



## The Unseen Battle: Psychological Perspectives on Adolescent Cancer Patients' in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*

J.L. Rex Lumine Nirmal<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. J. Jesulatha<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>\*PhD Research Scholar, (Reg. No: 20113014011007), Department of English, Annai Velankanni College, Tholayavattam. Kanniyakumari District Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abisekapatti, Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of English, Annai Velankanni College, Tholayavattam. Kanniyakumari District Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abisekapatti, Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu

### Abstract

In *The Fault in Our Stars*, John Green poignantly portrays the lives of teenage cancer patients, delving into their anguish, tribulations, and sense of isolation. He vividly describes the various forms of cancer and its debilitating physical effects. Green sheds light on the unique challenges adolescents face, including feelings of disconnection and marginalization. He also highlights the emotional toll on parents, who struggle to care for their ailing children. Through the protagonist Hazel, Green explores the complexities of love, life, and resilience in the face of adversity. The novel juxtaposes the experiences of cancer patients with those of healthy individuals, creating a thought-provoking narrative that spans two stories. Green's meticulous research on cancers devastating impact informs his writing, underscoring the disease's cruelty and how it affect a person physically and psychologically.

**Keywords:** anguish, tribulations, isolation, marginalization, emotional toll, resilience, adversity.

John Green is a renowned American author, celebrated for his impactful literature that has garnered numerous accolades. His notable awards include the Michael L. Printz Award (2006), Edgar Allan Poe Award (2009), Corine Literature Prize (2009), Indiana Authors Award (2012), Children's Choice Book Awards (2013), Los Angeles Times Book Prize (2013), and mtvU Fandom Awards (2014). Green's writings thoughtfully explore the complex emotional and psychological challenges that adolescents face, delving into themes of identity, mental health, and coming-of-age struggles. His works offer a nuanced portrayal of the teenage experience, tackling tough issues with sensitivity and insight.

Cancer is a complex and multifaceted disease characterized by the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells. These cells can metastasize, spreading to various parts of the body through the circulatory and lymphatic systems. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of cancer patients achieve complete remission. Cancer is not a single entity, but rather a broad category comprising over a hundred distinct and diverse diseases, each with its unique biology and behavior.

The bestselling novel *The Fault in Our Stars* has been adapted into a movie. The story revolves around Hazel Grace Lancaster, the protagonist, and her boyfriend Augustus, a fellow cancer patient. Author John Green sheds light on the harsh realities of cancer, its debilitating impact on the body, and the emotional turmoil it inflicts on patients and their loved ones. Initially, Hazel perceives cancer as a mere precursor to death, while her mother clings to the hope that medical interventions can conquer the disease. Green poignantly captures the mindset of parents who, despite knowing the grim prognosis, desperately seek any possible solution to save their children from the clutches of this unforgiving illness. Green describes the cancer patients who are below the age of eighteen in the novel, "But my mom believed I required treatment, so she took me to see my Regular Doctor Jim, who agreed that I was veritably swimming in a paralyzing and totally clinical depression and that therefore my meds should be adjusted and also I should attend a weekly Supported Group" (4).

In the initial stage, Hazel leads a reclusive life, rarely venturing outside her home. Her parents encourage her to break out of her shell and engage with peers her age, hoping she'll overcome her fears and live a normal life beyond her cancer diagnosis. To facilitate this, they persuade her to attend a weekly Support Group. Hazel's parents have dual motivations for this: they want her to socialize with other teenagers and also hope that the group's prayer sessions, led by Patrick, a cancer survivor who attributes his recovery to faith, might miraculously cure her cancer. Patrick, a former cancer patient himself, believes in the healing power of prayer and leads the group with this conviction. Hazel's parents, desperate for their daughter's recovery, explore various avenues, including the Support Group, in their quest to save her.

