The Depiction of Women Characters in John Green's Novels/Prikaz ženskih likova u romanima Johna Greena

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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i mađarskog jezika i književnosti

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The Depiction of Women Characters in John Green's Novels

Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Biljana Oklopčić, Associate Professor

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Abstract

Most young adult novels nowadays deal with teenage issues, such as young love, self-confidence, heartbreak, and similar. The protagonists of such stories are boys and girls that are mostly considered as "outcasts" in their schools or neighbourhoods and who meet another person that is either on the same side of the spectrum or the complete opposite. The authors of such novels tend to use the same formula in these stories: either a girl meets a boy who changes her life forever or a boy is obsessed with a girl and believes they belong together. One of the most famous authors of Young Adult literature is John Green. His women characters mainly have their lives changed by a boy, which makes them a Manic Pixie Dream Girl. The question arises whether such representation of women characters is healthy for young readers, what a good representation of women characters in such novels would be, and if there are any to be found in young adult novels. The aim of this BA paper is thus to answer these questions by examining John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* and *Paper Towns.*

Key words: Young Adult literature, women characters, the John Green formula, Manic Pixie Dream Girl, *The Fault in Our Stars, Paper Towns*

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Introduction

John Green is a well-known contemporary era author whose reading demographic are mainly teenagers and young adults. Two of his most famous and most well-received novels are *The Fault in Our Stars* and *Paper Towns.* His themes revolve around young boys and/or girls, dealing with teenage issues, such as heartbreak. In his novels, John Green also deals with the inevitability of death and illness. The protagonists in his novels are female and where they are not, it is a male character that is obsessed with a girl. John Green has developed a certain style in the portrayal of his women characters, known as "The John Green Formula."

The aim of this BA paper is to analyse John Green's depiction of women characters in his most popular novels, *The Fault in Our Stars* and *Paper Towns.* The first chapter introduces John Green's life and work, including his projects outside literature. It will also give a short analysis of his most popular novels *The Fault in Our Stars* and *Paper Towns* and explain the terms "John Green Formula" and "Manic Pixie Dream Girl." The second chapter will focus on young adult literature as a genre as well as on the women characters' portrayal in young-adult novels. The third chapter will offer an analysis of two main women character of John Green's novels *The Fault in Our Stars* and *Paper Towns*: Hazel Grace Lancaster and Margo Roth Spiegelman.

1. John Green

John Green is an American author, vlogger, and producer. He was born on August 24, 1977, in Indianapolis, but spent his childhood in Orlando, Florida. He and his family moved a lot all over America during the early stages of his life. After his graduation from Kenyon College in 2006, he started working as a student chaplain in Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, because he wanted to become an Episcopal priest. There he witnessed many children suffering and dying from terminal illnesses, which inspired him to become an author. Based on those experiences, he wrote *The Fault in Our Stars*, his best-selling novel. The first novel he wrote was *Looking for Alaska*, which he published in 2005. This novel was also based on his past experiences in highschool. In 2009, his novel *Paper Towns* was awarded the Edgar Award for Best Young Adult Novel and in 2013 *The Fault in Our Stars* won the Children's Choice Book Award for Teen Book of the Year. His novel *Paper Towns* was also inspired by his past experiences; the part of the novel where the characters are on a road trip was inspired by his travels across the country as a kid due to frequent moving. Due to their popularity, *The Fault in Our Stars* and *Paper Towns* were adapted to movies, which also had amazing success. In 2007, he and his brother started a YouTube channel "VlogBrothers" based on their project called "Brotherhood 2.0" where they stop all forms of communication between them except for videos on YouTube. They posted videos for each other every other day and, even though they were supposed to be private, videos skyrocketed and helped them reach over a million subscribers in 2013. The motto of their channel is "DFTBA" or "Don't Forget to Be Awesome." The topics of their videos range from political and social to discussions about fictional characters. Their fan base is called "Nerdfighters" and they are the reason why John Green's novels have gotten so popular. He has answered questions about his novels on several social networks: Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, and on his webpage johngreenbooks.com. John Green is an author that strives to become better and that tries to learn from his past mistakes. He currently lives in Indianapolis with his wife, Sarah Urist Green, his children Henry and Alice, and dog Willy.

1.1. John Green's Novels

John Green has received many awards for his novels and short stories. For his first novel *Looking for Alaska,* he received the American Literary Association's annual Michael L. Printz award. His second novel *An Abundance of Katherines*, which he published in 2006, was also nominated for the same award and was a finalist for Los Angeles Times Book Prize. Green's third novel, *Paper Towns*, was number five on the New York Times bestseller list in 2008 and was later awarded 2009 Edgar Award for Best Young Adult Novel and the Corine Literature Prize in 2010. *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*, which was published in 2010, is a collaboration with David Levithan, Green's friend and another young adult author. The novel was nominated for both Stonewell Book Award, for excellence in LGBT in children's and young adult fiction, and the Odyssey Award for excellence in Audiobook Production. *The Fault in Our Stars* was Number 1 on the New York Times Bestseller list in 2012 and was released as a major motion film in June 2014.

