

Tribhuvan University

Coping Mechanisms for Cancer Trauma in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U.

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in English**

By

Sandip Gyawali

Roll No.: 81

Symbol No.: 280868

TU Regd. No.: 6-2-49-190-2014

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

May 2023

May 2023

Sandip Gyawali

Coping Mechanisms for Cancer Trauma in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my profound gratitude to the respected supervisor Associate Prof. Dr. Anju Gupta and external examiner Lecturer Bal Bahadur Thapa whose sincere effort, helpful suggestions, continuous scholarly guidance, valuable criticism and instructions made this work complete.

I am heartily thankful to Prof. Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota, Head of the Department of English, for providing me an opportunity to work on this project by accepting my proposal. Similarly, I heartily express my gratitude to the respected lecturers of the Department who equally provided me with invaluable advice and suggestions.

My invaluable gratefulness goes to Dr. Tejendra Pherali, Associate Professor, University College London. His priceless suggestions helped me advance this research to such rigorous extent. In addition to this I would like to offer my respect to my parents and thankfulness to all my family members, who directly and indirectly supported to complete my academic research.

Moreover, I would like to thank my friends' suggestions during my research. Lastly, I would also like to thank all those who have formed my thesis into its final shape by giving technical support.

May 2023

Sandip Gyawali

Coping Mechanisms for Cancer Trauma in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*

Abstract

This study examines the coping mechanisms by characters struggling with cancer trauma in John Green's novel, The Fault in Our Stars. The research investigates the theoretical frameworks emphasized by Mardi Horowitz, and Jean-Martin Charcot to analyze the psychological dimensions of coping with the challenges associated with cancer. Through an analysis of the characters Hazel Grace Lancaster, Augustus Waters and Isaac's experiences in the novel – the analysis is done to navigate the intricate realm of emotions and the traumatic aftermath of their illness. Charcot's concept of somatization, and Horowitz's theory on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) provide derivative to analyze the psychological processes entailed in coping with cancer. By conducting an in-depth analysis of the characters Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters, the paper offers a detailed examination of how individuals confront and adapt to the trauma of cancer, emphasizing psychological support.

Key Words: Cancer, Trauma, Alienation, Death, Fear, Psychology

This research explores how the characters in the novel *The Fault in Our Stars* employ friendship, love, and humor as coping mechanisms in the face of trauma. It provides an overview of the significance of trauma and the impact it can have on individuals, emphasizing the importance of effective coping strategies in navigating such experiences. It highlights that human connection, particularly in the form of friendship, can provide individuals with emotional support, understanding, and a sense of belonging, all of which are crucial elements in coping with traumatic experiences. Love is presented as a powerful force that can offer hope, motivation, and a sense of purpose in the face of adversity. Additionally, the role of humor provides temporary relief, allowing individuals to find moments of joy and escape from the weight of their trauma.

Green's novel presents mainly two cancer victims who are dealing with their sufferings and fear of dying at an early age due to the disease. Because of their immature age, we can find them always in a deep traumatic tumult. The major characters, Augustus Waters and Hazel Grace Lancaster struggle in their adolescence to survive. Both of them have developed a sense of empathy towards each other because they can relate and share their pain and suffering. After being treated for cancer, Augustus seems happy and falls in love with Hazel, but when he is again diagnosed with same cancer, he finds himself alone. Both characters never seem satisfied with their conditions, and gradually they begin to realize that they will never be with one another. Despite so, they try to survive by using different coping mechanisms like love, social service, humorous presentation, hiding pain, so on.

The Fault in Our Stars by John Green employs the narrative perspective of Hazel Grace Lancaster, a 16-year-old protagonist. Throughout the novel, Green masterfully creates an emotional attachment between the reader and the book's

characters. By skillfully crafting relatable and empathetic characters, Green invites the audience to forge a connection with them. In particular, the author enables readers to understand and sympathize with Hazel's traumatic circumstances, allowing them to grasp the profound challenges she faces, despite potentially lacking personal experience with the disease that moulds her life.

It is hypothesized that the friendship, love and humor between two major characters, Augustus Waters and Hazel Grace Lancaster is the coping mechanism to deal with the cancer related trauma. This major problem arise in the characters when they have disease, and they realize that it is incurable. Illness makes people psychologically devastated and innermost alienated from the rest of the world. They are more shocked when they feel that the death is near to them. Especially in the early phase of their life, adolescents find it very difficult to cope with that sort of problem.

Theresearch analyzes the characters in John Green's novel *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) through the lens of post traumatic stress disorder among teenagers, who are suffered from cancer like a deadly disease. According to Maria Christina Poli "The individual, who is alienated from herself/himself may have cut off her/his relationship from her/his nature and her/his own world of meaning. Individuals may experience feelings such as emptiness towards their existential meaning, alienation from nature and themselves, and feeling powerless" (Poli51). On the surface level, the novel is the story of Hazel and Augustus, who love each other. But on a deeper level, it is more than young adult fiction. If the love affair between Hazel and Augustus forms the main strand, the struggle to win alienation and fear of death of various characters shapes the second strand of the story. Both strands are intermingled perfectly, as the first strand seems to have been covering the second strand. Hazel attends a cancer group in the church basement and meets Augustus Waters there.

Hazel describes Augustus that she has thyroid cancer that has spread up to her lungs, but she has sometime to live through a cutting-edge treatment that has not been effective. One day, Augustus invites Hazel to join him for a picnic. Hazel reveals that she is afraid to get close to people because she might be the cause of harm to other people surrounding her. She feels like a grenade that her death will harm everyone close to her. Likewise, Augustus shares that he fears he will die without doing anything extraordinary. Both characters are conscious of their disease and trying to cope traumatic experiences and feeling of alienation of their lives.

Numerous critics have received their different perspectives about the novel *The Fault in Our Stars*. Dheril Sofia Nanda analyzes how the book can be discussed with the discourses of semantics, linguistics, presupposition, and implicature.

