parzival and Wade. However, as the book progresses, Wade realizes that this fragmented approach is unsustainable. As Wade's double life falls apart, the reader becomes aware of the autonomy a person forfeits without a sense of unity. Cline's portrayal of Wade's struggle suggests that full agency cannot be achieved without seeing oneself as a unified subject.

When IOI approaches Parzival in the hope of bribing him, he agrees because as Parzival, Wade is confident in his ability to manage IOI. As noted earlier Parzival acts more rashly and

confidently than Wade, and Parzival thus looks forward to using the meeting to taunt IOI. Parzival meets with the enemy, comfortable in his untouchability. However, he forgets that although Parzival is untouchable within the OASIS, Wade is not. Sorrento (the head of IOI's contest division) reveals in their meeting that IOI has discovered Parzival's real world identity as Wade Owen Watts and threatens to blow up his trailer if he does not cooperate. A threat which IOI then carries out when Parzival still refuses to cooperate. Wade lives because he happens to not be home at the time, but everyone else in his trailer dies (Cline 142-145). This scene reveals that despite their apparent distinctiveness Parzival and Wade are still very much the same person. His actions as the brash Parzival nearly get Wade killed. Just like the superheroes for whom he is named, Wade's investment in his public alter ego (Parzival) causes his other persona (Wade) to suffer. Maintaining a dual life is thus not as simple as Wade initially believed. Here Wade suffers the consequences for Parzival's boldness, and those consequences occur specifically because Parzival was not thinking of his material world existence as Wade but relying on his immunity within the OASIS. Juggling two identities make it difficult to protect or properly care for both.

This intense separation and lack of cohesion proves to be unhealthy for Wade. His investment in Parzival causes the neglect of his real world self. Parzival is fit and thin while Wade describes himself as fat. Wade confesses that "I spent the vast majority of my time sitting in my haptic chair, getting almost no exercise at all. I also had a habit of overeating when I was depressed or frustrated, which was most of the time … I knew that if I didn't get my weight under control, I would probably die of sloth before I found the egg" (Cline 196). Wade admits to letting his real body reach an unhealthy weight. He also indicates that his mental state is suffering. Wade attributes this unhealthy state to the immense amount of time he spends in the

OASIS, which causes his real body to sit in his haptic chair doing nothing. Wade invests so much in Parzival that he suffers in the real world.

The underlying problem here is that both identities cannot be active. When Wade invests his activity in his OASIS life as Parzival, his material body becomes the passive recipient of Parzival's actions. Parzival's brashness nearly gets Wade killed, and the demands of his Parzival life keep Wade grossly unhealthy. By fragmenting his life into a duality Wade is only able to act in one life at a time, which means a piece of himself is always suffering from neglect. Because Wade has become two subjects instead of one, only one can have autonomy. Cline's portrayal of the first time Wade logs into the OASIS demonstrates this concept:

> These three words were always the last thing a user saw before leaving the real world and entering the virtual world: READY PLAYER ONE
>
> My avatar materialized in front of my locker of the second floor of my high school – the exact spot where I'd been standing when I'd logged out the night before. (Cline 26-27)

This quote in tracking the moment when Wade transitions from the material world to the virtual world captures the separateness of Wade and Parzival in the phrase "My avatar". Wade logs into the OASIS and instead of "I materialized" he notes that "My avatar materialized". The immediate switch to "I" later in the same sentence in "where I'd been standing" makes this "My avatar" moment appear as a hiccup in the transition. For a moment the avatar, Parzival, belongs to Wade but is not Wade. The wording creates a sense of distinction between Parzival and Wade, marking their status as separate actors. The effect of this may be best explained with an example. If I say "My body did this" as opposed to "I did this" I separate myself from the action. My body is the subject and not I, and this wording implies that I somehow did not have control over my

body. By giving my body the action instead of "I", I suggest that my body had some sort of agency which I did not. In order to erase the agency of "I", I must create a separate entity, "my body", to whom the action can be given. In the brief second when both Wade and Parzival could simultaneously exist, in the log-in to the OASIS, the phrase "my avatar" reveals their distinction as separate subjects.

Wade's attempt to live only as Parzival proves unsatisfactory and harmful. Wade discovers that two completely distinct lives ultimately lead to the neglect of one. Without some sort of underlying unity then they cannot both be maintained because to care for one is to neglect the other. Fragmented identity requires a juggling of separate needs and actions making it difficult to maintain a healthy balance as Wade's struggles show. The text encourages the reader to find Wade's dual lifestyle unhealthy through the voice of narration. With the story being narrated by retrospective Wade, he looks back at this phase in his life critically placing the reader in a critical position as well. Through the past tense in phrases such as "I had a habit of overeating" Wade criticizes his past habits. The use of "had" here places these actions even further in the past to further separate the narrating Wade from his bad decisions. The language of narration thus encourages the reader to find Wade's fragmented lifestyle unhealthy and applaud his movement towards singularity when it does come.

Part 3: Acting and Thinking as a Singularity

While Wade finds himself at a disadvantage initially due to his fragmented identity, by the end of the novel Wade arrives at the same ideological position as the text and narrator. Acting as a singular unit is the only way to be a full subject and achieve his goals.

The text promotes the necessity of acting with unified identity in its climatic moments. As noted earlier Wade nearly gets himself killed by IOI when he treats Wade and Parzival as separate entities. In the end, Wade only defeats IOI by combining his skills as Wade and Parzival to act as a singularity. With Parzival unable to defeat IOI inside the OASIS, Wade hacks into the IOI system in the real world. Wade is then able to put IOI at a disadvantage, and then go back into the OASIS as Parzival to finish the job. Only when Wade finally connects his two identities is he able to outsmart IOI. Wade goes from trying to keep his online and real world personas completely separate at the beginning of the book to using both to accomplish his goal. When Parzival and Wade act towards the same goal then, instead of one of his selves being a passive recipient, they both take action together and accomplish more.

This transformation from fractured to unified identity is signaled even earlier in the book, when Wade makes a lifestyle change to improve his health. Wade installs an exercise program that forces him to exercise before he can log in to the OASIS. He notes the effects in "If I wanted to log in, I had no choice but to exercise first. This proved to be the only motivation I needed… it worked. The pounds began to melt off, and after a few months, I was in near-perfect health" (Cline 197-198). Not only does this indicate an end to the neglect of his real world self, which was earlier noted to be problematic, but this also shows Wade connecting his two identities into one. Wade uses his life as Parzival (his desire to log in to the OASIS and hunt for the egg) to influence his real world life. Instead of seeing them as separate, he begins to blend these two lives into a seamless routine so that they are both active rather than one identity being active and the other passive. Wade by combining his routines as Wade and Parzival displays that his identity has begun to unify because he treats his two personas as one subject. Just like in the ending, Wade reaches his goal of better health by acknowledging and taking advantage of the

link between his virtual and real self. By simply using the connection between his real and virtual life, Wade changes his awareness of himself to improve his health. Unity is achieved by simply acting as though it were already there.

The form of the text further indicates that Wade has begun to conceive of himself as a singularity. When Wade introduces himself as the narrator of the book he says "So I want to set the record straight, once and for all" (Cline 9). This statement indicates that Wade wrote the account of his adventure after the fact, and he wrote this account in the first person. If the book were written in the third person, like this essay, then the text would constantly have to switch between Parzival and Wade. A method prone to confusion and frustration. *Ready Player One* does not suffer from this problem though because it is written in the first person by the protagonist, Wade Watts. Instead of "Parzival did this, then Wade did that", the novel is condensed into "I did this". By telling the story in the first person the novel maintains a constant perspective instead of flipping between Wade and Parzival. This perspective causes the reader to view Wade and Parzival as a singularity, and therefore when his actions finally begin to align with this perspective the reader finds their viewpoint confirmed.