1.1.1. *The Fault in Our Stars*

The Fault in Our Stars was published in June 2012, and it is John Green's most popular and most well-received novel to this day. In 2014, a film adaptation was released, which was also very successful. The inspiration for the title comes from Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, / But in ourselves, that we are underlings" (Shakespeare 140-141). *The Fault in Our Stars* is a novel about a sixteen-year-old girl Hazel Grace Lancaster who was diagnosed with cancer and was forced to join a support group for ill teenagers. There she meets Augustus Waters who is a seventeen-year-old amputee. They become best friends and later lovers. From the start, both Augustus and Hazel are well aware that their relationship will not last long. Despite that, they seize every day they have together until Augustus unexpectedly dies. Although this novel seems like yet another young-adult novel about two teenagers falling in love, it is far from that. This novel also deals with friendship, the meaning of life, death, and much more. Augustus and Hazel are not just regular teenagers. They are very intelligent, well-spoken, and they frequently quote poetry. Augustus constantly fears dying without leaving an impact on the world, without becoming or doing something important and ground-breaking. He wants to be remembered and talked

about even after he dies. Hazel, on the other hand, is the complete opposite; she does not want to be remembered by everyone, but rather by the people she cared about. John Green has successfully added humour into the story about two terminally ill teenagers, which made everyone fall in love with them. Although this novel was very well-received, many have criticized it by claiming that teenagers do not act and talk in the way presented in the novel, to which John Green responded: "I'm tired of adults telling teenagers that they aren't smart." This novel has a realistic approach to life and death and it does not have a cliché happy ending. In the novel, Augustus talks about his ex-girlfriend Caroline who died of brain cancer that changed her into a mean person. Many people tend to glorify people that died because they either forget how they were (due to many factors) or because they think that it is disrespectful to talk ill of the dead. Augustus is the complete opposite; he does not glorify Caroline, he describes her as she was. Caroline treated him badly and even made fun of the fact that he has only one leg:

> It ate her brain, you know? Or it wasn't the tumor. I have no way of knowing, because they were inseparable, she and the tumor. But as she got sicker, I mean, she'd just repeat the same stories and laugh at her own comments even if she'd already said the same thing a hundred times that day. Like she made the same joke over and over again for weeks: "Gus has great legs. I mean leg." And then she would just laugh like a maniac. (Green 176)

The Fault in Our Stars is a novel that leaves people with a vast range of emotions. In it, John Green shows the beauty of life, such as love, friendship, hopes, and dreams. It touches the readers and makes them appreciate what they have and accept life as it is, without any regrets.

1.1.2. *Paper Towns*

Paper Towns was published in October 2008 and has received many awards. It was later also adapted into a movie. *Paper Towns* is about a teenager Quentin "Q" Jacobsen who has been in love with his next-door neighbour Margo Roth Spiegelman since childhood. Although they have not spoken in nine years, one night Margo knocks on his window and takes him to help her get revenge on people who hurt her. After that night, she disappears and Quentin decides to find her himself, later learning that she is not the girl he thought she was. Throughout the novel, Quentin thinks that Margo is a miracle and spends most of the time

thinking that she is the answer to all his problems: “My miracle was this: out of all the houses in all the subdivision of Florida, I ended up living next to Margo Roth Spiegelman” (Green 1). The novel is not only about Margo’s disappearance and Quentin’s determination to find her but also about them finding themselves. In the end, Quentin does not “get the girl”; he only realizes that he was in love with the idea of her, so he lets her go. The central idea of this novel is that people are not made of paper; they have layers that some people might never even see. The novel is broken up into three parts: The Strings, The Grass, and The Vessel. The titles of the parts have metaphorical meaning and are used throughout the novel to chronicle Quentin’s experiences. Generally, strings are something that bind things together. They are introduced in the prologue where Margo and Quentin, who are nine, find a dead body of a person that committed suicide. Upon finding the body, Margo says: “Maybe all the strings inside him broke” (Green 8). This sentence plays a huge part in the entire novel: it refers to Margo’s philosophy about life and death and Quentin’s thoughts about Margo when he looks for her. In an interview, when asked about where the strings metaphor came from, John Green replied:

> Someone said it to me once, after a friend had attempted suicide, that “maybe all the strings inside him broke,” and I liked that image a lot because 1. puppets, and 2. We are all aware that there is this emotional/psychological life inside of us, right? But it’s very difficult to talk about, because it doesn’t have a physical location… So why the strings? The strings inside a person breaking struck me as a better and more accurate abstract description of despair than anthropomorphized symbols (broken heart, etc.).