The infringement on *The Fault in Our Stars* employs figurative items (irony, metaphor, hyperbole, understatement etc.) does not constitute that the writer does not attempt to be truthful to characters' psychological tumult, otherwise, by applying such kind of utterances, the author tries to serve the readers a lucid imagination, deliberation the implicit rather concealed meaning of his words. (57)

Nanda discusses how the book is an implicature of real-life depiction of the romance of common people, especially young adults. And, how it can be related to the mentality of the commoners. Implicature is the meaning beyond someone's saying; the writer of this novel also uses figurative words in order to create sense. She says the novel constitutes two kinds of implicature; generalized conversational and particularized conversational. The researcher uses Grice's *Cooperative Principle* to conduct a research and to reach in a conclusion. She differentiates the conversation as generalized and particularized, which is portrayed in the novel with Grice's five

maxims and relates it with the young adults.

S. Widhya, et al. provides insights about the novel *The Fault in Our Stars* and discusses that optimism and pessimism is the key element found inside the characters in the book.

The dominant type of optimism from Hazel Grace is dispositional optimism.

“Dispositional optimism” is defined as a global expectation that better (desirable) things than bad (undesirable) that will happen in the future. . . .

The dominant type of pessimism from Hazel Grace is dispositional pessimism.

“Dis- positional pessimism” is the tendency to believe the worst on a consistent basis. It a situation that made pessimistic to face something that happen in life and always blaming one’s self of every single thing. (211)

The researchers opine that the most dominant optimism is dispositional optimism and the most dominant pessimism is dispositional pessimism found throughout the text.

Widhya and others talk about how the psychological issues related to the main character’s emotion are reflected through the literature and how illness can be a hot topic to engage the readers in the literary text. Illness not only can bring sympathy but also can relate the pain with the character, which later on converges into empathy.

Portrays the depression which is reflected by the characters, and how it can be related in social context.

Abhisek Bhakat, Ph.D Research Scholar, talks about the manifestation of *carpe diem*, which means seize the day or enjoy the day. He observes this type of manifestation in the novel. The binary of life and death is presented in John Green’s book; we can see Hazel is constantly suffering from a serious illness, but that illness does not bring a fear upon her:

In modern day the theme of *carpe diem* is not only restricted to the fulfillment

of basic requirements like food, shelter, clothes and sex but goes beyond this and finds numerous sources of pleasure from contemporaneous cultural advancement and cyber world. As for example, in *The Fault in Our Stars*, the correspondent mail from Peter van Houten's attendant Lidewij Vliegenthart makes Hazel ecstatic with joy. (15)

The novel contains some essence of the romance between youth-adult characters. The love affair of Hazel and Augustus, conversation, and adventure towards Amsterdam all bounds as love novel. The major character Augustus utilizes internet to establish a connection with Hazel's beloved author, Peter van Houten. In addition to staying in touch through mobile networks, Hazel and Augustus cleverly leverage the convenience of SMS messaging when making a call is impractical, such as during Hazel's family dinners or Augustus' busy class schedules. By utilizing technology effectively, they maintain constant communication and optimize their interactions with Peter van Houten.

Virginia Kirkus views, "A smartly crafted intellectual explosion of a romance... readers will swoon on nearly every page. Green's signature style shines his carefully structured dialogue and razor-sharp characters brim with genuine intellect, humor and desire" (77). Along with humor, there are glimpses of pain, death and sorrow too. Here can also be seen in the novel *The Fault in Our Stars* as a tragic novel in which the main character Augustus dies at last. Glasgow Herald views:

Green's novel is truly captivating, with a plot that intricately weaves together emotions and experiences. Hazel and Augustus are extraordinary characters who possess a profound zest for life and an unwavering love for one another. Their passion and enthusiasm shine through, transcending the constraints of their illness. It is a genuine delight to witness their dreams unfold and their

relationship thrive, even in the face of impending death. (67)

Thus, this research explores the novel from various angles and specifically focuses on utilizing psychoanalysis and trauma studies as analytical frameworks. By incorporating these perspectives, the study delves into the characters' fears and their inherent desire for a purposeful existence. Green investigates how those who lived through the events are unable to reconcile their life because it is silenced, yet he insists on a meaningful life, even in times of great pain. The assumption is that for Green, only such experiences can neutralize the fear of death and feeling of alienation.

'Trauma' is used to describe the experiences or situations that are emotionally distressing and that exceed's people's ability to cope, leaving them powerless. Trauma are the circumstances that are outside the normal human experience. Unfortunately, the definition is not accountable. For some people, it can occur frequently and become part of human experience. Moreover, in this research paper traumatic experiences are shown which have been giving unbearable pain in the life of characters. In this regard, traumatic events are those which are thought to involve victimization or the threat of victimization. Events such as witnessing violence, unprovoked physical attacks, physical, mental, and emotional abuse are generally considered to be traumatic. As Cathy Caruth believes trauma as "a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event" (Caruth 4). Caruth suggests that language and storytelling play a vital role in the process of trauma recovery. Through narrative and sharing their experiences,

individuals can attempt to articulate and make meaning of their trauma. In *The Fault in Our Stars*, Hazel copes with her trauma by writing and sharing her story with others. By doing so, she seeks to connect with others, find solace, and confront the complex emotions associated with her illness. Similarly, Augustus's interest in metaphors and storytelling reflects the characters' attempts to give voice to their traumatic experiences and find catharsis through self-expression.

Discussing the process involved in the resolution or integration of trauma through defense mechanisms, M.J. Horowitz and N. Milner claim:

The individual employs defense mechanisms as a means of coping. However, the completion tendency, which drives the need for resolution, keeps the traumatic information active in memory. This dynamic creates intrusive symptoms like flashbacks, dreams, or intrusive thoughts. The individual oscillates between defense mechanisms and the completion tendency, gradually working towards integration. Difficulties in achieving integration result in the partial processing of trauma information, leading to the persistence of symptoms. (Horowitz and Milner 363)

The passage describes how individuals utilize defense mechanisms as a way to cope with traumatic experiences. These defense mechanisms act as a barrier, preventing the traumatic information from fully integrating into their memory. However, the completion tendency, which is the innate drive for resolution and closure, keeps the traumatic memories active and accessible. Relating to *The Fault in Our Stars*, we can see how the characters, particularly Hazel and Augustus, employ defense mechanisms to cope with the challenges they face. Hazel, for example, uses sarcasm and a cynical attitude as a shield against the emotional pain of her illness. Augustus, on the other hand, projects a confident and carefree image to mask his inner fears and insecurities.