This maintaining of perspective serves another purpose besides avoiding confusion and demonstrating that Wade is unified enough to produce a narrative. It also has an impact on how the reader receives the book's themes. Like beginning the text with a protagonist with fragmented identity, the first person narration normalizes unified identity so that it seems natural. Catherine Belsey writes that keeping the reader in a single position "limits the play of meaning for the reader by installing him or her in a single position from which the scene is intelligible" (Belsey 70). Even though the text has a fragmented protagonist at the beginning, the first person narrator makes the reader observe this fragmentation from a position of unity. We are not

viewing the story with the present fragmented Wade but rather in retrospect with the unified Wade. Belsey notes that by giving the reader such a transcendent position the protagonist seems to be learning something which the author and reader knew all along (Belsey 73). By placing us in the eyes of the retrospective Wade, the text encourages readers to view the fragmented Wade as problematic. Coming from the position of "I", the Wade and Parzival split seems wrong. Just as starting with fragmented identity in a Bildungsroman makes the reader view this fragmentation as the undeveloped stage of humanity, telling the story in retrospective first person causes the reader to view this split from the position of the singular "I". Because we are occupying this "I" position, the reader assumes that such a position exists.

In a similar vein, Joseph Slaughter writes that "the tropological "magic" of literary and legal incorporation presuppose that the person *is* a person in order to effect the person *as* a person" (Slaugher 26). Slaughter argues that the Bildungsroman and human rights law act with "a convoluted temporality" which acts as though something it wishes to exist already does exist. *Ready Player One's* first person narration acts similarly. Telling the story in the first person assumes that such a position exists, and by assuming it exists it creates such a place.

Ready Player One does not offer a single moment in which Wade's fragmented identity unifies. Instead it presents a gradual transformation in Wade's manner of thinking. Not only does the text convince readers that such a coherent version of identity is healthy by making it necessary for Wade's success in the climax, it also paints such a conception as natural because we view the entire book in retrospect in the position of Wade's unified identity.

Conclusion:

Ready Player One promotes the idea that the mature way of understanding our being is as a singular identity. Although fractured identity can seem like a way to circumvent social expectations, it also prevents a person from being fully active as only one identity can act as a subject at a time. The more passive part of Wade becomes, the unhealthier Wade appears. By telling the story in the first person in hindsight and by starting our young developing protagonist with fragmented identity, the text encourages readers to position themselves as unified subjects waiting for Wade to reach the same conclusion. *Ready Player One* presents the unified autonomous individual as natural and healthy.

As I mentioned briefly in the beginning, *Ready Player One* offers a look into the basics of how the fragmented identity of the protagonist functions to affirm that we should see ourselves as unified autonomous subjects. Because the sense of fragmentation is willingly self-inflicted, Wade's journey towards unity is a simple matter of changing his own perception. Although this change in perception does allow Wade to grasp full autonomy, the implications of fragmented identity on personal autonomy are shown some but not at length. Wade starts with a sense of fracture in his identity, discovers that such a view is unhealthy because it results in part of himself becoming passive, and changes his view so that he now acts as a singular subject. All of which the reader finds as a confirmation of the ideological position in which the text places the reader from the beginning through the narration. The remaining texts in this project will take a more nuanced approach to this ideology by considering more deeply the reasons for fracturing identity and rejecting personal autonomy, which will cause their ultimate support of unified autonomous subjectivity to read as conscious and deliberate.

Chapter 2: Throne of Glass

Internal Obstacles to Unified Identity

Introduction:

Published between 2012 and 2018, the Throne of Glass series by Sarah J. Maas follows the story of the assassin Celaena Sardothien as she and a large cast of characters work to save their world from invasion by a demon race known as the Valg. Along the way Celaena must accept her role as the lost Queen Aelin Galathynius and possessor of perhaps the only magic capable of stopping the Valg. In the third book, *Heir of Fire,* Aelin learns that to stop the demons threatening her world she will first have to deal with her own inner demons.

Like Ready Player One, the Throne of Glass series follows the development of a young person from a fractured to a unified identity. However, Throne of Glass approaches this story of development in a different, perhaps less idealistic way. Here fractured identity is associated with trauma rather than technological developments and acts as a method of coping. Because of this source, Celaena's journey to develop into a unified person contains an inner struggle and pain which was quite absent from Wade's story. However more difficult it may be, Celaena, like Wade, must achieve this unity before she is able to face and defeat the evil threatening her world.

Throne of Glass ultimately is optimistic and adheres to much the same ideology as *Ready Player One*. However, that optimism is grounded by an exploration of the limitations and difficulties faced by an autonomous subject. Throne of Glass may encourage readers to believe we can do anything and therefore must take personal responsibility for our own lot in life, but it willing acknowledges that this is not always easy. By displaying the psychological reasons a

person may reject unified identity, the Throne of Glass series argues that singular identity is not inevitable but that it is healthier.

Part 1: Trauma Splits Identity

The split in Celaena's identity is not immediately evident to the reader because she completely refuses to acknowledge her past life due to its association with a traumatic event. This is not like Wade's constant flipping between lives but rather a complete disassociation. In fact this disassociation is so complete that the reader is unaware of Celaena's identity as Aelin until a reveal at the end of the second book. In the third book *Heir of Fire* Celaena is forced to confront the life she has ignored for so long, and the deep nature of her fractured identity becomes evident.

Through a series of flashbacks *Heir of Fire* reveals the trauma that made Celaena abandon her life as Aelin. When Aelin was living as a princess, kingdom was attacked and her parents murdered. Aelin was the sole survivor but only after watching a lady-in-waiting, Lady Marion, murdered to give Aelin a chance to escape. Since then Aelin abandoned her life as the Princess of Terrassen, living instead as the assassin Celaena Sardothien. Celaena reflects on the trauma which caused her to reject her identity as Aelin:

> That. That moment Lady Marion had chosen a desperate hope for her kingdom over herself, over her husband and the daughter who would wait and wait for a return that would never come. That was the moment that had broken everything Aelin Galathynius was and had promised to be… That was the moment she could not face – had not faced" (Maas 465-466)

Celaena, after watching someone sacrifice themselves for her, does not want to be Aelin anymore. She rejects being a person that bears the responsibilities of that sacrifice, and a person for whom people would choose to sacrifice. By becoming Celaena, Aelin attempts to escape from both the trauma of her past and the terrible burden which that trauma contains. Thinking back on her life since that moment Celaena thinks "She'd been running for so long that she didn't know what it was to stand and fight" (Maas 65). Celaena's understanding of herself as running emphasizes how she seeks to escape from her past, from Aelin. Even though the divide in identity in this case is caused by trauma, like Wade in *Ready Player One* it is ultimately a willing divide because Celaena runs away from any confrontation with her awareness of herself as Aelin.

Celaena's denial of Aelin goes beyond wanting to escape the burden of sacrifice and trauma, and has other consequences for the way Celaena views herself. She not only rejects the role Aelin comes with but also other things about herself which she associates with the Aelin side of her person, namely her magic. When she was a Princess, Aelin possessed fire magic and the ability to shift into a Fae form. After becoming Celaena she stops using her magic and remains always in her human form. When forced to undergo magical training to reach her goals, Celaena demonstrates a fear of this side of herself. When her instructor attempts to get her to shift into Fae form she responds resolutely with *"No."* (Maas 101). Eventually her instructor has to trick her into getting angry and losing control to shift or use her magic. Later when Celaena finally does stay in her Fae form in order to pass her training she notes "How had she been afraid of this body for so long?" (Maas 237). This thinking shows that Celaena had been resisting her magical side because of fear, and that she is capable of overcoming that fear to accept herself.