The second part of the novel is called “The Grass” because Quentin found Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. A long poem called “Song of Myself” was highlighted. Upon reading it, Quentin came to this conclusion: “So grass is death, too—it grows out of our buried bodies. The grass was so many different things at once, it was bewildering. So grass is a metaphor for life, and for death, and for equality, and for connectedness, and for children, and for God, and for hope” (Green 172-173). The grass can also symbolize the clues in finding Margo (each piece of grass is a different clue). All of them together make a lawn; just like all the clues led him to find her. The third part is called “The Vessel.” Vessels are strong containers that are used to prevent water from getting in. Quentin explains to Margo how relationships are just like a watertight vessel. People leave them, or do not love them and they hurt each other; that is when the vessel starts cracking open and the water starts getting in. He continues to explain how that is not necessarily something bad because once the vessel starts falling apart, that is

the only time they could see one another for who they really are, instead of only seeing the ideas of each other. Once the vessel cracks, the light can get both in and out.

1.2. The "John Green Formula" and the Manic Pixie Dream Girl

John Green writes young-adult novels that are a big hit among teenagers and young adults. His style of writing is frequently called "The John Green Formula" because all of his stories have similar traits and storyline. Usually, person one and person two come together under rough circumstances, fall in love, and leave a lasting impression on readers. In this type of storyline, the girl is typically "not like most girls," which is the reason why the guy falls in love with her. Although John Green is clearly not the first author that has used this style of writing, it can nevertheless be found in all of his novels, hence the term "The John Green Formula." Ever since *The Fault in Our Stars'* publication, his novels have become worldwide famous, which brought more attention to his approach to young male-female relationships.

The term often used to describe women characters that exist solely as a product of a man's desire is the Manic Pixie Dream Girl. Film critic Nathan Rabin coined the term:

> When I coined the term "Manic Pixie Dream Girl" in an essay about the movie "Elizabethtown" in 2007, I never could have imagined how that phrase would explode. Describing the film's adorably daffy love interest played by Kirsten Dunst, I defined the MPDG as a fantasy figure who "exists solely in the fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures."

The Manic Pixie Dream Girl purposely tries to dissociate herself from other girls; she reads not-so-popular books, does not like to dress up, and thinks she is better than the rest because of it. The male protagonist is usually obsessed with her and spends most of his time trying to get the girl to like him. The guy does not see the girl realistically but rather sees her as this perfect girl with no flaws. The great examples of the novels featuring the MPDMs are John Green's *Paper Towns* and *Looking for Alaska.* In *Paper Towns,* Quentin is so obsessed with the idea of Margo that he could not imagine that she might ever be problematic or want to run away. He thinks that she needs to be saved by him. Most people interpret this as another broken girl only a guy could save in order for her to become happy. Green responded to this

interpretation on his Tumblr and stated that *Paper Towns* is supposed to be completely the opposite – it is supposed to completely shatter the Manic Pixie Dream Girl trope. He admitted that the novel can be interpreted as problematic if not read complexly. In *Looking for Alaska,* the protagonist "Pudge" is obsessed with his classmate Alaska. Alaska is far from flawless: she smokes, drinks alcohol, and has gone through a lot. Despite knowing that, Pudge glorifies her until she commits suicide. Only after that, he starts seeing her complexly. However, in *The Fault in Our Stars* the problem is opposite – Hazel Grace Lancaster finds happiness only after meeting Gus – the Manic Pixie Dream Boy. When writers such as John Green create such characters, this becomes risky for young impressionable readers who still do not know much about love or relationships. Suddenly, girls want to dissociate themselves from other girls to become more interesting to boys because girls care about men's (boys') opinion.

2. Young Adult Novels

In the past twenty years, young adult literature has become one of the most popular genres of books among teenagers, young adults, and, in some cases, adults. In order to learn about why young adult literature has become so popular lately, one first has to learn the history and the definition of it.

Young adult literature's first known appearance was in the 1950s when J.D. Sallinger published his *The Catcher in the Rye.* Later, authors continued writing novels whose target audience was young adults, but lacked young adult characters. In the 1980s, such novels contained a lot of graphic content such as rape, murder, suicide, and death in family. That was the time teenagers stopped reading them because such topics became too common, too predictable, and therefore tiresome. After such a downfall of young adult literature, the 1990s became the decade during which some of the most popular young adult novels were published. During that time, the Harry Potter series was published, which sparked a completely new genre: Young Adult Fiction. Some very successful novel series that came afterwards are *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games*, and many others. Young adult literature does not revolve around just fiction, but also has expanded into content that is more relatable for teenagers and young adults. The instances of that are young love, heartbreak, outcasts, loneliness, and many more.