This research work explores the traumatic situation of various characters who are engaged in different activities to hide their fear. The novel begins with girl named Hazel Grace, who suffers from thyroid cancer. Her mother forces her to go to a cancer support group every week because she thinks that her daughter might go into PTSD if she is not engaged in any work. Hazel sees a boy for the first time, and he flirts with her the whole time. His name is Augustus Waters, who turns out to be her best friend. After the meeting that day, they get introduced and start talking about movies as a way to hang out with Hazel. Their film talks might subordinate their pangs too. He invites her over because she looks like one of the actresses from a movie and he insists on seeing her. After getting to know each other better, they find out that both like reading and tell to read each other's favorite books. Their book talks might be another way to tackle the traumas. Hazel learns that Augustus had cancer before and has a prosthetic leg. Augustus and Hazel spend much time together and quickly fall in love. He cares much more and provides care to her. He treats her like a princess because he knows she is scared of dying, which makes her live her life like Lancaster.

Augustus knows how much her favorite author means to her because he writes about people with cancer. So, Augustus emails the favorite author of Hazel. The author agrees to meet the two of them as part of a wish foundation. But he lives in Amsterdam so they had to make a trip. Before leaving, Augustus and his parents start fighting because his cancer is revived, and they do not want him to go, but Hazel is not aware of it at the time. During their stay, Augustus's health takes a turn for the worst. He has tried to make Hazel's better while he is still there to make her happy. He puts himself before her even if his health worsens. In the end, Hazel is at peace with her life, but it takes a fearful event for that to happen.

The Fault in Our Stars delves deeply into the lives of young cancer patients

and their struggles with suffering. This suffering not only causes feelings of isolation but also a looming anxiety. Hazel, Augustus, and Isaac face immense physical and emotional pain, each accompanied by their individual fears of death. Hazel's lungs filling up with fluid leads to excruciating pain and frequent trips to the emergency room. Isaac copes with the loss of his remaining eye, rendering him blind and causing his girlfriend to end their relationship. Augustus' physical condition deteriorates, leaving him reliant on strong pain medication and coming to terms with the realization that he will never achieve his heroic aspirations. The characters in the novel, particularly Hazel and Augustus, view this pain as an inevitable consequence of life, rather than something desirable. However, the most thematically significant fear is that of losing a loved one to death, which the novel suggests is a necessary part of the characters' experiences.

Hazel's concern about causing pain to those around her when she dies is a significant source of worry for her. She uses the metaphor of a grenade that detonates and harms everyone in the surrounding area to describe her fear. However, Hazel eventually becomes a victim of this pain when Augustus's health declines, and he eventually succumbs to his cancer. Through her experiences, Hazel realizes that this type of pain is inevitable and cannot be avoided. Death is universal and affects everyone. But she also understands that this pain should not be avoided. Hazel does not regret her love for Augustus, despite the pain it caused her. It is both a God's blessing and a curse. Augustus, in his letter to Van Houten, suggests that the pain one cause others when one dies is a testament to the significance in their lives. He happily acknowledges that he left his 'scar' on Hazel, hurting her but also positively impacting her life in ways she will always carry with her. The novel proposes that this type of pain is necessary and is, in fact, a part of the joy of life. Hazel keeps on

thinking this idea in her eulogy for Augustus. Hazel's eulogy for Augustus touches on the idea of the necessary pain caused by death. She begins her speech by sharing a quote that hung in Augustus's room, one that had given them both comfort. Though the quote, from *An Imperial Affliction* reads: "without pain, we could not know joy" (Green35).

The concept of alienation and fear of death began with the foundation of human civilization. Theorizing the fear of death and alienation in human beings, Amin Daraee and others, in their research work, explain that:

The fear of death is so great that a significant part of life's energy is spent denying death. As Freud has said, the primary human community and the bits of social life are formed because of fear of death. The early humans because of fear of separation and of what lies in the dark, gathered together and they got close together. We keep the community alive so that we can live our eternal life. Fear of death includes obvious or implicit horror elements, whose amount varies and it is devoted to real experience in a different. (1)

Fear of death is a horrific experience, which may sometimes makes an individual alienated. On the contrary, alienation leads to frustration, which ultimately leads to the fear of death. That's why trauma, alienation and fear of death are related with each other. Regarding death, Sigmund Freud has explained that "Since we haven't gone through the experience of death and since death doesn't exist in our unconscious, we can't actually fear death itself" (25). He first introduced the concept of Thanatophobia that is opposed by self-destructive death instinct. Though the aim of every life is death, Freud explored death anxiety in many subjects – which can lead to deep psychological effects. Freud adds, "We may fear something else, such as abandonment, castration, unresolved conflicts otherwise fear of death may be the

outcome of a sense of guilt” (25). Explaining Freud, Lois Tyson also opines that death is a frightening issue to cope with. She states that “My intense fear of losing my life makes living so painful and frightening that my only escape is death” (23). Fear of death is really a frightening experience, and it makes living painful. People try to escape death by twisting its talks and trying to make life easy. That’s why the characters in the novel try to escape from the talks of death by twisting their talks in humorous way.