Like Wade making Parzival thinner, this situation demonstrates why fragmented identity can be appealing. Celaena's society has encouraged her to view magic and Fae as dangerous. In Celaena's country magic is outlawed, and the Fae are feared. She is literally "afraid of [her Fae] body" because her society encourages those fears. By fragmenting her identity Celaena disassociates herself from the magic and Fae part of herself of which her society does not approve. Celaena claims she is no longer Aelin, and in doing so she claims she is no longer the thing which her society fears. All of this set up of a protagonist with fragmented identity serves to highlight the real world concerns that could produce identity fragmentation such as trauma and social disapproval. Without this understanding of what causes the protagonist to fragment their identity, the fragmented identity is nothing more than a plot device to allow for the support of the autonomous subject at the end. While the fragmented identity of the protagonist does serve that function as well, my analysis of the underlying causes of this fragmentation emphasizes the applicability to the real world. These books are not just arguing for the unified subject they are also arguing against identity fragmentation, which even in these books full of magic and the unbelievable still has realistic causes.

Celaena has more sympathetic reasons than Wade for adopting fragmented identity. However, as demonstrated it is still a choice. Celaena's burial of Aelin is an escape from the memories that Celaena does not want to confront and from the fears society engrained within her. Because of the above ways in which Celaena actively chooses not to accept Aelin, her eventual decision to embrace Aelin and restore her unified identity reads as a choice. In *Ready Player One* growth towards unified identity was presented as a natural development while here that development is hindered by internal psychological blocks. Instead of the natural evolution which Wade undergoes, Celaena must make a conscious choice to overcome her mental

obstacles and unify identity to become an autonomous subject. The implication that the unified subject is not inevitable is even stronger here than *Ready Player One*, and thus the text's ultimate support of the autonomous unified individual can only be read as deliberate and promotional.

Part 2: Accepting Autonomy through Unified Identity

As *Heir of Fire* progresses Celaena continues to encounter and avoid her life as Aelin. It is not until the climatic moments that Celaena finally confronts and embraces her role as Aelin. In this moment and afterwards, the text displays how thinking with unified identity leads to an acceptance of personal autonomy and responsibility.

Although Celaena wants to save the world, at the beginning of *Heir of Fire* she plans to do it without Aelin. Celaena notes that, while others want her to return as Queen, "She didn't even *have* a throne, or a crown, or a court. Didn't want them. And she could bring down the king as Celaena Sardothien, thank you very much" (Maas 61). Celaena does want to defeat the evil threatening her world, but she does not want the responsibility that would come with being Queen. She does not want the throne, crown, or court. This sentiment serves as an example of why fragmented identity does not support an ideology of personal autonomy and responsibility, and why it serves as an escape for Celaena. Personal autonomy suggests that people all possess control over themselves. They control their own thoughts, actions, and desires. Such an idea is usually read as empowering because it implies that our interiority is protected from our external circumstances. Anyone can overcome their situation.

However, Celaena's situation in Throne of Glass highlights the other side to such thinking. If I am the core of my action and thought, then I am in turn also responsible for that action and thought. Such responsibility can be empowering, but as Celaena's refusal of Aelin

shows it can also be daunting and limiting. By fragmenting her identity Celaena has worked to refuse the personal responsibility she would feel as Aelin. Fracturing her identity allows for multiple cores of thought and action, which in turn disrupts personal responsibility. If I isolate and ignore part of my consciousness, then my current identity is not responsible for the thoughts and actions of the other. If Celaena refuses to identify as Aelin, then she does not have to feel guilty for Aelin's decision to run away from her role as Queen.

Unfortunately this strategy at rejecting responsibility also destroys autonomy. If I fracture and reject part of my consciousness, then that rejected identity becomes passive. Because she has not been claiming autonomy over Aelin, the trauma associated with Aelin is able to run havoc on Celaena's mental state. Thinking back to *Ready Player One* we see a similar problem when Wade's deep investment in Parzival causes his material life to become unhealthy. Wade becomes the passive recipient who suffers negative consequences for Parzival's actions. In Throne of Glass Aelin cannot overcome her trauma because Celaena has rendered her inactive. Because she has separated the two so much, Celaena has let Aelin's issues fester. The only way for Celaena to confront and deal with the trauma she associates with Aelin is to acknowledge that part of her identity, which is exactly what happens in the book's climatic scene.

During the climactic battle against the demon princes in *Heir of Fire*, Celaena falls unable to cope with the memories of her past life which the demons force her to relive. Celaena readies herself to die because she does not feel able to take on the responsibility she feels towards her conquered people and the people who have died to protect her. Celaena falls because she cannot alleviate Aelin's past, highlighting how fragmented identity isolates rather than solves psychological damage. In this moment when Celaena has given up a choice appears before her in "the young princess she had been – Aelin Galathynius – reached a hand for her. "Get up," she

said softly. Celaena shook her head. Aelin strained for her, bridging that rift in the foundation of the world (*Heir of Fire* 467). As Celaena prepares to give up her past self reaches a hand towards her, encouraging Celaena to accept her past and take on the challenges that come with it. The only way to deal with the troubles which Aelin brings is to acknowledge that identity. The offered hand represents a bridge across the psychological gap which Celaena has imposed on her sense of being. By owning her place as Aelin, Celaena can take control of the responsibilities she fears rather than letting them destroy her. The offered hand also importantly makes this moment read as a choice. Celaena does not have to take the hand. She could refuse.

Here Throne of Glass takes a more deliberate approach than *Ready Player One*, although both texts ultimately support a rather similar ideology. Although the book does position Celaena in a position in which she must either confront her responsibilities as Aelin or give up and die, a choice which certainly seems in favor of the unified subject ideology, it still portrays this as a choice and one that is not necessarily easy. The fact that Celaena considers death an option because of her psychological struggles should serve to enhance not diminish the message of this moment. Choosing to face trauma rather than let it kill them is sadly a real choice for some people, and we should not consider this moment of decision to lose its impact simply because one of the choices is giving up. It would be easy to argue that this is not a choice at all, but that would be doing a disservice to many for whom such struggles are very real. It is a choice and a difficult one. Instead of the natural ideology of *Ready Player One*, Throne of Glass presents the ideology of a unified autonomous individuals with its qualms of burden and responsibility which we may want to reject. Catherine Belsey writes that "the subject finds in the classic realist text a confirmation of the position of autonomous subjectivity represented in ideology as 'obvious'. It is possible to refuse that position, but to do so, at least at present, is to make a deliberate and

ideological choice" (Belsey 77). Belsey argues here that books that support the ideology of an autonomous subject present this position as obvious or natural, such as we saw in *Ready Player One*. Belsey says that because this ideology is presented as natural to reject it requires a deliberate choice. What Throne of Glass does differently in this climatic scene is that it presents the position of autonomous subject as a choice, albeit the healthy and correct choice, but still a choice. In this case accepting autonomous subjectivity by reuniting identity is portrayed as a deliberate decision.