The term "Young Adult" was first coined by the Young Adult Library Services Association in the 1960s. To many, the term is confusing because, although it seems as if it represents people in their twenties (pre-adulthood), it actually refers to the age range between twelve and eighteen. In *Critical Literacy Teaching Series: Challenging Authors and Genre Volume 4*, P.L. Thomas provides a sort-of-a-definition of Young Adult literature:

> What do I mean by Young Adult literature? The definitions of young adult (YA) literature tend to revolve, unsurprisingly, around the name itself. These are genre books that–at first–tended to be written about and for adolescents. That's partly it. However, even this definition and the assumptions of what counts as YA need to be parsed more critically. In particular, this book is concerned with who YA is directed at. (25)

What is more, Thomas also mentions that young adult literature was originally created for marketing purposes. That is why, initially, YA literature did not have young adult characters, and why it became so unrelatable, unreadable, and too predictable. Furthermore, he asserts that their main demographic was white wealthy teenagers, which left a big portion of young

people not being able to find a book they can identify themselves with: "What's more, in *depicting* a specific set of cultural practices, YA–in general–*defines and reinforces* these practices over time. … For the black and Latino students I spent the majority of my teaching career working with, it means that the high-interest YA that my bookshelves were filled with often did not reflect my students' life experiences. It negated them" (Thomas 25). However, in *Young Adult Literature and Adolescent Identity across Cultures and Classrooms*, Janet Alsup claims that there might be too much diversity in today's young adult literature, which makes it hard to teach it to both marginalized and dominant groups at the same time:

> We now see young adult literature written for and about African American, Mexican and Hispanic American, Chinese American, Arabic American, and Native American teens, in addition to books about gay and lesbian teens and teens living amid poverty and violence ... How do we determine the cultural authenticity and resultant quality of these books? Why and how do we teach them to students both from these marginalized groups and from dominant ones? (28)

Many can though still agree that the lack of diversity is still a big problem in not only YA literature but in literature in general. People of colour and the LGBTQA+ community are not much represented in such novels, except sometimes as secondary characters. Such representation of diverse characters is extremely important so that everyone reading the book can find someone they can relate to. Another problem with those novels is the over-stereotyping of marginalised characters, something even John Green has been a "victim" of. In *Looking for Alaska*, Green uses racial stereotypes for his Asian American character: "I hope you didn't bring the Asian kid along thinking he's a computer genius. Because I am not" (Green 105). What is more, John Green does not use a lot of diversity in depiction of most of his other male and female characters. Green states that he writes his characters like that because that is what he knows and is most comfortable with (as he is white) and that people should not concentrate on only one author when many others do the same. P.L. Thomas also discusses the lack of racial diversity in YA novels and Green's ignorance of it: "One way problematic racial stereotypes proliferate is through the ways authors describe the characters in their texts. Though people of color may be represented as characters in books, they often do not take center stage within these narratives. Such decisions are important to highlight for readers when considering how YA books create stereotypes" (59). Many authors intentionally make it obvious that a character is a person of colour (just like Green does) because they are not central characters. It is an issue because they decide that marginalized characters are credible only when they are representing more widely accepted portrayals.

2.1. Women Characters in Young Adult Novels

In young adult literature, women characters are portrayed in various ways; there are strong, independent, intelligent women, and there are weak, dependant, passive, stereotypical women. Although YA literature is supposed to appeal both to men and women, it is not an unknown fact that women are more drawn to it. That is why the portrayal of women in young adult literature is an important and frequently discussed topic. The main reason why mostly women and girls are drawn to YA literature is because of its romance elements. In *Learning Curves: Body Image and Female Sexuality in Young Adult Literature*, Beth Younger claims that in many YA novels women characters' main goal in life is to find a man. In many cases, that is even the characters' sole purpose of existence:

> Typical YA romance novels follow a standard formula, which varies slightly from the formula for adult romance novels. This standard formula, while previously applied by Janice Radway to adult romances, can also be modified for the YA romance. In YA romance, the expected outcome might not be sexual consummation and marriage but rather a commitment, or "going steady" with at least the promise of a secure teenaged future. (Younger 76)

That is why many young adult novels tend to portray their women characters in stereotypical terms as such characterization provides the readers with the happily-ever-after ending in the teenage world:

> Though texts like *Divergent*, *The Hunger Games*, *The Uglies*, *The Maze Runner*, and other contemporary bestsellers have strong representations of women and strong female protagonists, the depictions of traditional femininity still finds these characters as subservient and meek. Just because these characters are shown as physically powerful and intellectually superior to male counterparts, women are often still depicted as callously jealous and weak. (Thomas 94)

Another reason why many authors gender stereotype women characters in their novels is because they believe that is who/what women are. Yes, they sometimes empower them by portraying them as intelligent or physically strong; however, the authors nevertheless add male characters into their lives as they still believe that that is what women need in their lives.

3. Women Characters in *The Fault in Our Stars* and *Paper Towns*

In Green's novels, both male and female characters are going through many new and life-changing events like graduating, meeting new people, finding love, but also finding themselves. In this chapter, the emphasis will be put on the two most popular women characters in Green's novels: Margo Roth Spiegelman and Hazel Grace Lancaster.