In the novel the author uses various characters to provide comic relief while tackling the serious, distressing issue of teenagers dying of cancer. Firstly, the main character Augustus Water’s best friend Isaac provides numerous incidents of comic relief through his humor and way of coping with frightening events. Isaac’s girlfriend Monica dumps him because he will lose both eyes to cancer. She breaks up with him before the surgery because she does not want to leave a blind man. The comedy occurs when Isaac smashes all the Augustus’ basketball trophies to alleviate the pain and frustration “Isaac reached for the basketball trophy from the shelves above the bed and then held it over his head as if waiting for permission ... The trophy smashed against the floor, the plastic basketball players’ arm splintering off, still grasping its ball. Isaac stomped on trophy. ‘Yes’ Augustus said. “Get it!” (62).

Isaac smashes the basketball trophies to escape from the fear of death and to divert from the feeling of alienation. The smash of trophies indicates the loss of enthusiastic player hood as Augustus is incurably diseased. When Augustus asks Isaac and Hazel to prepare his eulogy because he is dying, he wants to hear what they say. Isaac is of the opinion that Augustus is going to die soon, but his inevitable death is presented with the cigarette-catching style, and his talking style is presented as a chatterbox. Lord Christ is referred to in his dialogue in order to make solace from the fear of

death.

The novel incorporates comic relief to hide depression and hopelessness through various characters. Firstly, Isaac provides comic relief by taking on the depressing situations and making them fun. Secondly, Patrick provides comic relief by being pathetic but also unintentionally humorous. These characters can be essential part of the novel because they are the main thing that shapes and controls fearful feelings. Casting the light on the issue of somatization Jean-Martin Charcot states:

Even minor physical traumas could produce dramatic and very disabling bodily and psychological symptoms in some patients with clusters of symptoms such as fatigue, nervousness, fearfulness, heart palpitations, insomnia and nightmares possibly account for the spectrum of psychological impact of Trauma. (85)

Charcot's opinion to somatization is that because of psychological impact of Trauma not only there is the loss of control to the body but the loss of everything. That's why we do have a fear of death and we try to escape from it as far as possible. It is not only an issue of the conscious mind but the unconscious mind too. It is an issue of mental health too. Gender plays a significant role in mental health issues. For example, over seventy percent of people diagnosed with borderline personality disorder are women. Those diagnosed as 'borderlines' have been stigmatized as being difficult to work with and treatment-resistant.

The novel presents three similarities between the main characters, Augustus and Hazel: illness, liking, and vision. The writer has shown the similarities between Hazel and Augustus. Cancer makes them similar and different at a time and both get treated as special one. They only have access to the outside life if they take a class at Heart of Jesus with another cancer patient. As the writer has presented, Hazel has been

feeling depressed and spending her time only in bed because of her cancer illness. Her depression is caused by the diagnosis of cancer. She is alienated on the one hand and she has a fear of death on the other hand. Such kind of depressed mentality can be found in Augustus also. Augustus as a cancer patient, felt depressed too because his cancer almost makes his life oblivion and took his left leg. "I fear oblivion" (14). From the quotation above can be seen that Augustus was "Oblivion". According to the Oxford dictionary, "Oblivion is the destruction or extinction" (2016). Thus, Augustus was devastated by the situation as a cancer sufferer. By the quotations above "Illness" are one of the similarities that influence their relationship. They have the same condition and nightmares which could be one of the strong factors influencing their relationship.

Hazel and Augustus have the same hobbies and preferences. They like reading. They are frequently discussing about Peter van Houten's *An Imperial Affliction*. Even Augustus sends the email to the author of *An Imperial Affliction* only to know how is the end of the story in that novel. Moreover, they both also exchanged novel. Hazel leaves *An Imperial Affliction* to Augustus and he gives her *Prince of Dawn*. Their talks about favorite books and reading talks might be another way to escape from the alienation and fear of death too as they speak:

"Hazel Grace," he said upon picking up. "So have you read it?" "Well, I haven't finished it. It's six hundred fifty-one pages long and I've had twenty-four hours."

"How far are you?" "Four fifty-three." "And?"

"I will withhold judgment until I finish. However, I will say that I'm feeling a bit embarrassed to have given you *The Price of Dawn*." (15)

They give opinions about the same object which they like. It makes good two-way interactions between them. And it could be another strong factor to escape from the

fear of death and sense of alienation, along with influencing their relationship because it makes their conversation more intense than before.

They both present their perceptions about novel *An Imperial Affliction*. And they feel joyfully explaining what they have just read to each other. On the one hand, this reading culture is praiseworthy, on the other hand, reading fictional works helps to forget their pains and sufferings. As the people who just have met its outstanding quality of interaction. Their similar reading habit corresponds with their incurable disease and problems being face every day. Reading novel has been the best antidote for both major characters in the novel along with their relationships. Their hobbies and preferences are the major factors influencing their relationship: love relation, which is another remedy for Hazel and Augustus. Their love relationship can be taken as the best way to escape from the feeling of alienation and fear of death. Despite being similar in every respect, there are slight differences in them too. Augustus can express easily his liking to Hazel. The liking factors of this part are focusing on how they feel of each other. It is not about they are love each other but how they express their likings to the physical, hobby, and their treatment to each other too.

On the contrary, Hazel seems a bit shy to express her internal feelings. She needs more time than August to tell him about her feelings towards him. That different nature between Hazel and Augustus can be taken as individual nature on the surface, but on a deeper level, their distinct nature reflects their psychological status. She is confused about her feeling toward Augustus. But, Augustus makes her comfortable to him. And sometimes she cannot refuse how comfort she is. Hazel has been more frightened of death and she can't refuse what Augustus requests as she says:

We crawled into the bed, my freedom circumscribed some by the oxygen, but even so I could get on top of him and take his shirt off and taste the sweat on

the skin below his collarbone as I whispered into his skin, “I love you, Augustus Waters,” his body relaxing beneath mine as he heard me say it. He reached down and tried to pull my shirt off, but it got tangled in the tube. I laughed.(17)

From the statement above, we come to know that Hazel also has a good feeling toward Augustus. But, she needs more time than Augustus to convey him. She needs good timing and good moment to tell him about her feelings. When the moment comes she says “I love you, Augustus Waters,” (27) without any interruption. That very shy nature makes her introvert and hampers her health. Augustus Water is literate, warm, incredible, and easy going so he can take Hazel to another place outside her house. He is adaptable and very good listener that makes Hazel very comfortable to him. The positive qualities of Hazel are thoughtful, knowledgeable, and rebellious that make Hazel have a different view from Augustus. However, Hazel is open-minded and humble to Augustus, who has twisted her feelings.