Celaena and the reader are aware of how difficult facing the responsibilities of Aelin will be, and yet she chooses to do so anyway in "Celaena reached across the earth between them and brushed her fingers against Aelin's. And arose" (Maas 469). The nouns in this sentence display the clear split between Aelin and Celaena. There are two characters, two sets of fingers, present until their fingers touch. Then the nouns disappear so that instead of Aelin and Celaena both rising as separate entities, they merge to rise as one. Celaena must reach towards Aelin for this merge to occur, which again highlights the decisional aspect to accepting personal autonomy and responsibility. The end of the book makes this acceptance abundantly clear as the last line is Celaena's thoughts and reads "She was Aelin Ashryver Galathynius – and she would not be afraid" (Maas 562). The first part of this sentence displays Celaena's new identity as she now sees herself as Aelin, the name which she loathed at the beginning of the book. The second part indicates that this singular identity will come with challenges. To say she will not be afraid implies that there is something to be afraid of, but by accepting Aelin she will be able to confront and seize control over those fears. In essence Celaena's need to accept Aelin to overcome her trauma is a simple example of how ignoring problems rarely fixes them. Celaena's struggles

serve as a reminder that we do often try to solve psychological pain by ignoring it, and it still proves ineffective.

If we return to Joseph Slaughter's critique of the confirming Bildungsroman in "The idealism of the classical, affirmative *Bildungsroman* seems to have lost much of its social and aesthetic appeal in the ages of modernist irony and postmodern suspicion – except in popular, "subliterary" culture, where its ideological (and rather naïve) optimism seems stronger than ever" (Slaughter 26), our analysis of Throne of Glass offers an interesting point of contention with Slaughter's statement. Throne of Glass is optimistic and affirms that same ideology which we saw in *Ready Player One*. However, as shown through the text's heavy emphasis on choice and its display of the difficulties of its encouraged ideology, Throne of Glass's optimism would be better defined as deliberate rather than naïve. This text may be an optimistic affirmation of the autonomous individual, but it displays its decision to support that ideology openly. This is not naïveté but rather an awareness that to see ourselves as unified autonomous individuals is a particular way of thinking and a subsequent choice to accept that mode of thinking.

Part 3: A New Hero to Celebrate Individual Autonomy

This element of choice leads to something else about this trend of Young Adult books featuring protagonists with fragmented identity. The blending of these psychological conflicts into stories of adventure and battling evil has generated a new type of hero. This hero is a mixture of both the epic hero and the protagonist of the novel, and their appearance suggests an appeal to the power of the individual.

In his work on the novel Georg Lukacs writes about the difference between the epic and the novel. From his writing we can glean how books such as Throne of Glass incorporate

elements of both the epic and novel hero. Lukacs writes that "the novel's heroes: they are seekers" meaning that their goals and paths cannot be directly given or if they are psychologically direct they do not correspond to reality" (Lukacs 189). While saving the world may seem to be a direct goal for Celaena, it takes her three novels of seeking and psychological development (four if one counts the prequel) before she arrives at this path. Her fragmented identity makes it impossible for Celaena to find her path. At the end of the first book, *Throne of Glass*, Celaena thinks "she'd be free to live her own life, without fear of punishment or enslavement. She could begin again – far away from Adarlan. She could begin again" (*Throne of Glass* 402). At the beginning of her journey Celaena wants freedom. While her Aelin identity wants to save her people, this would burden Celaena with responsibility making her freedom goal hard to achieve. Because of these conflicting goals Celaena has to spend the next three books in internal conflict and development before she is able to find a direct path. As shown above by the third book, *Heir of Fire* Celaena's goal has changed to saving the world but without becoming queen. By the end of *Heir of Fire* Celaena has accepted her rejected identity and can finally arrive at a direct goal: saving her people and saving the world. In this way the Throne of Glass series begins with a seeking hero, which Lukacs defines as an element of the novel hero, and then develops into a hero with clear goals which is more of a feature of the epic. Furthermore this final direct goal is a destiny assigned to Celaena by her world's god-like beings which is another element of the epic.

Lukacs also writes of the requirements for epic heroes. Lukacs notes that "Epic heroes have to be kings" because it allows their individual destiny to be bound to a totality or community (Lukacs 192-193). Celaena resists being Queen precisely because she does not want to bear the sacrifice and weight of other people. She resists having her destiny tied to a

community. However, when she accepts Aelin and finds a direct path, which as I already noted makes her more of an epic hero anyway, she also accepts her destiny as Queen and allows herself to be bound to a community. Instead of her status as Queen being a given at the start like in the traditional epic, here it is a position which Celaena must decide to embrace. Throne of Glass begins with a more novel like protagonist who then develops into an epic hero. Furthermore her Celaena side contains the component of the novel hero (Celaena seeks a path, goes through a lot of internal development, and is not a Queen) while Aelin represents the epic hero (She is a Queen chosen by this world's God like figures to carry out a specific goal). In merging Aelin and Celaena, Throne of Glass also merges the novel and epic hero.

The form of this series also merges the epic and novel. Lukacs writes that "The outward form of the novel is essentially biographical" (Lukacs 198). The biographical form limits the scope of the story to a particular individual. All of the other characters and events tie back to the protagonist's experience, and this central character's experience symbolizes some problem of life. Thus the biographical form's span covers the development of a human life although this may cover just the time that is essential to development rather than everything between life and death (Lukacs 200). The Throne of Glass series in many ways follows this biographical form. The series revolves around the protagonist, Celanea/Aelin, with the books beginning when she stops being an assassin and starts her long journey towards becoming Queen and ending when she finally does become Queen. Although there are other characters with their own storylines throughout the series, Aelin's story defines the scope. Even when the story follows other characters, these stories are always revealed to have some ultimate connection to Aelin and her actions. When her personal journey to Queendom ends, the series ends even as other characters still seem to have some developing left to do.

However, despite this biographical structure Throne of Glass also definitely uses an epic form as well. Lukacs writes:

> In the epic, the central figure and its significant adventures are a mass organized in itself and for itself, so that the beginning and the end mean something quite different there, something essentially less important: they are moments of great intensity, homogenous with other points which are the high points of the whole; they never signify anything more than the commencement or the resolution of great tensions. (Lukacs 201)

The epic is organized around the events which take place focusing on climactic moments and ending when the overarching conflict has been resolved. Throne of Glass also uses this structure as each book is organized around particular intense moments all culminating and ending in a final battle which resolves the series overarching conflict. It just so happens that this conflict and resolution also corresponds to the biographical journey of the protagonist. The biographical journey and the epic quest correlate producing a series that is organized by both action and internal development. *Heir of Fire* presents a good example of this because the climax of that particular book has Celaena confronting both the demon princes and her past. The resolution of the action parallels the end of the psychological journey. The concerns of the novel with the development of a person and the epic's focus on events have thus been overlaid.

This is a merger which many adventure and fantasy books do to some degree because the adventure of the protagonist often seems to change and develop the character in some way. However this effect becomes much more pronounced in something like Throne of Glass because Celaena's fragmented identity highlights the character's psychological conflict and development. In other words Frodo's adventures in *The Lord of the Rings* probably do correspond to some character development, but this development is often a result of the adventure rather than

containing a separate interest all its own. In the Throne of Glass series Celaena's character development (her journey to accept her place as Queen) is its own story that runs alongside the exciting events that happen to her. Thus it is a true combination of the novel's seeking hero and the epic hero on a quest to fulfill his destiny.