As stated previously, most young adult novels have women characters whose lives revolve around men. John Green's novels are no exception to that as all his women characters have their lives changed by male characters. In both *Paper Towns* and *The Fault in Our Stars,* Margo is only viewed through a male eye and Hazel's way of life changes vastly after meeting Augustus. In both novels, the first-person narrator participates in the story: in *Paper Towns,* the narrator is male (Quentin), whereas in *The Fault in Our Stars* the narrator is female (Hazel). Therefore, *Paper Towns* puts in focus the emotions and thoughts of the male protagonist and the only way of perceiving the female character (Margo) is through his eyes. As a result, the readers are unsure how reliable the description of the character is or only view the character as flawless just like the narrator. Male narrators in Green's novels in general have insufficient knowledge about other characters, which makes their perception of the characters untrustworthy. John Green gender-stereotypes his characters, which then results in the narrator's insufficient knowledge of other characters. Male characters also view female characters in an obsessive way. Obsession makes people lose the ability to see another person realistically. The people that are in the narrator's focus are not able to show what their thoughts and opinions are. The only way they can do that is through dialogues with the narrator, or through the way they act (although that is still perceived through the narrator's eyes).

3.1. Hazel Grace Lancaster

Hazel Grace Lancaster is a 16-year-old girl who was diagnosed with terminal cancer at a young age. Having cancer left her depressed, so her parents enrolled her into a support group for teenagers suffering from depression as an aftermath of their illnesses: "Then we introduced ourselves: Name. Age. Diagnosis. And how we're doing today. I'm Hazel, I'd say when they'd get to me. Sixteen. Thyroid originally but with an impressive and long-settled

satellite colony in my lungs. And I'm doing okay" (Green 5). From the mere beginning, it is undeniable that Hazel is a stubborn (female) character fully aware of the fact that her life can end any second. The reader learns about Hazel's appearance from her. She does not think much of herself due to the fact that cancer completely changed her appearance:

> I was wearing old jeans, which had once been tight but now sagged in weird places, and a yellow T-shirt advertising a band I didn't even like anymore. Also my hair: I had this pageboy haircut, and I hadn't even bothered to, like, brush it. Furthermore, I had ridiculously fat chipmunked cheeks, a side effect of treatment. I looked like a normally proportioned person with a balloon for a head. This was not even to mention the cankle situation. (Green 9)

As stated previously, John Green follows a certain "formula" when writing his female characters. Hazel is a perfect example of that formula. From the beginning of the novel, Hazel dissociates herself from "most" girls by not liking regular "girly" things (or things that are expected from a girl to like). She does not care about appearances; she does not like nor wants to socialize. She tends to stay in her room and read her favourite books over and over again. In the novel, she meets up once with her high school friend Kaitlyn at the mall and is bored by it, which illustrates perfectly how much she dislikes doing "girly" things and being with "typical" girls:

> I ended up just picking out some flip-flops so that I could have something to buy, and then I sat down on one of the benches opposite a bank of shoes and watched Kaitlyn snake her way through the aisles, shopping with the kind of intensity and focus that one usually associates with professional chess. I kind of wanted to take out Midnight Dawns and read for a while, but I knew that'd be rude, so I just watched Kaitlyn. (Green 44)

Hazel does not feel comfortable enough talking about her life, besides her illness – it is almost as if she thinks she is only her illness, nothing more, nothing less:

> I thought of telling her that I was seeing a boy, too, or at least that I'd watched a movie with one, just because I knew it would surprise and amaze her that anyone as dishelved and awkward and stunted as me could even briefly win the affections of a boy. But I didn't really have much to brag about, so I just shrugged. (Green 43)

However, Hazel is careful with her words and actions in order not to hurt other people. She pushes other people away from her because she does not want them to suffer once she is gone. The only people she has in her life are her parents because they are the ones that are invested in her life, her illness, everything. They are the only ones she cannot remove from her life:

> I'm like. Like I'm a *grenade,* Mom. I'm a grenade and at some point I'm going to blow up and I would like to minimize the casualties, okay? ... I just want to stay away from people and read books and think and be with you guys because there's nothing I can do about hurting you; you're too invested, so just please let me do that, okay? I'm not depressed. I don't need to get out more. And I can't be a regular teenager because I'm a grenade. (Green 99)

Hazel is obsessed with how big of an impact her death will have on others. This fear has begun at a very young age. She and her parents thought she would die and half-unconscious she overheard her mother say to her father mid-crying that she would not be a mother anymore. Because of that, she fears how her death will affect others, so she pushes everyone away. This emphasizes how selfless Hazel actually is. She wants her parents to continue living after she dies; she wants them to "continue" being parents: "'I want you guys to have a life,' I said. 'I worry that you won't have a life. That you'll sit around here all day with no me to look after and stare at the walls and want to off yourselves'" (Green 297). Because of that fear, upon first meeting Augustus, she was reluctant to hang out with him and get to know him better. Eventually, he was the one that made her realize meeting people is not so bad after all. He changes her perspective on life entirely. Before meeting Augustus, Hazel was depressed without any will to neither leave the house nor meet new people. As stated previously, Augustus' purpose in the novel was to make Hazel happy and make her forget about her illness – at least for a little while. In the beginning, she considered herself the "grenade" out of the two of them, but once Augustus' cancer reappeared, she realized that he has become the grenade. He is the one that is going to die first and she is the one that will suffer afterwards. Instead of thinking about what might happen, she decides to cherish every single moment they have spent together, which shows how much Hazel has grown as a person:

