

Fighting Against the Fate in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*

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Abstract : *The paper is about the existential battle of Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus in John Green's The Fault in Our Stars. They show their optimistic behavior against pessimistic situation. There is the feeling of confidence and sense of optimism in the characters against the dark situation of their lives. The main focus of this study is to explore how the characters in the novel embrace sense of optimism despite their terminal illness. In doing so this paper applies, Jean Paul Sartre's theory of existentialism as the tool of analyses. It mainly revolves around how Hazel chooses life than death despite adverse situation to assert her existence illness*

Keywords: Optimism, pessimism, struggle, choice, freedom, existence and stars.

1. Introduction

This study attempts to analyze Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* from the perspective of existentialism. This novel relates the story of life, love and death of the two patients of cancer. It mainly concerns the struggle of Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Water for the existence of their lives. Hazel has terminal thyroid cancer and has attended the supportive group where she meets Augustus Water. Augustus has lost a leg from bone cancer but has since apparently been cancer free. Their first meeting helps them to share their feeling and experience to each other. Hazel shares her favorite book, *An Imperial Affliction* with Augustus and together they obsess

about the unresolved ending of the book. In that book it is not mentioned how the author's daughter dies at the end and it becomes a very curious matter for Hazel. Augustus manages to meet the author and wants to know the conclusion of the book. Augustus surprises Hazel by telling that he still has wish to take her to Amsterdam to meet Peter Van Houten, reclusive author of *An Imperial Affliction*.

Hazel is very happy about the whole idea of Augustus. She convinces her worried parents and her skeptical doctor. Hazel emails Augustus and invites him to come to Amsterdam to discuss the ending of the book.

Hazel and Augustus manage to get trip in order to know how author's daughter dies at last. It is the great unknown conclusion of the book *The Imperial Affliction*. They go to Amsterdam and have beautiful and romantic times but when they meet Peter Van Houten it does not exactly go as planned. He is a mean drunk and does not answer any of the Hazel's questions. Hazel is angry and upset but Van Houten's assistant Lidewij takes her and Augustus out to explore Amsterdam. They see Anne Frank's house where Hazel expresses her love for Augustus and they finally kiss to each other. They go back to the hotel room and have sexual intercourse. These two characters spend very romantic life in Amsterdam by forgetting their pain and sorrow and try to make themselves optimistic from the sorrowful environment. They also want to forget their present situation through their love affair.

The novel is quite powerful in term of its structure, setting, perfect characterization etc. My concern, however, in this thesis is to discover something more than sociological, romanticism, self-actualization, characterization, reader response and psychoanalytical interpretation. My focus in this article, therefore, is to investigate why the protagonist struggles throughout the novel despite her terminal illness from the perspective of existentialism. For this, I will rely on some of the prominent critics. Because of the word limitation of intended thesis, my analysis concentrates only on the target novel and a few concept of existentialism especially from that of Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus from the vast theory of existentialism. It is hypothesized that the protagonist of the novel Hazel and other characters struggle from beginning to end despite their terminal illness as they choose life rather than death to create their existence in this world.

2. Methods

As its methodological and analytical tool, the paper utilizes Sartre's idea of existentialism from his book *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre argues: "existentialism creates essence" (56), which means the value of human life is possible only through existentialism. The concept of choice turns out to be especially important because, for the existentialists, human beings are uniquely free. Indeed, in Sartre's paradoxical words, we are "condemned to be free" (56). Lacking any essence other than our own freedom, we are forced to make choices and, in so doing, define ourselves. In a huge universe that is devoid of purpose and uncaring about people, it is the human project to give meaning to our lives by the free, conscious and intentional choices we make according to Sartre.

3. Analysis

There are some contradictory ideas

Kaladarpan | Volume :3 | No.: 1 | Oct/Nov. 2023 presented by the novelist in the novel. According to Hazel if anyone becomes slower then he becomes fast. Hazel thinks that the time is passing very slowly for her than other people around her. It indicates that she wants very long life to spent rather than facing demise untimely. Hazel discovers herself to be optimistic because she always believes about good luck happens to her. Augustus takes a trip to Amsterdam with Hazel and Hazel's mom. When they are in the plane, Augustus and Hazel look at the risen sun which is too bright to see and they are so amazed with the sun. Hazel hopes that she can live longer like a sun that always brightens the earth. It shows the feeling of optimism in Hazel's life. She wants sustained life and does not wish her time to be passed quickly.