What precisely does this combination of novel and epic components achieve? Lukacs says of the difference between the novel and epic:

> The novel comprises the essence of its totality between the beginning and the end, and thereby raises an individual to the infinite heights of who one must create an entire world through his experience and who must maintain that world in equilibrium – heights which no epic individual, not even Dante's, could reach, because the epic individual owed his significance to the grace accorded him, not to his pure individuality. But just because the novel can only comprise the individual in this way, he becomes a mere instrument, and his central position in the work means only that he is particularly well suited to reveal a certain problematic of life. (Lukacs 201)

Combining the novel and epic hero seems to be an attempt to circumvent the problems Lukacs identifies and further assert the autonomy of the individual. By having Celaena struggle with her own sense of identity, her destiny becomes something she chooses to embrace. Aelin is the one chosen to save the world and her people, and as discussed earlier it takes Celaena at least 3 books to accept follow this path. In this way she overcomes the epic individual to reach those heights of the novel hero. Celaena may be chosen by the gods, but she still must struggle to become the type of individual who will embrace instead of running from that fate. It is not her destiny and fate which make the story but her decision to seize that fate. This makes the series a celebration of the importance of individuality rather than a detraction from it.

To approach the issue from the other angle Celaena's epic destiny also prevents her from being turned into the novel's "mere instrument". Because Throne of Glass deals with gods and fighting against external forces, Celaena's central position is not because she is best suited to reveal a problem but rather because she is best suited to defeat the problem. Unlike Lukacs' novel heroes who are problematic individuals who must stay problematic for there to be a source of conflict in the novel, Celaena does not stay within her internal struggle. She reveals and embodies a problem with her fragmented identity, but then moves past it. She is at the work's center because she contains that element of heroism which the epic heroes had. The difference from traditional epics is that the text codes Celaena's heroism to be due to her individuality. Celaena can only be the hero when she develops into it by first dealing with her fragmented identity. This need for development implies that it is Celaena's personal characteristics which make her suited to save the world not simply "the grace accorded to [her]". Through this combination of epic and novel, the Throne of Glass series greatly emphasizes the power of the individual in shaping their own story.

Conclusion:

The Throne of Glass series, like *Ready Player One*, features a protagonist with split identity to ultimately promote the autonomous unified individual. However, Throne of Glass is more open about the drawbacks such an individual faces by showing that personal autonomy also comes with personal responsibility, and that this responsibility can become a burden. The Throne of Glass series seems aware of its choice of ideology as a choice making its optimism in choosing to believe in the autonomous individual deliberate rather than naïve. The series' merger of epic and novel qualities further highlights its devotion to the power of the individual. The protagonist is neither a pawn of destiny nor a symbol of societal problems but becomes the

driving force behind a story of her own choosing. In a story that is often dark and brutal there lies an unshakable devotion to the ability of the individual to shape their own fate.

Such a devotion reveals why these books would show that the unified autonomous individual is not inevitable through fragmented identity and then choose to support a belief in autonomous subjects anyway. Without a sense of control over their own lives, people are likely to spiral into bouts of depression and anxiety. The importance here is not in whether a person is in control, but that they feel in control. The fragmented identity of both Wade and Celaena results from their attempts to exert more control over their lives either by reshaping themselves or escaping from something. This attempt at control ultimately causes both characters to exhibit decaying mental states because fragmented identity acts as a form of isolation and denial rather than an assertion of agency. To truly confront and overcome negative aspects of their lives, such as Wade's weight and Celaena's past, requires them to own those negative aspects and reconcile their identities. Even though living two lives was initially an attempt to protect themselves, Wade and Celaena both find that it actually has negative consequences on their sense of well-being. Through protagonists whom the reader is encouraged to identify and sympathize with, the reader learns that it is better to see oneself as a singularity and accept all the autonomy and responsibility that comes with being a subject for the sake of mental health, even if such a position is not the inevitability many texts treat it as.

Chapter 3: The Lunar Chronicles

Exploiting the Difference between Social and Personal Identity

Introduction:

Thus far I have examined books that deal largely with personal identity rather than social identity, with personal identity being how we see ourselves and social identity being how the world names us. Although some would rightly point out that how society constructs us does affect the way people see themselves, personal and social identity are still not quite the same thing. For example, a woman living under a patriarchal society may still see herself as equal to men even if her society constructs her as inferior while another woman may have internalized this social construction and believer herself to be inferior. Social identity certainly always has an impact on a person, but this impact's manifestation may differ from person to person resulting in different personal identities. The third text I have chosen will present an opportunity to examine the point of contact between these two identities. Since social identity undoubtedly impacts personal identity, which we saw in *Ready Player One* and Throne of Glass with the attempt to use fragmentation to avoid societal disapproval, it proves apt to examine more closely the effect social identity has on personal identity and thus personal autonomy. *Ready Player One* and the Throne of Glass series seem quite determined to insist that our personal identity affects autonomy, but how does personal autonomy hold up when we factor in the pressure which our social identities exert?

Marissa Meyer's The Lunar Chronicles, published from 2012 to 2015, follows the story of Cinder Linh, a cyborg who discovers she is the lost princess of the moon. Lunars, as the

people who live on the moon are called, have a strained relationship with Earth due to their ability to manipulate bioelectricity, which allows them to control people's minds. With Cinder's aunt, Queen Levana set on conquering Earth and killing Cinder, Cinder must reclaim her throne to prevent a devastating war.

Like Throne of Glass, the Lunar Chronicles follows the progression of a young girl towards queendom. However, in Cinder's case her issues lie more heavily in what she is rather than who she is. Cinder finds difficultly in accepting herself because she is Lunar and cyborg. Cinder internalizes her social groupings causing a split in the way she sees herself. Through Cinder's case we shall see how the slight distinction between social and personal identity allows for a person to seize agency over their own self-conception.

Although the Lunar Chronicles arrives at a similar ideology concerning personal autonomy as the other texts examined, the series' concern with social divisions causes an awareness of the ways in which social constructs limit identity. While Throne of Glass displayed the ways in which internal fears may block the power of the individual, The Lunar Chronicles deals with how external obstacles can limit personal autonomy. The fact that the Lunar Chronicles admits the effect of social systems and yet continues, like *Ready Player One* and Throne of Glass, to uphold individual autonomy shows just how deeply this ideology is valued in the American society to which these books appeal.

Part 1: Social Identity Causes Fragmentation

In the first book in the series, *Cinder*, Cinder refuses to accept herself as both Lunar and cyborg. The prejudices of her society have affected Cinder's own viewpoint causing her to see herself as split. Cinder's struggle illustrates how society's limited identity categories can greatly restrict a person's view of themselves.

Cinder's view of her own identity illustrates how deeply societal prejudices affect our self-conceptions. After being told that she is Lunar, Cinder responds with disbelief and disgust. She declares "'I'm not Lunar.' She wrenched her glove off and waved it at him. 'I'm *cyborg*. You don't think that's bad enough?" (*Cinder* 176). This brief passage reveals Cinder's struggles with two aspects of her identity: being Lunar and cyborg. By equating the two in the above quote, Cinder shows that she sees both of these aspects of herself as negative. Her society views the Lunars and cyborgs as other, something less than human. While Cinder has had time to adjust to being cyborg and feel the injustice of society's claims about her, the news that she is also Lunar serves to fully display how society's views have impacted Cinder. Cinder clearly harbors her society's prejudices against Lunars as is seen in her reaction to being Lunar in the quote, "She shuddered. Lunars were a cruel, savage people. They murdered their shell children. They lied and scammed and brainwashed each other because they *could*. They didn't care who they hurt, so long as it benefitted themselves. She was not one of them" (*Cinder* 178). Cinder has never met a Lunar, and thus these assumptions come entirely from what her culture has taught her. In this quote we see how deeply Cinder has internalized her society's biases. As a cyborg she is more readily able to recognize how society treats cyborgs unfairly, but her reaction to Lunars serves to show that even for someone well aware of the harm caused by social prejudices these assumptions are easily internalized. Later when Cinder discovers she is able to use the Lunar gift "the thought both sickened and frightened her" (*Cinder* 387). Cinder's socially acquired prejudices cause her to view this part of herself with disgust. Because she has not been aware of her Lunar identity as long, the way in which she internalizes society's negative opinion of this identity is more readily apparent.