> Some infinities are bigger than other infinities. A writer we used to like taught us that. There are days, many of them, when I resent the size of my unbounded set. I want more numbers than I'm likely to get, and God, I want more numbers for Augustus Waters than he got. But, Gus, my love, I cannot tell you how thankful I am for our

> little infinity. I wouldn't trade it for the world. You gave a forever within the numbered days, and I'm grateful. (Green 260)

After Gus' death, Hazel stops being the happy girl she has become because of him; she gets depressed again and feels very lonely. Augustus was the best thing that happened to her and once he died, a part of her died with him. In these moments, it seems as Hazel dies along with Gus. Throughout the novel, Hazel explains that her tumour fills with fluid, which makes her feel like she is drowning. His death makes her feel even worse because this is not just physical pain; she feels like she is literally drowning but cannot die. That is where she shows how strong of a person she has always been:

> When you go into the ER, one of the first things they ask you to do is rate your pain on a scale of one to ten, and from there they decide which drugs to use and how quickly to use them. I'd been asked this question hundreds of times over the years, and I remember once early on when I couldn't get my breath and it felt like my chest was on fire, flames licking the inside of my ribs fighting for a way to burn out of my body, my parents took me to the ER. Nurse asked me about the pain, and I couldn't even speak, so I held up nine fingers. Later, after they'd given me something, the nurse came in and she was kind of stroking my head while she took my blood pressure and said, "You know how I know you're a fighter? You called a ten a nine." But that wasn't quite right. I called it a nine because I was saving my ten. And here it was, the great and terrible ten, slamming me again and again as I lay still and alone in my bed staring at the ceiling, the waves tossing me against the rocks then pulling me back out to sea so they could launch me again into the jagged face of the cliff, leaving me floating faceup on the water, undrowned. (Green 262-263)

At the end of the novel, Hazel reads Gus' eulogy for her where he talks about how grateful he was to have her and how happy he was that he chose her to be the person that got to hurt him and how he hoped she was happy with her choice as well. She replies: "I do, Augustus. I do" (Green 313). That reply shows that her love for him is eternal, that she will remember him for the rest of her life. She has learned that death does not mean the end; even after they die, their love for each other continues.

3.2. Margo Roth Spiegelman

Margo Roth Spiegelman has always been a rebellious girl that liked breaking the rules but never got in trouble for it. She is very popular and influential in her high school. As mentioned previously, since the whole novel is told through Quentin's point of view, it is impossible to properly learn who Margo is. Consequently, she is a typical instance of a Manic Pixie Dream Girl and a typical woman character of young adult novels. Quentin has started idolizing Margo after they found a dead body when they were nine years old. Although they have not spoken in nine years, Margo knocks on his window in the middle of the night to ask him to help her get revenge on those who hurt her. During their adventure, the most important thing about her appearance is her blue eyes and the odd black face paint and outfit: "I swiveled around when I heard the window open, and Margo's blue eyes were staring back at me. Her eyes were all I could see at first, but as my vision adjusted, I realized she was wearing black face paint and a black hoodie" (Green 25). Margo uses her physical appearance frequently to get out of trouble or to get what she wants (from men). There are instances in the novel where men either made comments about her looks or where they cannot stop staring at her. What is more, during the night of the revenge, Quentin describes Margo's figure as curvy and made of soft edges. Another way of viewing men's infatuation with her is that it is not due to her allure, but because of her confidence, mysteriousness, and quirkiness. In spite of this, Margo feels trapped in her hometown because people who live there do not care about anything but their own needs. She explains that those people are "paper people living in paper houses":

> Here's what's not beautiful about it: from here, you can't see the rust or the cracked paint or whatever, but you can tell what the place really is. You see how fake it all is. It's not even hard enough to be made out of plastic. It's a paper town. I mean look at it, Q: look at all those cul-de-sacs, those streets that turn in on themselves, all the houses that were built to fall apart. All those paper people living in their paper houses, burning the future to stay warm. All the paper kids drinking beer some bum bought for them at the paper convenience store. Everyone demented with the mania of owning things. All the things paper-thin and paper-frail. And all the people, too. I've lived here for eighteen years and I have never once in my life come across anyone who cares about anything that matters. (Green 57)