Hazel is utterly captivated by the book *An Imperial Affliction* and has read it multiple times from cover to cover. She becomes determined to meet the book's author, Peter Van Haouten, in Amsterdam. Recognizing the potential life-changing impact of this encounter, Hazel's mother takes charge of organizing the trip, ensuring every detail is meticulously planned. Due to Hazel's reliance on an oxygen tank for survival, her mother also arranges for a portable spare tank to accompany them on the journey. Hazel's mother selflessly joins the trip, not to enjoy the excursion, but to

provide a watchful eye and safeguard her daughter's well-being, ensuring her safety and health amidst the challenges of travel.

Augustus who has a bone cancer lost one leg and in the same way the disease affects the whole body, but he doesn't inform his parents because if they know, they will die soon by depression and sadness. When Augustus decides to make a trip in Amsterdam with Hazel, it is a risk to him, "As we approached the house, I could hear someone crying inside. I didn't think it was Gus at first, because it didn't sound anything like the low rumble of his speaking, but then I heard a voice that was definitely a twisted version of his say, 'because it is my life, mom. It belongs to me'"(139). Augustus doesn't express emotion to anyone, but his mother identifies his sufferings and shouts not to make a trip because it will make him injured. After the trip, he comes to his native place; his disease makes him feel pain a lot and it spreads all over his body and ends his life.

John Green introduces another teenage character, Isaac, a member of the weekly Support Group, who is also a cancer patient. Isaac has been battling eye cancer, resulting in the removal of one eye, and is now facing the impending loss of his remaining eye. Despite this, his parents selflessly care for him, managing every aspect of his life. Although they are heartbroken about their son's impending blindness, they conceal their emotions to protect him. Instead, they devote themselves to ensuring Isaac's comfort and happiness, catering to his every need and desire. When friends visit, his mother goes out of her way to prepare food, aiming to lift Isaac's spirits. Even after losing both eyes and becoming blind, Isaac's mother remains dedicated, escorting him wherever he wishes, often using a wheelchair for transportation. Remarkably, Isaac stoically endures his suffering, choosing not to express his pain and struggles to others.

In *The Fault in Our Stars*, John Green employs a unique narrative technique by crafting a novel that not only tells the story of Hazel's life but also traverses the boundaries of a "novel within a novel" through the book-within-a-book, *An Imperial Affliction*. This nested narrative follows the journey of Anna, a cancer patient, and becomes a pivotal element in Hazel's quest for answers. Hazel identifies with Anna's story and seeks to uncover the elusive ending of *An Imperial Affliction*, which parallels her own life's journey. The search for the novel's conclusion becomes an obsession for Hazel, driving the plot forward. Green skillfully weaves the two narratives together, culminating in a poignant conclusion that connects the inner and outer stories, blurring the lines between fiction and reality.

The cylindrical green tank only weighed a few pounds, and I had this little steel cart to wheel it around behind me. It delivered two liters of oxygen to me each minute through a cannula, a transparent tube that split just beneath my neck, wrapped behind my ears, and then reunited in my nostrils. The contraption was necessary because my lungs sucked at being lungs. (8)

John Green poignantly portrays the anguish and loss experienced by Augustus and Hazel, as well as the impact of cancer on their lives and aspirations. He sheds light on Augustus' past as a basketball player, now hindered by bone cancer, which has resulted in the amputation of his leg. Similarly, Hazel's cancer diagnosis has forced her to abandon her normal life, including attending school, while Isaac's cancer has rendered him blind and unable to engage in activities he once enjoyed. Green highlights how cancer ravages the lives of individuals across various age groups, from young children to adults. He also illustrates the devastating effect of cancer on the dreams and aspirations of teenagers, as well as the parents who had envisioned a bright future for their children. Instead, these parents find themselves dedicating their lives to ensuring their children's survival, as cancer mercilessly shatters their goals and aspirations. Through these characters, Green indirectly conveys the far-reaching suffering of cancer patients globally, evoking a sense of empathy and understanding in the reader.