One can understand through her thoughts in the novel. She “...devoted quite a bit of my abundant free time to thinking about death” (3). This monologue explains that Hazel does not have any fear of death, but her mother and doctor think just the opposite; they think she is now depressed, which is a side effect of cancer. But, she has no worries about death in the future rather, she celebrates the present. Similarly, Augustus also believes in the same thing, he says, “I’m on a roller coaster which only goes up” (11). They do not care about their disease when they begin to love each other. They only want to enjoy the present. The theme of *carpe diem* works throughout the novel.

The relation between Hazel and Augustus is further highlighted in terms of physical attraction too, though love between them is one of the ways to escape from

the feeling of alienation and fear of death. But it does not mean this thing could be everything to maintain the relationship. If the physical is not really attractive, the attractive characteristic can interest people. A woman is different from a man. Man tends to look at someone from the physical appearance, but a woman does not. Woman tends to look at someone by their behavioral qualities. And this statement is one of the references for Hazel and August making and nurturing their relationship.

The description of Augustus is an attraction for Hazel on the surface level, but she gets solace from describing her boyfriend and her liking. Hazel explains herself as a common girl with a unique performance with oxygen tanks in her hand she only has half lungs, but she thinks herself as a beautiful girl. She says, "Augustus is unique man with amputated feet but nice hair and style. His hair was parted neatly on the left side in a way that he would have found absolutely horrifying, and his face was plasticized" (24). Her physical attraction for Augustus grows when "Augustus Waters was sitting on the front step as we pulled into the driveway. He was holding a bouquet of bright orange tulips just beginning to bloom" (27). So, they have different styles and behavior, which make them complement each other. By liking each other, both major characters try to soothe their pain and relying on each other they make a means of escaping from the fear of death and alienation.

The novel is about kids coping cancer with the help of mechanisms like reading, supporting and forgetting the truth of inevitable death. Suffering is a prominent part of the characters' lives and they attempt to escape from the suffering. Sixteen-year-old Hazel Grace Lancaster is living with thyroid cancer, Augustus, and Isaac all endure a bit of physical and emotional pain. Throughout the novel, Hazel, Augustus, and Isaac endure physical and emotional pain, along with the fear of death. Hazel's struggle with fluid build-up in her lungs causes intense pain that lands her in

the emergency room, while Isaac deals with the loss of his remaining eye and the breakup of his relationship. Augustus' physical deterioration forces him to take strong counter pain medications and accept that he will never accomplish his life goals. These characters understand that agony is an inevitable part of life, even if it's not desirable. However, the most significant pain in the novel is the one caused by the death of a loved one. Hazel is acutely aware of the suffering she will cause those around her when she dies, leading her to describe herself as a grenade that explodes and hurts everyone nearby. Ultimately, Hazel becomes the victim of this pain when Augustus weakens and succumbs to his cancer, leaving her to grapple with the intense grief of losing her love. What Hazel knows is that the pain cannot be avoided, as she argues "You are not a grenade, not to us. Thinking about you going away makes us sad, Hazel, but you are not a grenade. You are pretty amazing" (103).

Since dying is a must and universal, everybody will experience it. However, as Hazel senses over the course of the novel, it is not necessarily something one should avoid. She would not think other person than Augustus for anything, even though that her love is the precise cause of the intense pain. It is a blessing and a curse, so to speak. Augustus at the letter in the end of the novel says happily that he left his 'scar' on Hazel, assuming she will carry it throughout her life. The type of pain is necessary and in fact, it is a part of joy. The novel clearly shows the sufferings in all the characters that have been living frustrated life from bitter and dark experiences of their lives because "after a dissociation of particular events from consciousness, memories tended to be stored as images through flashbacks and nightmares and through bodily sensations such as anxiety and panic symptoms" (Janet 105).

This project contends that John Green's representation of characters in *The Fault in Our Stars* as always psychologically deviant. His motive behind bringing

difficult circumstances in their part is a problematic one. Further, the characters are prone to suffer from physical illness along with psychological fear of death because they are suffering to their lives, yet they try to retrieve that again because of the anxiety in their present status. Green presents the theme of psychological alienation in his novel where most of the characters are physically ill and they are destined to certain parameters of the house. Hazel Grace, seventeen years old and living with cancer rarely left her house. Augustus Waters has lost one of his legs to a form of cancer. This leads them for physical suffering and mental exhaustion.

The protagonist of *The Fault in Our Stars*, Hazel Grace Lancaster, undergoes a multi-faceted transformative journey. On a physical level, readers witness Hazel's body grow weaker as the story progresses. This is evident in her use of the stairs at the support group at when the novel begins, and her eventual reliance on the elevator as her physical condition deteriorates. However, the most significant aspect of Hazel's journey is her spiritual and philosophical evolution concerning death. At the start of the book, Hazel is preoccupied with the impact her death will have on her loved ones. She avoids getting too close to people because she knows her impending death will cause them pain, making her feel like a 'grenade.' This fear is particularly acute when it comes to her mother, as she overheard her mother say that if Hazel dies, she will cease being a mother. Hazel's desire to learn the fate of the characters in *An Imperial Affliction* drives her mission. But through her relationship with Augustus, Hazel's perspective shifts. As his cancer returns, she recognizes that he is now the one who is like a 'grenade.' Nevertheless, Hazel does not regret falling in love with Augustus, even though she knows it will cause her immense pain when he eventually passes away. Augustus is afraid of fading into oblivion that his life will be worthless and nobody will remember him once he is not there. Augustus is doubly being victim first

by physical illness and later by Hazel, leading him to psychological fear of death.

