

The Cancer Patients Hope for Life in John Green's The Fault in Our Stars: A Genetic Structuralism Study

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Abstract:

This article discusses the struggles of cancer patients in facing life in America in the novel by John Green entitled *The Fault in Our Stars*. This novel tells the story of cancer patients who are hopeless because of their cancer and also cancer patients who still hope that their cancer will be cured. This study uses the Genetic Structuralism theory from Lucien Goldmann to find the worldview of the author obtained from the conversations and problems experienced by the characters in the novel and then look for the truth through print media and online media to find out the truth. The results of this study indicate that Green wants to convey that if we need to be healthy, then we must be happy and accept all the fates that God has given, and remain positive thinking about all things that happen in our lives.

Key Word: Cancer Patients, Hopeless, Hope, Genetic Structuralism, Worldview.

Date of Submission: 18-08-2022

Date of Acceptance: 02-09-2022

I. Introduction

Cancer is one of the deadliest diseases in the world. Until now, cancer has not found a cure. Many doctors recommend surgery and chemotherapy to weaken cancer growth. But efforts to traumatize cancer patients due to the impact of the pain caused by the treatment they are experiencing. So many cancer patients stop to carry out the treatment. This research has two focuses. They are hopefulness and hopelessness. As denotative meaning in the Oxford dictionary, hopefulness means *the feeling of having hope, believing that something you want will happen*. As denotative meaning in the Oxford dictionary, hopelessness means *the fact of a situation being extremely bad with no hope that it will get better*. In this research. The researcher used three main characters, they are Hazel, Augustus, and Peter Van Houten.

In the novel entitled *The Fault in Our Stars*, Hazel as the main character has a history of thyroid cancer with metastases in the lungs, and Augustus has a history of osteosarcoma cancer. Augustus faces his life optimistically, feels happy, accepts reality, and tries to fight his destiny even though he really cannot. Meanwhile, Hazel has disappointed and useless feelings. All of her life activities are limited because she must bring an oxygen tube everywhere and every time. At one point, Van Houten writes a novel that inspires Hazel and Augustus.

In analyzing the novel, the reader uses the imagination and historical background of the author. Literary work is a picture of real life with a concept on a cultural and historical background that is still ongoing. It influences the author in the process of making literary works. John Michael Green (John Green) born on August 24, 1977, is an American teen novelist and vlogger. Green was born on August 24, 1977, in Indiana and is married to Sarah Urist Green. Green's novel entitled *The Fault in Our Stars* (his latest novel) was first in the line on The New York Times Best Seller in January 2012 and the adaptation of the film in 2014 took first place starting from the beginning of the film was shown. Green is also known for his works on YouTube to inspire all viewers through educational programs that discuss literature, economics, history, and also science.

This research is analyzed by Goldmann's theory entitled Genetic Structuralism. This theory emphasizes two elements, namely intrinsic and extrinsic elements. There is a homology between the structure in the novel as an imaginative world and the structure of social-historical facts about American Society's view toward cancer in the 21st century. It helps me to find the author's worldview.

II. Theoretical Framework

Genetic Structuralism is a theory of analyzing intrinsic and extrinsic elements at the same time from a literary work. Goldmann states clearly that an author has a relationship with his surroundings, so when an author

makes literary works he indirectly makes a cultural creation based on a particular time, place, or event (1981: 6). In other words, an author creates a literary work by seeking and getting inspiration based on experiences, special events, and times in the real world. Based on Faruk's book, the four important keys are Significant Structure, Human Fact, Collective Subject, and Worldview (Faruk, 2012: 25).

"A significant structure toward which the thought, feelings, and behavior of individualism are directed."

(Goldmann, 1981: 76)

Based on Goldmann's explanation above, small parts of a literary work are a picture of a world of imagination created by the author where the main character in the work answers curiosity, solutions, and an imbalance of viewpoints that the author has about the world around him.

Human fact is all forms of activities or behaviors carried out by humans, both physical and verbal, must adjust to the surrounding environment.

"First of all, every human fact is meaningful for all three. Whether it be a dream, an act of delirium, a cultural work or a historical process, human facts are the result of a subject's meaningful behavior."

(Goldmann, 1981: 47)

Humans, as Goldmann explains in the quote above, do something in adjusting to the environment consciously, because humans understand clearly the consequences and things that benefit them. A collective subject or trans-individual subject is a collection of subjects that live collectively.

"Men living under similar conditions constitute social groups which elaborate a complex of habits and mental structures to resolve their problems. With these elaborations, they can act in the world, but such habits and mental structures not only govern their behavior but also their intelligence, thought and emotions."

(Goldmann, 1981: 86)

This is a fact that historical events can only be understood if they are related to the collective subject as Goldmann's explanation below. Therefore, the collective subject has a dominant influence on the formation of culture.