Hazel feels that she is unable to exchange anything for her life. She thinks life is more valuable than anything and she wants to do any kind of scarification for her life. She has a fear in her mind about to face death and she wants to go far away from the death. These lines reflect the hidden sorrow of Hazel. She never wants to die but due to her difficult condition she is unable to live happily. She thinks that every people should contribute their labor while spending life on the earth if they are able and strong. According to Hazel, fear is the main cause which can lead every human beings to the destination of death very early. People having fearful mind can't do anything else in their lives rather they die very untimely. Moreover, she thinks that there is nothing on this earth which can be exchanged with life. She means that life is more precious than anything and everyone wants to choose life rather than death.

Augustus is also a very optimistic person and he wants an extraordinary life to spend. He argues: "Everyone wants to lead an extra ordinary life" (169). Augustus Water discusses about the meaning of dying for something or leaving behind some great

sign of heroism with Hazel Grace Lancaster. Everyone means those who are able or unable, normal or handicapped, healthy or unhealthy, strong or weak and so on, all the people of different nature and physical condition want to lead an extra ordinary life. Nobody wants death though they are abnormal. Augustus clarifies the real meaning of living a life to other. In the beginning most of the cancer patients go to supportive group to get some motivation for life from the group members but later on they again go to visit Peter Van Houten to know about the book. *An Imperia Affection* related to cancer and its treatment. Slowly and gradually most of the character twist their mind on the optimistic behaviors and they want to live a very romantic life. Meanwhile, Augustus and Hazel want to be in love with each other and try to forget all the pains and sorrows through their love and affection. Here extraordinary life means something great deed in life through hard work. Cancer patients also needs this sort of life and this indicates they are compelled to live life rather than anything in the world.

According to Hazel, people who are suffering from cancer never become sad from their terminal disease and they always keep on smiling until the very end of their life. Hazel suggest: “You are familiar with the trope of the stoic and determine cancer victim who heroically fights her cancer with inhuman strength and never complains or stops smiling even at the very end” (176). People who are cancer sufferer fights with their illness with inhuman strength. They never go back to struggle against cancer. They fight against cancer with great heroism.

Hazel talks about freedom of choice in life to Augustus in the coffee shop. They enjoy discussing about the romantic situation of their lives. Hazel assures to Augustus by saying, “You have a choice in this world” (209). It means everyone has choice in this world as Sartre said in his book *‘Being and*

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Nothingness’. They share their feeling to each other when they come to café for drinking tea the next morning after they spend their time with each other at Amsterdam. They also want to make their existence strong in this world by having a kind of choice. All the decisions they make are decided by using choice. Hazel always tries to encourage Augustus to live a happy and peaceful life by discovering herself hopeful in front of him. She knows being sad and hopeless before other can make other pessimistic.

Hazel always becomes serious about her life. She is not a person who takes life easily rather she is a person who devotes her whole life for not crying in front of people. She thinks showing pain and sorrow before others may make other pessimistic towards life. She claims: “Much of my life had been devoted to trying not to cry in front of people who love me.” (213). She focuses on the importance of life. Hazel argues this when she finds Augustus taking cigarette in his mouth and being serious about the miserable condition of himself. According to Hazel everybody must have tolerance power to hide their pain and suffering in front of other people who love them more. Showing pain to other doesn’t mean being relief from the tension rather if give more trouble to the people who are around us. We should never show our grief to other rather we should be happy by showing our smiling face in front of other. Hazel claims that she survives her life to make others happy. If anyone chooses death in their life than he/she never becomes optimistic and does not care about other. Hazel opines, if other see her cry, it will hurt them and she will be nothing but a sadness in others’ lives and she must not become a mere sadness and she thinks she shouldn’t cry. She never wants her pessimistic feeling to be exposed in front of other people.

Hazel and Augustus always try to convince each other in the time of difficult condition.

These two characters tolerate everything very easily through the feeling of confidence. Even in the eve of death, they argue it will be okay and fine with full of confidence. Their confidence level is shown very high throughout the novel. They want to survive in this world by caring each other. Hazel further suggests: “you’ll...you’ll...live your best life today (216)”. She clarifies the meaning of life to Augustus. He also can spend his best life in the present time forgetting all the pains and sufferings according to Hazel.

Hazel is a girl who energizes other in the time of difficult condition. Hazel tries to convince Augustus that he deserves to live a much sustained life even in the eve of death. When Augustus struggles against death in the hospital Hazel suggests him, “I don’t think you are dying, I think you have just got a touch of cancer” (217). It shows the positive thinking of Hazel. She tries to convince Augustus that he doesn’t have any seriousness only he has been touched by cancer. She tries to create favorable environment in the hospital when Augustus is in the last stage of his life. She is a very courageous girl because she always tries to make other happy although she is being suffered from a terminal cancer. In front of Augustus, she shows a positive behavior to make him relax as well as comfortable from the critical situation.