After a horrific experience, a person frightens of death. When Hazel and Augustus are diagnosed of cancer, they are mentally and physically tormented. This can be an uncomfortable and even painful experience. They may turn on psychoactive substances, including alcohol to escape the feeling. Panic attacks are some examples of a psychosomatic response to such emotional triggers.

John Green emphasizes the complicated situation of characters: physical and mental torture in a relationship and critical situation of human life and unfavorable circumstances. This research has tried to prove some characters' unusual life style. Hopelessness and physical illness are the causes and effects of alienation, where all the characters are frustrated in their life. But some characters are able to get rid of psychological torture, some not, and some have happy to give torture to other, while some persuade to live happily. This research work focuses on exploring the physical and psychological torture of characters and the ramification of alienating experiences under the influence of external forces (society) and internal pressures (family members).

Another character Augustus "Gus" Waters in John Green novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*, lives his life just like that: scared, conflicted and cautious. In every way, Augustus tries to prove his existence. As his cancer returns, however, all of his performance falls away. What remains is Gus, a teenage boy in Indianapolis who used to a star athlete and now finds dying from cancer. As he deteriorates physically, he is forced to acknowledge the bitter reality that he will die without doing anything extraordinary for the humanity. Because of Hazel, he realizes that failing to do something extraordinary does not equal being insignificant. Here the authors' portrayal of psychological disorders of Augustus indicates his painful life in the

present life:

I looked over at Augustus Waters, who looked at me. You could almost see through his eyes they were so blue. I said, when all of us are dead. All of us. There will come a time when there are no human beings remaining to remember that anyone ever existed or that our species ever did anything. There will be no one left to remember Aristotle or Cleopatra, let alone you. Everything that we did and built and wrote and thought and discovered will be forgotten and all of this. (13)

Green presents the theme of alienation and fear of death in his novel which is the story of Augustus and Hazel. The physical toll on the two characters is the starting point of their relationship. The way the two are able to discuss their suffering leads the mental connection that they share that no one else understands. Inevitably, this leads to an emotional attachment.

Throughout the novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*, the reader is always excited and intrigued when Isaac makes an appearance. His character is comic, yet we feel sympathy for him. At the start of the novel, Isaac is only partially blind, but later cancer spreads and he loses his entire sight. After his girlfriend, Monica, breaks up with him because of his surgery. In the beginning, Isaac shows characteristics of hope, optimism and freedom due to his relationship with Monica. Then his surgery is performed and through his actions as well Isaac becomes over dramatic, theatrical and pessimistic. He feels aloof and frightens by death. He tries to escape from those feelings by being funny. Isaac not only keeps his happiness in mind but also he tries to lighten the mood by cheering other friends. In an attempt to overcome the despair he feels, Isaac tries to take a more humorous approach. This look becomes clear from the given lines:

A day after I got my eye cut out, Gus showed up at the hospital. I was blind and heartbroken and dint' want to do anything and Gus bursts into my room and shouted, 'I have wonderful news!' And I was like, 'I don't really want to hear wonderful news you want to hear', and I asked him, 'Fine, what is it?' and he said, You are going to live a good and long life filled with great and terrible moments that you cannot even imagine yet !. (272)

From the given lines, it can be justified that Isaac tries to heal his fear of death by sharing his suffering with his friend Augustus. But it does not lead to a solution of their feeling; rather, it increases the flood of suffering. Although Isaac knows the fact that his eye sight will lost, he does not mourn over his loss and express his suffering with Augustus humorously.

Moreover, Green's novel *The Fault in Our Stars* explores the situation of characters who are nearly tortured by society. Death is most obvious in the physical deterioration of the body, for that is what people can see; the symptoms of death can be the hardest to control and hide. Cancer patient is unable to control the pain they feel from the disease and how their body responds to it. "I was left on the shore with the waves washing over me, unable to drown" (105). That is how Hazel Grace described cancer, her cancer in particular. It's hard to control any form of pain. "That's the thing about pain . . . it demands to be felt" (63). The suffering from the physical deterioration of their bodies can leave them helpless and in excruciating pain. There are methods to numb the pain, but some methods aren't seen regularly every day.

A carry-around oxygen tank or a prosthetic leg can be pretty normal in a hospital setting, but out in the real world, they stick out like a sore thumb. "I could feel everybody watching us, wondering what was wrong with us, and whether it

would kill us, and how heroic my mom must be, and everything else” (144). Hazel Grace and Augustus are not regular teens. They have an illness that people too often use to isolate them and make them feel uncomfortable about themselves. Fortunately, they found each other, another person who knows exactly what they are going through. Their relation has been working as a therapy. The worst way to handle any sort of pain is to go through it alone. Whether it is the pain shown on one’s face, the equipment they carry around, the vomiting, the fainting, the weight loss, or the blood, death is the most obvious to the observer by the way it changes the physical body.

Instead of suffering “apart” as two individuals, the two main characters: Augustus and Hazel face the psychological consequences of dying by talking and thinking about it together- “what happens to us when we are dying”-they get each other. To Augustus, if he was not remembered greatly, he would not consider himself remembered at all. He is able to tell Hazel “... there is no glory in illness. There is no meaning to it. There is no honor in dying of” (217). Augustus yearned to be a hero in some way before he died. He wanted to be remembered. Being a cancer patient made him more difficult. From his perspective, he would not be able accomplish something that would make him 'new worthy'. Hazel, through understanding, did not agree and was able to respond to him in these words: “I just want to be enough for you, but I never can be. This can never be enough for you. But this is all you get. You get me, and your family, and this world. This is your life. I am sorry if it sucks” (214). From the given extract, it can be proved that Augustus and Hazel are the victim of traumatic suffering. Sometimes, they work through their trauma but they cannot get a complete resolution of it. As a result, both characters attend a support group in the church to cope with their pain and grieve to other people.