Although it is not as obvious as her feelings toward being Lunar, Cinder also finds herself repulsed by her cyborg form. In LeiLani Nishime's essay "The Mulatto Cyborg", she argues that cyborgs in cinema are representative of racial mixing. They are to use Donna Haraway's term "monsters" that reveal our anxiety about the contamination of pure groupings, namely race in Nishime's argument. The general feeling of society towards cyborgs in the Lunar Chronicles indicates that such an analogy is not inappropriate to use with this series. Her legal guardian reminds Cinder of society's views on cyborgs in "You are *not* human, Cinder. It's about time you realized that" (*Cinder* 284). Being viewed as inhuman goes beyond such atrocious personal treatment. There are laws in place which limit the rights of cyborgs. One of these laws allows Cinder to be drafted for a medical experiment against her will. Even though Cinder feels the injustice of such treatment, society's prejudices still get to her self-image. When Cinder sees a diagram of her body that confirms that she is 36.28% cyborg she thinks "She was 36.28 percent not human" (*Cinder* 82), and when she mourns her adopted sister's illness Cinder "wished she could cry to prove [her grief]" (*Cinder* 64). Although these quotes do not display the same intensity of repulsion Cinder feels at being Lunar, they do illustrate that society's views on cyborgs have impacted her. Cinder feels that her cyborg parts are not human, and she regrets her inability to "prove" she has emotions by crying. Both of these moments display how social identities can be internalized and make us see our position as other or outside the norm.

Cinder's reaction to being told she is Lunar and her feelings about being cyborg capture an unpleasant reality. Even the very people who find themselves hurt by society's prejudices are also susceptible to internalizing that bias and hatred. If we return to Throne of Glass we see this concept in play in Celaena's fear of her Fae body. Both these series show the harsh reality that we are all influenced by social prejudices. If we can be socially influenced to dislike ourselves,

then very few people are truly innocent of prejudice. However, Throne of Glass and the Lunar Chronicles do not stop at the revelation of brutal truths. Both Cinder and Celaena are eventually able to cast off their need for social approval and stop their prejudice towards themselves. Because of the existence of self-directed prejudice, I argue that these book's concern with personal identity, the way we see ourselves, reflects something about which people should be concerned. The way we think about our own identities does influence the way we feel, act, and think. It can and does have a large impact on our mental health.

Despite the obvious problems with the way these identities make Cinder feel about herself, this is more of a negative self-image rather than a split identity. Being both Lunar and cyborg does cause some initially fracturing, but since society views them both as other they result in a similar negative view of herself. The information that causes Cinder's understanding of identity to become completely fragmented occurs at the end of the first book. When Cinder discovers she is really the lost princess of the moon, Selene Blackburn, this revelation does not cohere with the other identities society has imposed on her. Cinder sees herself as at the bottom of the social ladder, and thus to find out she is royalty creates a massive disjunction in her self-understanding. When Dr. Erland tells Cinder that she is Princess Selene after running a DNA test, she responds with denial in "She shook her head. 'No. I can't. I can't be a queen or a princess or – I'm nobody. I'm a cyborg!'" (*Cinder* 384). This moment evokes Celaena's rejection of Aelin in Throne of Glass. Both characters even display an aversion to being called by their royal name. However, in Cinder's case her rejection comes at least partially because Princess Selene does not fit in with how society has taught Cinder to view herself. By reverting to "I'm nobody. I'm a cyborg!" in her denial, Cinder demonstrates how she has to some degree accepted and internalized her society's view of her as less than. Cinder cannot be both a cyborg

and a princess because in her society those identities do not mesh. While Cinder, like Celaena, also balks at the immense responsibility of being Princess, this fear is also heavily mixed with a sense of incompatibility between her identities. This denial shows that society's determination of what identities are incompatible can produce a fragmented sense of identity. Fragmented identity does rest in a person's self-conception, but that can still be easily influenced by external factors.

The very last words of the first book make the reader feel the incongruity of Cinder's social identities. The last lines of the book read:

Soon, the whole world would be searching for her – Linh Cinder.

A deformed cyborg with a missing foot.

A Lunar with a stolen identity.

A mechanic with no one to run to, nowhere to go.

But they would be looking for a ghost. (*Cinder* 387)

The separation of these descriptions into separate lines serves to highlight for the reader how dissimilar the different aspects of Cinder's identity have become. Each of her identifiers goes on a separate line, unconnected from the others and also unconnected from her name "Linh Cinder". Furthermore even though this passage occurs right after Cinder finds out she is Princess Selene, this is not included in the text as one of her descriptors, indicating how she has fails to incorporate this new identity into her overall sense of being. Not only are these descriptors presented in a way that isolates them from each other, but they also do not mention the part of Cinder's identity which is so dissimilar that she herself cannot accept it. Ending the first book

with these words creates a sense of disparateness that makes the reader not only acknowledge but feel and sympathize with Cinder's fragmented identity.

Cinder struggles with a fractured sense of identity because the social identities she has internalized do not cohere under that same society's guidelines. Cyborg Lunars are not royalty. In this case we see how social identity can deeply affect our self-conception, but as Cinder's journey continues we find that social and personal identity are not identical because Cinder is able to restore a singular identity and seize autonomy.

Part 2: The Role of Personal Experience in Identity

Cinder does not immediately accept her destiny and arrange an uprising to get her throne back. Similar to how Celanea in Throne of Glass must overcome her fragmented identity before she can save the world, Cinder must first accept her identities by learning more about her past before she is able to accept her role as Princess Selene. Once she sees herself as a singular unit Cinder regains agency and is able to begin the fight against Queen Levana. The importance, which all of the books have placed on reconciling fragmented identity before their protagonist can be successful in their quest, reflects the impact self-conception has on personal autonomy. Without a singular identity, a person divides their own autonomy. The question then is if the source of fragmentation is mostly external, rather than largely internal like Throne of Glass and *Ready Player One,* how does a person achieve unification?

Personal experience functions as the check to social construction because it allows people to understand where their social identities are incorrect or lacking. Society may tell us one thing about a particular social grouping, but our own experience can contradict those social norms. We see this concept in play in the Lunar Chronicles as Cinder contrasts her own experience with emotions to her stepmother's claim that she is inhuman. Because personal experience gives us

data with which to combat social identities, Cinder's lack of knowledge about her own past serves as an obstacle to unified identity. Because Cinder does not know about her own past, she struggles to produce a sense of coherence amongst her socially contradictory identities. Society says cyborgs should not be royalty, and since Cinder has no experience as royalty she has no evidence with which to contradict her society's claim. In the second book, *Scarlet*, instead of going to help with the rebellion centered around her in Africa, Cinder travels to France to find out more about her past. During this quest to track down an explanation for her past rather than trying to take back her throne, the reader becomes even more invested in Cinder's struggle with fragmented identity. The series teases reader's with an explanation about Cinder's mysterious past, and thus creates a parallel experience in which both Cinder and the reader desire more information. This serves to increase the reader's identification with Cinder and identify with her development towards autonomy. After finding the underground lab where she was saved and turned into a cyborg after Queen Levana tried to murder her and also tracking down the pilot who helped smuggle her away from the moon, Cinder finally goes to Africa to meet Dr. Erland. Dr. Erland then asks if she is ready to accept that she is Princess Selene to which Cinder responds "I know that I am who you say I am. And someone has to stop Levana. If that someone has to be me, well … yes. I accept that. I'm ready" (*Cress* 181). Once Cinder is able to see the place where she was turned into a cyborg and understand how she survived the murder attempt and came from the moon to Earth, she feels ready to accept her destiny. When Cinder finds the answers about her past she is able to fill in her self-understanding and repair the link between Cinder and Selene. This transformation demonstrates that people often rely on their personal experience to constitute their identity as well as social groupings.