That mind-set results in her escape the following day without telling anyone about it. At that moment, she becomes a mystery for everyone who knew her: “Margo always loved mysteries. And in everything that came afterwards, I could never stop thinking that maybe she loved mysteries so much that she became one” (Green 8). Although Quentin was determined to find her, she did not want to be saved or found. What was not blatantly obvious to Quentin, the readers see immediately: everyone else was annoyed with Margo because they did not see her through Quentin’s rose-coloured glasses; they saw her the way she was – cold and rude at most times. Even her mother was sick of her constant running away, leaving minimal clues and expecting to be found: “Oh, come on, Connie. Look, is it sick that it’s a blessing to have her out of the house? Of course it’s sick. But she was a sickness in this family! How do you look for someone who announces she won’t be found, who always leaves clues that lead nowhere, who runs away constantly? You can’t!” (Green103) Once the filter through which Quentin saw Margo is removed, a very different picture of Margo is portrayed. She tried to pay attention to her words and actions her whole life because Quentin was not the only one that idolised her; it seems as if she was under a giant microscope where everyone was watching and judging her. Many people think they know someone when the truth is they only know a version that this person allows them to see. If the novel was narrated by, for instance, one of Quentin’s friends, or her ex-boyfriend or ex-best friend, she would have been portrayed as a completely different person. Quentin stereotypes her with what he saw that night; he constantly mentions how she wore designer jeans, even though to Margo that was something completely irrelevant: “I was bored, so it again confused me that she would pick this place, since Margo always struck me as a person with a very limited tolerance for boredom. Maybe she liked the idea of slumming it? Unlikely. Margo wore designer jeans to break into SeaWorld” (Green 171). A lot of people thought that Margo was self-centred because she wanted everyone looking for her. The truth was the complete opposite – she did not want to be found, which is obvious in the end when they do find her. She leaves clues only for people to have a certain idea where she is, so they do not worry. Finding a dead body as kids stayed with her for her entire life because she has been wondering what drives someone to kill themselves. She wondered if they could have done something to change that: “‘It would have been nice to tell him that, whatever it was, that it didn’t have to be the end of the world.’ ‘Yeah, although in the end *something* kills you.’ I shrug. ‘Yeah, I know. I’m not saying that everything is survivable. Just everything except the last thing is’” (Green 301).

In the last part of the novel, she seems almost too perfect. Everything she said was true and made sense, even her staying in Agloe instead of coming home. Margo only wanted to start her own life in a fictitious place instead of continuing it in a paper town like Orlando. She does not care about anything, especially the future; she wants to live in the moment: "But what about after the summer? What about college? What about the rest of your life?' She shrugged. 'What about it?' 'Aren't you worried about, like, *forever?*' 'Forever is composed of nows,' she says" (Green 296). Eventually, Quentin comes to a realisation that Margo is not a girl that will settle down in a small town and be with a boy that knows nothing about her for the rest of her life. It is very easy to imagine what a person is like and have a certain picture of them, without actually knowing them, just like Quentin did: "There are so many people. It is easy to forget how full the world is of people, full to bursting, and each of them imaginable and consistently misimagined" (Green 267). Margo is also only a human and not a perfect person deserving of such idolisation:

> Margo Roth Spiegelman was a person, too. And I had never quite thought of her that way, not really; it was a failure of all my previous imaginings. All along—not only since she left, but for a decade before—I had been imagining her without listening, without knowing that she made as poor a window as I did. And so I could not imagine her as a person who could feel fear, who could feel isolated in a roomful of people, who could be shy about her record collection because it was too personal to share. Someone who might read travel books to escape having to live in the town that so many people escape to. Someone who—because no one thought she was a person—had no one to really talk to. And all at once I knew how Margo Roth Spiegelman felt when she wasn't being Margo Roth Spiegelman: she felt empty. (Green 199)

In the end, she admits how she actually feels about paper towns and paper people. After isolating herself, she realised that she was slowly becoming a paper girl herself. She cared too much about who she was surrounded with, how popular she was, and other superficial things. At home, she was a completely different person. Nobody actually knew, for instance, about her record collection, or how much she liked poetry. She adapted easily to who she was with, just as paper changes the way you fold it: "I looked down and thought about how I was made of paper. I was the flimsy-foldable person, not everyone else" (Green 293). It is very easy to create a picture of someone one does not know, especially because people tend to keep other people at such a distance that they can create an image of each other. It is easy to love another person when one thinks they are a fulfilment in their life, something they have been missing

to be happy. It is easy to create an image of someone in the street based on what one saw in one moment. It is easy to hate someone when one sees them solely as a bad person. Yet, it is very hard to let a person be themselves without perceiving them as what one wishes them to be. Besides only "misimagining" people, one needs to put themselves in their shoes: "But imagining being someone else, or the world being something else, is the only way in. It is the machine that kills fascists" (Green 299). In order to see someone as they are, one needs to completely understand them as real people, not just as a product of one's own imagination. Once people realize that those around them are only people and that everyone has their own lives and their own problems, their own stories, and that all those stories together are like grass, each on their own but in a way still connected, only then it is possible for a person to love another person selflessly. When asked in an interview about his inspiration for Margo's character, John Green also mentioned how nobody is supposed to romanticize people, which is something that he also did to his friend Jen in high school: "There were a lot of things that went into thinking about Margo—considerations of how we romanticize the people we love, the ceaseless urge that some people feel to get the hell out of their hometowns, how weird it can feel to be popular but not have anyone actually know very much about you, etc." Because Quentin romanticized Margo so much, in the end she turned out not to be the girl he thought he knew.