In the same manner, in the novel, as genuine as Hazel can be, she can have

her doubts as well. To have death looming around every day can only negatively affect the mind. "... and I just do not want this particular life" (121). Sometimes life can be overwhelming, especially as a teenager, and very confusing. Throw in a little cancer, and life takes on a whole new spin, "... depression is not a side effect of cancer. It is a side effect of dying"(3). It was something Hazel and Augustus had to face. But facing the fear of death together gave them the support they needed to be strong. Depression, withdrawal, and denial all mark the physiological reactions to death. In this regard, Ruth Leys states, "This meant, too, that the amnesia held to be typical of psychological shock was explained as a kind of post-hypnotic forgetting that risked being irreversible since, according to the hypothesis, the traumatic scene was never present to the hypnotized subject and hence was constituting unenviable for subsequent representation and recall" (9). In *The Fault in Our Stars*, the characters grapple with their traumatic experiences of living with terminal illnesses. While amnesia is not a central element, the emotional impact of their conditions and the subsequent challenges they face are significant. While amnesia may not be directly addressed, the passage's mention of irreversible forgetting can be connected to the characters' desires to leave a lasting impact on the world. Hazel and Augustus seek to create meaningful connections, forge deep relationships, and find ways to be remembered even after they are gone.

The Fault in Our Stars explores the emotional scar of death in the loss of someone deeply loved. Many people fear falling in love in general, but Hazel Grace fears falling in love because of the limited time she has left. She reflects: "I am a grenade and at some point I am going to blow up and I would like to minimize the casualties" (99). Nobody wants to fall in love with someone who is going to die very soon. Because when they are gone, it is over, it is the end and there is no way to get it

back. Hazel Grace struggles with wanting to love Augustus and not wanting to be the one that leaves him behind and hurts him. But you really cannot help who you love. Hazel reflects, “You realize that trying to keep your distance from me will not lessen my affection for you” (122). And though Augustus knows that he will experience potential heartbreak in Hazel’s death he is still willing to take risk in loving. Though Augustus never became a well-known hero to the world, to Hazel he was her everything and she was his: “But then I wanted more time to fall in love. I got my wish, I suppose. I left my scar” (313). Death takes its greatest toll in the emotional wreckage- fear, anger, sadness and hopelessness. But it is through emotional involvement that one may be inspired to great deeds. The true sacrifice that Gus makes is in taking Hazel to Amsterdam, knowing that he is relapsing. He has put her life above his own.

The Fault in Our Stars by John Green makes fun at clichés and baseless social conventions, especially regarding cancer kids and coming to terms with death. The novel seeks to downplay the popular idea that battling cancer is a noble, heroic, and rewarding activity, and it does so primarily by showing the realities of cancer. There is nothing particularly noble for Hazel about struggling to breathe and knowing her death will hurt others, or anything heroic for Augustus in having had a leg amputated, or rewarding for Isaac about losing his vision. Instead, the reader sees that kids with cancer are just those kids. What makes them different from other kids is that they are put in the terrible position of having to deal with a debilitating and sometimes fatal illness. Augustus discusses this idea directly when he tells Hazel about his former girlfriend, Caroline Mathers. He talks about the trope of a person with cancer who heroically fights cancer until the end, then points out that kids with cancer are not statistically any more likely to be better people than kids without cancer. Caroline, he

explains, became increasingly cruel toward him as her condition worsened. Rather than make her a better person, cancer made her worse. In this context, Bessel Van der Kolk writes:

Complex trauma exposure results in a loss of core capacities for self-regulation and interpersonal relatedness. Children exposed to complex trauma often experience lifelong problems that place them at risk for additional trauma exposure and cumulative impairment such as, psychiatric and addictive disorders; chronic medical illness; legal, vocational, and family problems. (401)

In this way, complex trauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and disturbs the whole existence. That experience of complex trauma varies from one to another. The most poignant example of cancer's reality is Augustus himself after cancer reappears. He withers quickly, and Hazel witnesses all the humiliation and pain he suffers as a result. He loses control of his body, urinates in his bed, and becomes confined to a wheelchair. When he calls her for help after driving to the gas station, she thinks of the person he has become, noting that "Augustus Waters of the crooked smiles and unsmoked cigarettes was gone, replaced by this desperate, humiliated creature sitting there beneath me" (153). A few lines later, she thinks of the conventions of the cancer kid, and how they are supposed to maintain their humor and spirit through to the end. But Gus was the reality: suffering, frightened, and pitiful while struggling not to be. Through these details, the novel shows that the false and feel-good conventions regarding cancer kids are really just hollow clichés used by society to deal with an uncomfortable subject.

Problem is part of human life. People have assumed that life is being identical with the problem itself. Then people will do everything to find the perfect solution for

their problem. Sometimes multiple personalities may occur when people face a complicated situation. Then, this condition makes people do something that are not suitable with the norms in society. As a psychological study, psychoanalysis is often used to analyze some literature, such as fiction. The author presents many characters with many characterizations and offers some conflicts to complete the story.

This research focuses on the issue of horrific experiences among cancer affected youngsters in John Green's *The Fault in our Stars*. It primarily focuses on Cancer Traum and how the characters in the novel try to cope through different mechanisms. After being affected by cancer like incurable disease and its effects upon the various characters and the intensity of fear of death and its effects are on the characters. Characters suffer at present due to their physical illness and actions that are deposited in their mind. Betrayal, wound, pang and pains rupture the life as well as dehumanizes the whole human race. The main characters Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters get tortured because of their physical burden in their whole life. Hazel Grace, because of her cancer, she uses a portable oxygen tank to breathe properly, whereas Augustus Waters has lost one of his legs to a form of cancer called osteosarcoma.

Moreover, this research finds coping mechanisms to trauma through analysis of the characters' experiences in the novel, the strategies utilized by major characters navigate the intricate realm of emotions and the traumatic aftermath of their illness. The psychological torture of characters and the ramification from frightening experiences under the influence of external forces (society) and internal pressures (family members). John Green presents the traumatic situations in the novel through the story of various characters that are victimized from many actions. He emphasizes on the complicated situation of characters, physical and mental torture in a

relationship and critical situation of human life and unfavorable circumstances. The research tries to prove some characters' unusual lifestyle. Physical burden and illness and events are the cause and effects upon their living where all characters are frustrated in their life. But some characters are able to get rid of psychological tortures, some not and some persuade to live easily. Characters like Isaac, Peter Van Houten, Hazel Grace are living with terrible experiences. In spite of their good family background, demerits cannot maintain to their lives, so they suffer and are alienated from outer life.