Hazel and Gus argue that remembering the past life and being nostalgic can be the side effect of cancer that ultimately leads to untimely death. According to Gus, life can be made good and perfect by remembering the present time. Hazel claims that nostalgia can be the side effect of cancer. She thinks to remember the past events or childhood days give ourselves pain and it becomes a side effect of cancer. This sort of past memory can increase the stage of cancer and leads us to the death. But immediately Gus replies that nostalgia is the side effect of dying. They are engaged in such discussion

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when they start talking about their childhood day and try to memorize every event. The condition of climate also indicates them not to remember about past life. According to Gus, to remember everything about the present is a good life to be spent. Usually nostalgic condition of life leads everyone to remember every sorrowful events of the past. They are unable to go forward in their lives due to past event. Augustus argues that forgetting all the past events and thinking about the future is a very good way to overcome our pains and sorrows.

When Augustus is admitted in the hospital for the treatment he struggles much against death. He does not like to listen the term death. It indicates how much he hates the death. He argues, “I hate myself I hate myself I hate this I hate this I disgust myself I hate it I hate it I hate it just let me fucking die” (245). He hates the death terribly. It shows how negative Augustus is towards death. Augustus is very positive for life and negative for death. The word ‘hate’ is repeated by Augustus for many times which also focuses the inhuman behavior of human being. It reflects that human beings aren’t ready to accept death easily because of their negative motive towards death. Augustus is in miserable condition and he is near to death but he is not ready to accept death easily. He hates himself for being suffered from that sort of terminal illness i.e. bone cancer. He hates cancer as it disgusts him for being a man of bone cancer.

Hazel appreciates Augustus for his good characters of Augustus. She opines: “Augustus Water keep his sense of humor till the end, does not for a moment waiver in his courage, his spirit soared like an indomitable eagle until the world itself couldn’t contain his joyous soul” (247). She argues that Augustus Water chooses life rather than death in every moment of his life. But his spirit leaves his body like an indomitable eagle. God does injustice to him according to Hazel. He is a person who

remains happy and tries to make other happy throughout his life but he is compelled to face untimely demise due his terminal illness. Augustus always wants to make other happy even in the time of difficult condition. He shows the sense of humor to other to make other laugh. He never wants to lessen others life span due to his miserable condition.

Augustus suffers a lot from physical pain and struggles against death in the hospital. Hazel becomes the witness of his pain and suffering as she is there with him in the hospital. She tries to reflect the real situation of Augustus's life through her words, "But this was the truth, a pitiful boy who desperately wanted not to be pitiful, screaming and crying, poisoned by an infected G-tube that kept him alive, but not alive enough" (245). Hazel thinks about Augustus's situation in her mind when she is in the hospital with him. She analyzes the real condition of Augustus when he undergoes treatment. He cries and screams due to physical pain of infected G-tube. His family members and doctors and other surrounding people don't let him to die. When Hazel finds Augustus screaming and crying on the death bed of hospital then she realizes his actual condition. The complex treatment helps to keep him alive only for short period of time not for long time, according to Hazel. Augustus is not in the condition of facing any kind of pain on his body. He is nearly unconscious in the hospital bed because he doesn't tolerate pain. His body is fully poisoned by an infected G-tube. In such a terrible condition neither Augustus could survive for long time nor could he die soon. He is struggling against death on death bed to survive but unfortunately nobody can stop him dying at last. Hazel finds his whole body very pitiful. Augustus Water doesn't want to show his actual condition to other people as he seems to be normal and happy in front of other people. He shows his sense of optimism throughout the novel.

After the death of Augustus Hazel becomes fully disappointed but her friend's words before his death helps her to assert her existence: "You are going to live a good and long life filled with great and terrible moments that you cannot even imagine yet" (272). Gus always wants Hazel to live a very happy life upon the terrible situation. After the death of Augustus, Hazel becomes sad and serious for some moment but immediately she is ready to accept life which can be analyzed through her assertion of life. There are also some people in our society who want to die after the death of their life partner or lover but here Hazel deserves to spend great and happy life even after the death of her lover i.e. Augustus which indicates that she favors life rather than death in any kind of circumstances. Although she is suffering from cancer, she wants to spend long and good life. It is evident in the novel that every character wants long and good life even though they are aware of their tragic situation. Everybody must live long life even he is unable to imagine the terrible moments to come in the future.