John Green includes religious ideas in cancer patients. It describes in the beginning of the story that the religious ideas spread in assemble of cancer patients in the group which is called as Weekly Support Group. In the group, Patrick who has religious faith to cure the cancer disease and he prays for them for the cure of disease.

Lord Jesus we are gathered here in your heart, *literally in your heart*, as cancer survivors. You and You alone know us as we know ourselves. Guide us to life and the light through our times trial. We pray for Isaac's eyes, for Michael's and Jamie's blood, for Augustus's bones. For Hazel's lungs, for James's throat. We pray that you might heal us and that we might feel your love, and your peace, which passes all understanding. (14)

Religious ideas are inserted in cancer patients as during the conversation of Augustus and Hazel, Augustus says that they are literally in the heart of Jesus. In the same way, while the ending of Augustus life, he speaks with his religious faith not to swear in the Literal heart of Jesus.

John Green portrays cancer patients as individuals who are often marginalized and disconnected from society. Initially, Hazel is in denial about the severity of her cancer diagnosis, but as the reality sets in, she becomes withdrawn and isolated, developing an inferiority complex that prevents her from attending school or leaving her house. This self-imposed seclusion exacerbates her feelings of alienation and disconnection from the world around her. However, when her mother encourages her to break free from her shell and engage with others, Hazel struggles to overcome her anxieties and venture out. It is only when her mother suggests joining a support group that Hazel finally musters the courage to leave her house and connect with others who share similar experiences.

The life of a cancer patient is fleeting and fragile, with a uncertain future that seems all too brief. They are denied the luxury of time to savor joy and happiness, often masking their true emotions with a brave face to conceal their suffering. Their existence is marked by a constant cycle of hospital visits, medication, and pain management, leaving little room for life's simple pleasures. There were very rare persons who overcome cancer. Green insists these things in the novel through the characters:

I had a surgery called *radical neck dissection*, which is about as pleasant as it sounds. Then radiation. Then they tried some chemo for my lung tumors shrank then grew. By then, I was fourteen. My lungs started to fill up with water. I was looking pretty dead my hands and feet ballooned; my skin cracked; my lips were perpetually blue. They've got this drug that makes you not feel so completely terrified about the fact that make you not can't breathe, and I had a lot of it flowing into me through a PICC line, and more than a dozen other drugs besides. (24)

In the novel, John Green vividly portrays the physical manifestations of cancer in his characters. Hazel Grace, for instance, is constantly adorned with an oxygen tube in her nose, connected to a tank that she carries with her everywhere in a bag. This conspicuous accessory sets her apart from others, relegating her identity to that of a cancer patient. Similarly, Augustus, Hazel's love interest, is also defined by his cancer diagnosis. The two meet at a weekly support group and experience an instant attraction, blossoming into a deep and intense relationship. They often congregate at their mutual friend Isaac's home, further solidifying their bond. Their love reaches new heights during a trip to Amsterdam, but tragically, Augustus succumbs to bone cancer upon their return, leaving Hazel heartbroken and their love cut short.

When someone is diagnosed with cancer, they often become a source of burden to those around them. They are relegated to living on the fringes of society, their lives marked by isolation and alienation. Their daily activities and routines are starkly different from those of others, and even simple pleasures like eating become a challenge. They are forced to adhere to strict dietary restrictions, and indulging in their cravings can have dire consequences. Society often views cancer patients as individuals with physical limitations, and their lives are constantly overshadowed by the spectre of mortality. As a result, love and relationships become fleeting and impermanent, much like their own lives.

The novel *The Fault in Our Stars* poignantly portrays the struggles and agony of cancer patients through its well-crafted characters. The author skillfully employs characterization to illustrate the diverse experiences of individuals affected by various types of cancer. By reading this novel, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the emotional and physical distress endured by cancer patients, fostering empathy and insight into their lives.

#### WORK CITED

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