Achieving this sense of unity allows Cinder to take more ownership of all of her identity and seize autonomy. Before learning about her past, Cinder spends all of her time hiding because she feels shame. She allows societal prejudices to control her. This desire to hide herself is symbolized by the gloves Cinder wears. For the duration of the first book, Cinder wears gloves all the time to hide her metal cyborg hand. In the second book Cinder experiments with using her Lunar mind control abilities to make it look like she has a human hand, hiding her cyborg hand with an illusion. The last time Cinder uses an illusion to transform her hand, she changes it to something different in "Cinder gulped and let the glamour change. The flesh of her hand became metal again … The cyborg hand she'd replaced. The one she'd always hidden – usually with heavy work-stained cotton. Once with silk. The girl she'd been back then. The one she'd always tried to keep hidden" (*Scarlet* 452). Here, instead of using her glamour to hide her cyborg hand, Cinder uses it to once again look at the hand she always hid due to society's judgement. By recreating this hand, Cinder acknowledges the link between the hidden girl she was and who she now intends to be. The rather overt symbolism in this moment allows the reader to track Cinder's changing sense of identity. The reader is assured that Cinder's and their own quest to discover more about Cinder's past has produced results. Knowledge about yourself does help generate a unified identity.

As she stares at this hand, Cinder announces her plans to defeat Levana. Up until now she has been a fugitive, simply trying to escape Queen Levana's attempts to kill her. Only after Cinder has achieved a unified identity, through gaining knowledge about herself, does she move to take action instead of just reacting. Once Cinder understands who she is, she is able to design how she wants her story to go and formulate a plan to stop Queen Levana. When Cinder let society define her, she was only able to react to how society treated her. The ability to formulate

her own plans and actions occurs once Cinder has accepted herself as a singularity. Staring at the hand as she announces her plan to stop Levana unites acceptance with the resolve for action implying that a personal unified sense of identity is vital for exercising agency.

Cinder's need to learn more about her past before she embarks on her epic mission suggests that a singular identity is key to seizing agency. By creating a chronology that links Princess Selene and Cinder, Cinder gathers enough data to unify her identities despite the societal assertion that such unity is not possible. It is only once she has done this that Cinder can assert who she is enough to begin pushing back against external forces and forge her own path. Like Throne of Glass and *Ready Player One* fragmented identity disrupts autonomy. Whether the fragmentation is purely self-inflicted, the result of trauma, or of contradictory social identities, creating a singular self-consciousness is necessary to acting with autonomy.

Part 3: Casting Off Social Identity

Once Cinder has grown confident in her sense of personal identity, she is also able to begin casting off the effects of her social identity. It is within this process where we see the individual ultimately come to overpower their systematic placement, and the autonomy of the self is celebrated.

As the series progresses Cinder finds herself becoming more and more comfortable with her cyborg identity. The contrast between how Cinder thinks of herself at the end of the first and third book marks this change effectively. At the end of book three when another character asks Cinder if she has any more secrets:

Cinder rocked back on her heels, pondering.

Cyborg. Lunar. Princess.

No more secrets. No more lies. (*Cress* 541-542)

In opposition to the descriptors analyzed above from the end of the first book, here Cinder includes all of her various identities on a single line. They no longer exist in isolation but have merged into a singularity with various aspects. Princess is also present here, and the adjectives have been removed from the nouns. By formatting these descriptors in this way, the text shows how Cinder has accepted that she can be all of these things at once despite their apparent incongruity, and that she has ceased to define these aspects negatively. The descriptions from the first book such as "deformed cyborg" and "Lunar with a stolen identity" (*Cinder* 387) display Cinder's internalization of society's prejudices. Cyborgs are monstrous, and Lunars are criminal. Thus, the lack of adjectives in this later quote demonstrates that Cinder now feels freer from the definitions these social identities used to press on her. Cinder has not cast off the identities of being Lunar and cyborg, but rather she has cast off the social expectations of those identity groups. Cinder is moving away from internalizing social identity and towards a personal identity that is self-defining and thus more autonomous. Maybe we cannot change our social identities, but we can change how we view those identities.

A change in Cinder's view from the beginning to the end of book four, *Winter*, perhaps more noticeably captures the text's faith in the power of the individual. At the start of *Winter* when discussing her future with her love interest Kai, Cinder thinks "Once they overthrew Levana, Kai would go back to being the emperor of the Eastern Commonwealth and, someday, he was going to need an empress". Since Cinder is in love with Kai, she briefly considers if she could be empress of the Eastern Commonwealth, which is where she grew up, but concludes "she had seen the prejudices of the people in the Commonwealth. Something told her they wouldn't be accepting of her as a ruler" (*Winter* 38). Although Cinder loves Kai, in this quote

she allows the pressures of prejudice to tint what she expects from her future. Cinder knows that the people in the Commonwealth dislike cyborgs, and thus she does not allow herself to hope that she could one day marry Kai. Her society's prejudices have limited what Cinder believes she can do in the future. By the end of *Winter,* Cinder has changed her attitude towards this situation. At the end of *Winter* Kai asks Cinder "if you think, *someday*, you might consider being an empress" to which she replies "I would consider it … Someday" (*Winter* 822-823). This time when she thinks about marrying Kai and becoming empress, Cinder does not even consider the prejudices of the people in the Commonwealth. By not even worrying about what society thinks before answering Kai, Cinder demonstrates that she has ceased to see herself as limited by her social identity. The move from not allowing herself to imagine being empress to seriously considering it displays how Cinder's personal desires have come to outweigh her social identity. The Commonwealth's people are still prejudiced towards cyborgs, but Cinder no longer allows this to affect her decisions. Here the individual successfully resists the limits which their social identity places on them, asserting the power of personal agency over social determinism.

Just as in Throne of Glass there was a departure from tradition in combining elements of the novel and epic to better exemplify their belief in individual autonomy, in this moment we see how in placing so much import on the freedom of the individual YA books like the Lunar Chronicles depart from the traditional idealism of the Bildungsroman to a different kind of optimism. Joseph Slaughter writes that "In classical *Bildungsroman* (and *Bildung*) theory, the idealist genre imagines a reconciliation of the "conflict between individuality and socialization, autonomy and normality", the human personality is both the product and agent of the perfect harmonization of the individual and society" (Slaughter 26). While as Slaughter describes here the classical Bildungsroman sought to achieve harmony between the individual and society, here

the ideal outcome is the individual's triumph over society. The end does not see Cinder accepting society's definition of her but rather letting it go.