Thus, even in the frustrated lives of the characters, they want to recover from cancer trauma. They want to get rid of suffering; Hazel falls in love with Augustus to get the company. So here, Hazel is seen little bit distressed again because she wants to get rid of her bitter reality, which always causes pain to her.

John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* encompasses a central theme of impending doom, yet also presents a poignant exploration of embracing optimism and finding meaning in life's circumstances. The narrative follows the intertwined journeys of Hazel Green and Augustus Waters, who confront formidable obstacles and trials while maintaining a facade of normalcy. Their evolving relationship from friendship to romance highlights their unwavering support for one another, encompassing both moments of joy and pain. Against the backdrop of Trauma, Green portrays a heartwarming portrayal of genuine friendship. Although a Young Adult fiction, *The Fault in Our Stars* incorporates philosophical musings in a well-placed and complementary manner, enhancing the overall narrative. Despite trauma and fear serving as the foundation of the story, each significant character undergoes experiences of love, loss, and grief, resulting in their profound aesthetic and moral depth. By thoughtfully exploring these themes, Green successfully captures the

attention of readers on both emotional and intellectual levels, rendering the novel a resonant and meaningful work.

The ultimate finding of this thesis is that the characters in the novel *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green utilize friendship, love, and humor as powerful coping mechanisms in the face of trauma. Throughout the story, the author portrays the experiences of the main characters, Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters, both of whom are living with terminal illnesses.

Friendship plays a crucial role in their lives as they navigate the challenges and uncertainties brought by their illnesses. Hazel and Augustus form a deep bond, providing each other with emotional support, understanding, and a sense of companionship. Their friendship allows them to share their fears, hopes, and frustrations, providing a source of solace during difficult times. By having someone who truly understands their struggles, they find comfort and strength to face their traumatic circumstances.

Moreover, love acts as a significant coping mechanism for the characters. Hazel and Augustus experience a profound and genuine connection, developing a romantic relationship that offers them a source of happiness and purpose amidst their struggles. Their love for each other provides them with a reason to keep fighting and cherishing the moments they have together. Love becomes a driving force that helps them confront their trauma with resilience and determination.

Additionally, humor emerges as a vital coping mechanism within the story. The characters often use wit and humor to navigate the dark and challenging aspects of their lives. By finding moments of levity and laughter, they are able to temporarily escape the weight of their circumstances and find moments of joy. Humor serves as a

way to cope with their trauma by providing a break from the sadness and pain, allowing them to maintain a positive outlook despite their challenging realities.

Overall, the thesis concludes that the characters in *The Fault in Our Stars* employ friendship, love, and humor as powerful coping mechanisms in the face of trauma. These elements provide them with strength, support, and moments of respite, enabling them to confront their challenges with bravery and resilience. Through their interactions and relationships, they demonstrate the capacity of human connection and humor to serve as essential tools for navigating difficult circumstances and finding solace in the midst of adversity.

Works Cited

- Bhakat, Abhishek. "Modern-day Manifestation of *Carpe Diem*: John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012)." *The Literary Herald*, vol.2, no. 2, Sep. 2016, pp. 11-18.
<https://tlhjournal.com/uploads/products/2.abhishek-bhakat-article>.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth.
Baltimore: The John Hopkins University, 1995.
- Coley, William B. "Cancer And Trauma." *The British Medical Journal*, vol. 1, no. 3453, 1927, pp. 491–491. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25322838>.
Accessed 21 June 2023.
- Cordella, Marisa, and Aldo Poiani. *Behavioural Oncology: Psychological, Communicative, and Social Dimensions*. Springer, 2014, p.7. doi: 10.1007/978-1-4614-9605-2.
- Charcot, JM. *Lecons sur l'hysterie virile*. Translated by Bailey, Pearce. Le Syncomore, 1984. 85.
- Daraee, Amin, et al. "The Prediction of Fear of Death Based on Early Maladaptive Schemas (Failure, Vulnerability) and Psychosocial Flexibility in Master Degree Students of Islamic Azad University, Hamadan Branch." *Journal of Psychology & Psychotherapy*, vol. 11, no. S4, 2021, pp. 1-6.
- Green, John. *The Fault In Our Stars*. Penguin Books, 2013.
- Horowitz, M. J., and Wilner, N. "Life Events, Stress, and Coping." *Aging in the 1980s: Psychological Issues*, edited by L. W. Poon, American Psychological Association, 1980, pp. 363-374. Accessed 18 June 2023.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/10050-026>
- Holzman, Philip S. *Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy*. McGraw Hill, 1970, p 5. <https://doi.org/10.30762/jeels.v2i1.43>

- Janet, P. *The Major Symptoms of Hysteria*. MacMillan, 1907.
- Nanda, Dheril Sofia. "Implicature in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*." *Journal of English Education and Linguistics Studies*, 2016, vol. 2, no.1, p. 43. *JEELS*,
- Poli, Maria Cristina. "The Concept of Alienation in Psychoanalysis", *Figures de la psychanalyse*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2005, pp. 45-68.
- Freud, Sigmund. *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*. Hogarth Press, 1949. 25.
- Tyson, Lois. *A Critical Theory Today*.Routledge, 2006. 23.
- van der Kolk B, et al. Disorders of Extreme Stress: The Empirical Foundation of Complex Adaptation to Trauma. *J Trauma Stress*. 2005. Accessed 21 June 2023. <https://doi: 10.1002/jts.20047>
- Widhya, S, et al. "Optimism and Pessimism of Hazel Grace in John Green's Novel *The Fault in Our Stars*." *KnE Social Sciences*, 2019, pp. 199-212.