Hazel always tries to suppress her inner pain and never tries to disclose with other. But she attempts to lessen others pain though she herself is the victim of terminal illness. She tries to convince Gus: "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" (254). Gus remains very sad after the death of Augustus but Hazel reflects the reality in front of him and makes convinced to him. She tries to make him understand about the meaning of life. She says that there is family, friends and the world for him to live the life. There is no meaning to remain pessimistic due to trivial events according to Hazel.

Hazel never wants other people to be in sorrowful and painful situation due to the death of their relatives. She analyzes death

as the natural process and we must adjust ourselves in that miserable condition. Hazel's mother insists her to get off from the car to take part in the funeral process of Augustus but she is not willing to take part in any social activities. Hazel thinks that her participation in funeral may bring pessimistic situation in her life. After having good relationship with Augustus, she is unable to forget beautiful moments that she spends with him in Amsterdam. Because of love and fear of death, she doesn't want to take part in his funeral and make herself weaker. It reflects her negative impact towards death and funeral activities. Otherwise a good friend and lover like Hazel should be ready to take part in the funeral activities of her lover or good friends. She never wants to get near to those activities which are related to death. She doesn't want anyone to be so much pessimistic, crying, moaning, screaming and so on due to death of Augustus. She always wants optimistic environment around her although her life is full of pessimistic situations. She thinks about the life of her parents in the future after she dies. She always wants her parents to be happy and healthy throughout their lives. She worries thinking about how her parents will react when she will be on the death bed.

Peter thinks about his daughter in different ways. He claims that his daughter's beauty has been collapsed due to death. According to him if she survived for long time, she would be very beautiful girl. But God does not like his daughter to live long life. He argues, "My daughter, she was eight. Suffered beautifully. Will never be beautified" (285). Peter Van Houten claims that his daughter was very lovely and beautiful but her beauty did not sustain for long. At the very end of the novel, Peter Van Houten reveals the reality of the novel *An Imperial Affection*. He tells the detail about how his daughter died at the very end of the book. But in the beginning, when Augustus and Hazel wants to know the conclusion part

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of this novel, he does not mention anything about it but he tells everything about the novel after the death of Augustus. Peter doesn't want to talk about the death in the novel which clarifies that he also wants life. According to Peter, his daughter was selected for the most beautiful girl by Catholic Church. She also had same kind of cancer as Augustus had, osteosarcoma. Her right leg was also removed like Augustus. Peter Van Houten becomes an alcoholic person after the death of his beautiful daughter. He wants to hide every event which is related to death from everyone in the novel which clarifies that he assert life rather than death.

Hazel does not want to spoil her parents' life due to her physical condition. She worries about the condition of her parents after her death. She explains her true feeling towards them when she expresses: "I just don't want to ruin your life or anything" (299). Hazel stops her father and mother when they talk about the life and death among each other. Hazel is trying to convince her parents that their lives are valuable and they shouldn't spoil their lives even after the death of her. She worries that her parents may be very depressed or alcoholic like Peter after her death. Her parents also realize that it is possible to live with pain as Hazel because she herself is living everyday with lots of pain and struggle. She thinks about the life of her parents and determine herself to make her parents life happy and sustain.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, Hazel, the protagonist of the novel and many other characters who are victim of terminal illness spend their whole life by facing many difficult circumstances. Hazel and Augustus both visit several places to treat their terminal cancer. In the beginning they visit supportive group where they find many handicapped people suffering from the same diseases. They realize that they are

not only the people who are suffering from terminal diseases but there are so many people around the world who are suffering from the same disease. Throughout the novel, the novelist wants to show that there are many handicapped people in this world who want to alienate themselves from the community and society due to their disabilities and paralytic situation. When Hazel and Augustus travel to visit Amsterdam to visit Houten, they are greatly shocked by the activities of Houten. He is a famous author of the book *The Imperial Affection* who is a drunkard. They feel that due to some unbearable conditions in life, a very gentle human like Houten can

be changed into a mean drunkard. Despite his acute suffering due to the death of his dear daughter, he continues to exist and chooses life rather than death. Green reflects through her book that every human has to face some intolerable events in their lives and some of them go mad, some become drunkard and some accept the events easily. He wants to show that struggle is the part of human life. Every character in the novel affirm life embracing sense of optimism in their lives. Hazel, the protagonist of the novel, embraces and affirms life rather than death even after the death of her lover.

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