Worldview is a life perspective, vision, principles, value system, or ideology.

"Worldviews are *historical* and *social* facts. They are totalities of ways of thinking, feeling and acting which in given conditions are imposed on men finding themselves in a similar economic and social situation, that is, imposed on certain social groups."

(Goldmann, 1981: 112)

The development of people's mindsets because of absorbing too much information and developing their experiences, and worldviews can change and develop based on the situation and the community's need to harmonize their life with the nature of the environment, and the changes and the developments are not always realized by the community. Therefore, the product of worldview is the history and facts of how a society is formed and coexisted in agreeing and having the same assessment of a problem

III. Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative method, so the researcher focuses on the text and context to analyze the data and information contained in the novel as well as in print media and internet media. Qualitative data is obtained in the form of words, sentences, and phrases that focus on John Green's novel *The Fault in Our Stars*. In this research, there are two kinds of data, namely primary data and secondary data. The primary data in this study are taken from words, sentences, or quotations in the novel *The Fault in Our Stars*. On the other hand, secondary data in this study is taken from books, journals, and articles that discuss hopefulness and hopelessness and socio-historical facts that relate to the American Cancer Society's contradictory view on cancer in the 21st century, and the author's life. Then, the homology structure can be found. This process can help me to find a worldview from the author.

IV. Finding and Discussion

This article discusses the struggles of cancer patients undergoing a series of cancer treatments the way they live their daily lives as people with special needs in America and how Americans view cancer, treating cancer patients, and how to treat it. Furthermore, this article discusses hopelessness and hopefulness in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* in 2012. In this discussion, there are three main characters analyzed, namely Hazel, Augustus, and Peter Van Houten. It is important to study reality as a process made by men, created by them, and having human meaning (Goldmann, 1981: 53). It means when I do this research I must know what kinds of processes happened in real life that influenced John Green to write and create many sick characters in his novel.

Hazel is a 16-years-old girl with thyroid cancer that has metastasized in her lungs. Hazel has to undergo a series of cancer treatments to surgical removal of the tumor to save her lungs. In every activity, Hazel always carries an oxygen tank which she named Phillip, but Hazel is shy when taking Phillip wherever she goes. Hazel

is depressed because she is in pain and she also feels that all the efforts the doctors and her parents have put in are in vain so Hazel always locks herself in her room and doesn't want to interact with anyone. Hazel also thinks about death a lot and she hopes that other people will never pay attention to her and hopes that everyone will forget her soon.

“... presumably because I rarely left the house, spent quite a lot of time in bed, read the same book over and over, ate infrequently, and devoted quite a bit of my abundant **free time to thinking about death...**”
(Green, 2012: 2)

Tomasz Witkowski (2017) once says that some experts explain that negative thinking, pessimism, and stress can damage the cells in our body and can lead to cancer. Moreover, scientists appeal to someone diagnosed with cancer to change their way of thinking into a more positive way of thinking that aims to protect them from cancer or cure their disease. As a tranquilizer for cancer sufferers, many doctors recommend giving anti-depressants, which are a potential tool to improve calm in patients. Therefore, Hazel's case has clear evidence that cancer sufferers experience the same thing in the real world.

Hazel is feeling depressed because she has had radical neck surgery. She also thinks that her cancer can change all her activities, such as her parents pulling her out of public school and starting to implement homeschooling Hazel. Hazel's activities are also limited because every day and every time she has to carry an oxygen tank wherever she goes. Moreover, she also has to undergo medical treatment such as chemotherapy which aims to slow the growth of cancer in her lungs.

“...and everyone was holding hands, and I couldn't catch my breath. And **my lungs were acting desperate**, gasping, pulling me out of the bed trying to find a position that could get them air, and I was embarrassed by their desperation, disgusted that they wouldn't just let go.”

(Green, 2012: 25)

The American Cancer Society about cancer, chemotherapy, and the effects on cancer sufferers. This is done to better understand that what is experienced by Hazel in the novel also happens in the real world. Chemotherapy is therapy or drugs to treat cancer. There are many types of chemotherapy, but not all cancer treatments work the same. In patients with cancer, chemo is highly recommended because chemo aims to heal, control, alleviate, and cure cancer so the cells die or become inactive. Many doctors try to minimize the effects of chemotherapy, for example avoiding the use of some chemo drugs which have major side effects. The effects of chemotherapy can vary from person to person (American Cancer Society, 2020). Chemotherapy also has several effects that often occur in cancer sufferers such as weight loss, changes in nail texture, and skin color. Sometimes, the effects of chemotherapy can last a lifetime, but this can cause damage or reduce the work on the heart, lungs, kidneys, or reproductive organs.

Apart from experiencing depression and fear of death that does not know when it will happen, Hazel feels that she is a burden to her parents. This is because she has to undergo a very expensive treatment, buy medicines, and pay for all the necessities needed by cancer patients.