The triumph of the individual over the social system is made even clearer by Cinder's actions once she becomes Queen. Cinder negotiates to have her friend Carswell Thorne, a thief, pardoned of all his crimes in other nations due to his efforts in helping her overthrow Levana. Here the individual actions of Thorne cause him to be released from the system's rules. The law has gone from something that forced Cinder into a medical experiment because she is a cyborg to something that need not be feared if the individual asserts themselves properly. A person can triumph over the injustices of the system. Cinder also announces "I've decided to dissolve the Lunar monarchy … change Luna into a republic, elected officials and all" (*Winter* 820). Here the very structure of society proves flexible to the will of the determined individual. The people who are in charge have more power than the system itself. Similarly Emperor Kai is able to cancel the cyborg draft in the Commonwealth without getting approval from his cabinet or people. When a single person is able to change the system it places the impetus for change on the individual rather than all of society. Cinder and Kai change things before their social systems evolve naturally into that change. These moments suggests that societal change to fix injustices inherent in the system are necessary, but it also implies that such change occurs through the individual since both Kai and Cinder make these changes alone. By having individuals fix their society's problems the Lunar Chronicles again celebrates the ability of the individual to overcome systematic limitations. This Bildungsroman is a story of the individual changing society rather than harmonizing with it.

As Cinder takes more action and becomes comfortable with her sense of identity, she is able to let go of the ways society has tried to define her. She no longer feels ashamed of being

cyborg because she rejects how society defines cyborgs. The series further confirms the individual's ability to rise above social constructs by having Kai and Cinder change the structure of their societies. The Lunar Chronicles displays how social pressures can be internalized, but it ultimately suggests that the autonomy of the individual is more powerful than society by having Cinder reject her social identity and displaying how the structure of society itself is constructed by and therefore can be altered by individuals.

Conclusion:

The Lunar Chronicles illustrates how social identity can negatively impact our sense of personal identity. What her various identities claim of Cinder is not only negative but contradictory causing a fractured sense of identity. Gaining knowledge about her past gives Cinder the data to unite her identities, and she is then able to take action and break away from her social identities. Cinder gains enough power to change the structure of society herself. Personal autonomy is affected by but proves more powerful than social systems.

Through Cinder's character development the Lunar Chronicles encourages readers to believe in their ability to define themselves and change society. While this may sound idealistic, the series displays how personal experience does provide a space in which the individual can foster a different understanding of their identity than what their society says. It is possible to reject social identities, but it requires claiming ownership over personal identity. We can either let society define us, or we can define ourselves.

While this ideology emphasizes the power of the individual over society, the great irony is that a belief in personal autonomy and responsibility in many ways supports our current social system. Returning to a point from the introduction, Stephan Feldman writes of the attempt to bring postmodern ideas into to American legal system in "Given our Constitution, with its

emphasis on individual rights such as free expression and religious freedom, scholarship

denigrating the self, autonomy, and agency will probably fall on deaf ears" (Feldman 284).

Similarly when writing of the types of self narrative different societies produce Victoria

Hardcastle notes that "(North) American self-narratives emphasize positive results achieved by

individual labor" (Hardcastle 43). Both these quotes and scholars, despite their different projects,

demonstrate that American society emphasizes the individual. Our Constitution stresses the

protection of individual freedoms against larger structures, and the American mythos paints a

picture of unrestrained social mobility for the hardworking individual. The Lunar Chronicles

then in celebrating the power of the individual over society ironically supports America's social

system which claims to do the same. However, I will point out that the Lunar Chronicles

supports what American society claims to value and support. This promotion is not the same as

blindly suggesting that everything America society does is wonderful, and in saying these books

display some American values we should not mistake them for political propaganda.

This point of irony may also help to explain the point of departure from the classical

Bildungsroman which teaches the individual to harmonize with society. After explaining what

the classic Bildungsroman is, Slaughter writes that "Many stalwart critics of the *Bildungsroman*

maintain with Franco Moretti a historicistic and Eurocentric view of the genre, prematurely

eulogizing the loss of its synthetic social vision with the trauma of World War I" (Slaughter 26).

Critics of the Bildungsroman view the genre as dead because they think its interest in

synthesizing the individual and society died with World War 1. The interest I take in this quote is

that critics who think of the Bildungsroman as a "synthetic social vision" are "historicistic and

Eurocentric". This view of the Bildungsroman as a genre which when idealistic portrays a

harmony between the individual and society originates from a study which focused on historic

Europe, a place and time in which the freedoms and capability of the individual were not as heavily emphasized as they are by contemporary American society. In turning away from the traditional idealist Bildungsroman, the Lunar Chronicles has not abandoned idealism but rather exchanged it for an idealism that runs in conjunction with its own society's values. The Lunar Chronicles is an American idealist Bildungsroman in which the individual makes their own path rather than harmonizing with society.

Conclusion

In concluding, I must observe that for some my analysis of these texts may have served as a confirmation of the less than stellar reputation of Young Adult Fiction. After all I have concluded that these books maintain an idealist and optimistic outlook on the individual and their place in society. My analysis of the techniques used to achieve this optimism have shown that this idealist ideology is deliberate, but this purposefulness will hardly make some more appreciative of their overall ideology. Why then have I spent dozens of pages rambling on about the details of these books' construction and the effect it achieves?

As I said in the introduction, I maintain that the popularity of these books merits an exploration. If something appears enough on the public consciousness, then we ought to examine its effect on that consciousness. Even if my analysis confirms some people's dislike of YA fiction, this study provides a place grounded in analysis and evidence with which to take issue or approve of what these books are trying to achieve.

However, as one has probably assumed from reading this, I do not think scholars should dismiss Young Adult fiction. The idealism of these books does serve a function in society, but it is not intellectual or political but rather emotional. According to U.S. Department of Health and Mental Services 1 in 5 adolescents experience some sort of mental health disorder and 1 in 8 suffer from depression, and suicide is the second leading cause of death for 15 to 24 year olds (Office of Adolescent Health). I am not trying to suggest that the books I have examined here are the cure for mental health problems in our nation's young adults. However, I would like to point out that they are aimed at a group which suffers from high rates of mental illness and that their

deliberately idealistic ideology may be an effort to address our personal rather than systematic well-being. In fact, since both Wade in *Ready Player One* and Celaena in Throne of Glass exhibit symptoms of depression, I would argue that these books to some degree are aware of mental health as an issue. In short the ideology of the unified autonomous self to which these books faithfully cling may in fact be designed to make people feel better about the world and themselves, but that is not necessarily a trick to keep people from questioning the system. It may be that optimism and feeling better can be valued in and for themselves because we as human beings do need those feelings from time to time to remain healthy. All stories do not serve the same purpose.

The focus on the individual and their self-perception should serve as a reminder that how we think and feel about ourselves is important. The existence of fragmented identity and the ability to reject social identity shows that how society constructs us and how we view ourselves is not always a one to one ratio. Emphasizing this space of difference keeps people from being nothing but the victims of social circumstances and prejudices. If there is not a slight space of difference between social and personal identity, then people would not be able to overcome negative social identities. Books like the Lunar Chronicles, Throne of Glass, and *Ready Player One* remind readers that how we think about ourselves can be distinct from how society views us, and that seizing agency over our self-conception and personal identity allows us to improve our mental well-being.

My goal in this study has been to demonstrate that to discern the implications and functions of this popular literature requires detailed analysis and exploration of the texts. Blanket statements, such as Slaughter's assertion that the affirmative Bildungsroman only persists "in popular, "subliterary" culture, where its ideological (and rather naïve) optimism seems stronger

than ever", do little to provide a nuanced understanding of popular culture's goals and effects. Naturally Slaughter's study is not about popular culture and so I do not take issue specifically with him making such a statement but rather with the overall tendency to let such statements serve as the academic opinion on popular literature. It is not even that such statements are completely incorrect, but rather that if we place too much faith in them, they prevent us from looking to the larger consequences and underlying causes of "subliterary" culture.

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