3.3. The Comparison of Margo and Hazel

Margo Roth Spiegelman and Hazel Grace Lancaster at first do not seem to share anything besides a three-word name. However, when one digs deeper, they have more in common than one would think. To begin with, they are both very intelligent and like reading literature. Hazel likes reading books and Margo loves poetry. Next, they both struggle most of their lives; Hazel with cancer and depression as a side-effect of dying, and Margo with hiding her true self her whole life. Both of them also have deep issues regarding their parents. Margo's relationship with her parents has always been unsteady, which is the reason for her mysteriousness and rebellion. Hazel's issue with her parents is vastly different. Her problem is that her parents are too involved in her life, which means that once she dies they will suffer immensely. Despite that, they try to stay real and see the world and their lives as they are and make the best of them. Because of that, even though it does not seem like it at first, they are both wild at heart. Margo loves living on the edge and going on adventures. She lives in the

moment and wants to live her life to the fullest for as long as she can. Although Hazel is not very rebellious, she also dreams of an adventure. She knows she does not have much left so she wants to use up every moment. They are also very stubborn and at times immature and demanding, but for different reasons. Margo loves road trips and she does not care if it means she will travel alone as long as she goes somewhere. She does not care how her parents feel about her escaping because they have no control over her anymore. Hazel might not keep running away from her hometown and her family, but she wants to visit Amsterdam and meet her favourite author Peter Van Houten. She does not care if she barely survives the trip, she must meet him. She does not listen to her parents, she often snaps at them even though they always fulfil her every command. Despite that, both of them want their trips for the right reasons; Margo wants to escape her horrible parents and her boring city and Hazel wants closure on her favourite book. Furthermore, both characters are quite realistic and teach readers to enjoy every moment while it lasts. They also teach readers that people come and go, but they should all be given a chance. They will either serve as a lesson or be someone unforgettable. A quote by Mary Pipher from *Reviving Ophelia* perfectly describes Margo and Hazel's personalities, their stubbornness, and their struggles to stay real, true to themselves:

> Girls who stay connected to their true selves are also confused and sometimes overwhelmed. But they have made some commitment to understanding their lives. They think about their experiences. They do not give up on trying to resolve contradictions and make connections between events . . . They will make many mistakes and misinterpret much of reality, but girls with true selves make a commitment to process and understand their experiences. (61)

Even though they have many similarities, they also differ. The first difference between them is the way they are perceived. On the one hand, Margo is only seen through Quentin's eyes, which makes her character one-dimensional and perceived only as a love interest. On the other hand, the readers see Hazel only through Hazel's eyes, as she is the narrator of *The Fault in Our Stars*. Hazel is very critical of herself, which gives her character more complexity. Another difference is that Margo cares about her appearance, her status in high school, and who her friends are. On the contrary, Hazel could not care less about what she wears and how many people in her life she has; she wants to surround herself with as little people as possible. Another thing they differ in is their role in the novels. Margo's role is to be a mystery that Quentin is supposed to solve, and eventually his grand prize. Hazel's role is to fall in love, but also to be the person someone falls in love with.

Conclusion

Although young adult novels have come a long way since their beginnings, their writers sometimes still seem to (intentionally or unintentionally) do the same mistakes that were done in the past. In many YA novels, there is still a problematic and stereotyped portrayal of women characters, characters of colour, and many other marginalised groups. They have improved in some aspects, but there still is a long way to go. Because of that, many scholars have criticized young adult literature authors in their critical studies. One of the authors that has also failed in this respect is John Green. John Green has received many awards for his novels, but he has also admitted that he still has room for improvement. The reason why Green particularly was put under a microscope is due to his depiction of women characters. He depicts them as the "Manic Pixie Dream Girls," i.e. the girls whose sole purpose in the novels is to be the products of men's desires. Due to the fact that all his novels and short stories follow a certain storyline and all his characters have similar traits and purposes, his style of writing has been known as the "John Green Formula." His women characters are not very realistic but rather overstereotyped. All of his novels have the first-person narrator, so that the reader can only learn about secondary characters through the narrator's eyes, which makes it challenging to imagine them complexly. As it was discussed in the paper, Hazel and Margo are portrayed as the girls who do not want to be seen as typical girls. Gender stereotyping is obvious in that matter because Green asserts that all girls like the same things and that is why Hazel and Margo are considered the atypical, "outside of the box" girls. In conclusion, *The Fault in Our Stars* and *Paper Towns* are not completely successful in breaking gender stereotypes of women characters in young adult literature, except that in the end, Quentin does not get the girl, and that Augustus' purpose was to make Hazel happy, instead vice versa. John Green attempted at making his readers think more complexly about the characters, outside of what the narrator provides them with.

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