“It occurred to me that the reason **my parents had no money** was me. I'd sapped the family saving with Phalanxifor copays, and Mom couldn't work because she had taken on the full-time profession of Hovering over Me.”

(Green, 2012: 79)

In the novel, Hazel only briefly explains how expensive the treatment costs for cancer patients. This is also experienced by cancer patients and their families in the real world. Analysis of the amount of expenditure on cancer treatment (American Cancer Society, 2019) explains the cost of caring for and treating cancer patients that is very expensive. This has an impact on emotions, finances, relationships, time, and health. Not all cancer treatments and drugs can be covered by health insurance. Thus, many people think that if a patient is diagnosed with cancer, it will cost a lot of money for the healing costs.

Like Hazel, Peter Van Houten is a father whose only daughter dies from leukemia. Van Houten decides to move from America to live in Amsterdam to start his new life and he hopes to forget all about America and his daughter. Van Houten became an annoying, drunk, and stubborn person. Hazel idolizes him because Van Houten writes a book entitled *An Imperial Affliction* which tells about the struggles of a cancer patient, but Van Houten doesn't finish the story, and he doesn't want to talk about it. Hazel is so upset that she is so mad at Van Houten.

In the real world, when you find out that someone in his family has died, there must be many family members who mourn his death. However, it is different with the closest person. Usually, the closest person to the person who died will experience great emotional shocks. It is not uncommon for people to experience excessive stress or depression when they are abandoned by their loved ones. This incident usually lasts a long time with very long period. The following are the phases when someone they care about dies suddenly. Among them, they will experience a phase of shock when they first hear the news of someone's death, the denial phase will occur when someone has seen the body of their loved one lying stiff and they hope that everything they experience is limited to a dream. The anger phase and mourning are phases when someone has started to accept

that someone they love has left them and they try to believe in the destiny they have got, the recovery phase is a phase when someone has started to get used to without the person they love and they have got used to doing normal activities again.

On the other hand, Augustus is a teenage boy with osteosarcoma cancer. Unlike Hazel and Peter Van Houten, Augustus is enthused because of his cancer. He considers cancer is a miracle of God that not everyone can experience. Even though Augustus has to lose one of his legs and had to use a cane to walk, he never objects, and he always does things like any other teenager.

Dad: "And how's your health now?"

Augustus: "NEC for fourteen months."

Mom: "That's wonderful. The treatment options these days – it's remarkable."

Augustus: "**I know. I'm lucky.**"

(Green, 2012: 83)

Based on Cancer Australia's blog, many cancer patients feel embarrassed or afraid when they get stared at or interact with normal people. This is because many cancer patients have stitch marks, the smell of harsh drugs, changed body shape, faded skin color, and medical equipment that they must carry with them in every activity they do.

In another hand, Hazel hates her illness. She thinks that her illness is an obstacle to all her happiness but Augustus continues to cheer Hazel up. Augustus thinks cancer is apart of his body because cancer is a part of a happy life and there is nothing to be afraid of from the effects of cancer but Hazel remains stubborn in her stance.

"It crossed my mind to fake a choking incident or something so that he might give me the Heimlich. Maybe then he could rid himself of this fear that **his life had been lived and lost for no greater good.**"

(Green, 2012: 237)

Many cancer patients are unhappy with their body shape after they undergo a series of cancer treatments and also undergo tumor removal surgery. Often cancer patients think of ways to restore their body shape to normal using treatment at a beauty clinic. From the American Cancer Society (2020), Cancer patients need attention from their loved ones when they experience depression because of the changes that occur after treatment for cancer so that they feel comfortable and more confident.

V. Conclusion

The results of the analysis of *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green using the theory of Genetic Structuralism by Lucien Goldmann is to find the worldview of the author. The reason Green created this work is that Green wants to remember his friend who dies of thyroid cancer, Ester Earl. The researcher begins this research by identifying each quote in the novel *The Fault in Our Stars* and the social conditions of society in America that are described in the novel that causes binary opposition in society. The results of this study reveal that John Green as a writer wants to inspire his readers through the struggle of cancer patients in maintaining their lives by trying hard to undergo treatment so that cancer they suffer can be cured. There is no need to know in detail about how and what the patient has done with his illness so far because this can be mentally disturbing. It is enough to spend time with the patient and do positive things that the patient enjoys so that he can forget the pain. The disease will gradually recover with a developed immunity due to the impact of the patient's positive energy. In this novel, Green wants to convey that everyone must have a high life expectancy so that the immunity in the body can continue to increase so that our body is not easily attacked by disease. A high spirit of life can increase immunity so all diseases can be cured.

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ShintaWidyawati Prakosa, et. al. "The Cancer Patients Hope for Life in John Green's The Fault in Our Stars: A Genetic Structuralism Study." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 27(08), 2022, pp. 01-05.