"Moments of infinite joy within a limited time": The concept of time in John Green's *The Fault in our Stars*

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Time is a major theme in John Green's young adult and romantic novel, *The Fault in our Stars* (2012). Green spent ten years trying to write the book. Even though Hazel and Gus experience typical teenage problems, as well as extreme physical hardships and psychological conflicts due to their cancer disease, they still manage to have a great time together. They fall in love with one another, meet their favorite author, and share a common interest in reading books. They decide to live a life that could be short overflowing with content, notwithstanding their impending death, breathing tubes and worried parents. In this paper, I choose to approach the notion of time that passes in the narrative and how it plays out through the structure of TFIOS based on the narrative theory of time by Paul Ricoeur in his book *Narrative and Time* (1984). Ricoeur’s 'unfolding representative stages' are called threefold mimesis—prefiguration (pre-understanding), configuration (emplotment), and refiguration (embedded contextuality)—all three are used to create a triadic bridge model of structural relations between narrative and time. However, it is Green himself who offers the greatest insight into his work. Through his readings, writings, the Vlogbrothers channel and interviews, he provides the readers with tools to share his imaginative vision and empathetic character portrayals. A major influence on the development of TFIOS was Esther Earl, a concrete case of a girl who died of cancer at the age of 16. The structural time devices in TFIOS are not always linear, but also synoptic conveying the narrative formations of time. Elements like flashbacks and flashforwards are employed. Green deals with time as duration, both chronological and psychological, the time it takes a reader to actually read and time as an organizational device. Time is also a subject both Green and the characters speculate about, particularly in their fear of oblivion and their need to be remembered after death. The author presents how time passes and how a disease like cancer affects young adolescents in real life.

**Key words:** 21st-Century young adult literature, romantic narrative, time, John Green, TFIOS, life and death, cancer disease, teenage issues.

**INTRODUCTION**

John Green (1977) is a *New York Times* bestselling author of four young adult novels including: *The Fault in Our Stars, Looking for Alaska, An Abundance of Katherines,* and *Paper Towns*. He is an award-winner; his many awards include the Printz Medal, a Printz Honor, and the Edgar Award. Green was selected by *TIME*
Ricoeur, these triple mimetic stages “form a bridge between Augustine (1992) (threefold present of time) and Aristotle (model of tragic, comedic [sic, comic is correct], romantic and ironic plots)” (Boje, 2001: 112). For St. Augustine, the three forms of time—past, present, and future—are contemporaneously related: “The time present of things past is memory; the time present of things present is direct experience; the time present of things future is expectation” (The Confessions, Book XI, Chapter 20, Heading 26). St. Augustine does not subject a time to weave the plot. However, with reference to Aristotle’s reflections on the weaving of the plot as an element of the tragedy, narrative is characterized as “the imitation of an action”. Ricoeur also suggests that the plot is configured as a “representation of action,” and that narrative represents the human world of acting (and, in its passive mode, suffering) expanding its meaning of representation by creating a fictional “world” of the text with its own coherence (Ricoeur, 1991: 138). This happens through a process of emplotment: the arrangement of events into an ordered narrative whole, a plot. (Ibid, 138) Ricoeur proposes that the time and the weaving of the plot are key elements to any narrative.

Mimesis1: Narrative prefiguration

Mimesis1 anticipates an action - a marriage, a death, a journey, a murder - and divides it into beginning, middle, and end. Prefiguration is the existing setting and situation as the story begins. For Ricoeur, “To imitate or represent action is to pre-understand what human acting is, in its semantics, its symbolic system, its temporality” (1984: 64). Mimesis1 is “the narration of the world of action, the pre-understanding of the practical life” (Boje, 2001: 112). Ricoeur calls Mimesis1 “networks of action” or antenarrative, a telling without mediation of the structures of everyday life. This pre-narrative network of structures gives our lives a quality of narratives-not-yet-narrated.

Mimesis2: Narrative Configuration (the imaginative order in a narrative)

In Ricoeur’s narrative theory, configuration (Mimesis2) is the sequence of events that connects the opening with the conclusion. It takes the pre-narrative context of mimesis1 shaping it by the imaginative configuration or the grasping together of the heterogeneous elements of a story (selected events, characters, scenes, actions, etc.) into a whole imaginative order, as he called it a “concordant discordance,” in just the same way as does the plot of a story (Ricoeur, 1984: 66). Ricoeur notes that narrative ‘emplotment’ encompasses plot as mediating function or connecting moment between the pre-narrative context (mimesis 1) and shaping the experience of reading itself (mimesis 3). Time in the narrative unity
created by narrative ‘emplotment’ is both chronologically linear (one event after another that represent different experiences of time) and synoptic (a purpose-filled sense of the whole story throughout). (Ibid: 66-68). Mimesis2, Ricoeur proposes, is “the concrete process by which the textual configuration mediates between the prefiguration of the practical field and its refiguration through the reception of the work” (Ricoeur, 1984: 53).

Mimesis3: Narrative Refiguration

In Ricoeur’s theory, the final mimetic stage, narrative refiguration reconnects the parts to the whole and marks the completion of narrative representation in reading. Ricoeur’s model for this is a phenomenology of reading, which he describes as “the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader” (Ricoeur, 1984: 71). It is a “post-understanding” that signals a significant change from the plot’s opening situation. In reading, we realize narrative worlds, integrate them into actual, lived experience, and bring them to life. In this sense, the reader contemplates the story where the imaginative world generated is actually a “joint work of the text and reader.” Then, “it is in the reader the traversal of mimesis reaches its fulfillment” (Ibid: 76, 71).

Ricoeur’s Mimeses in TFIOS

In Ricoeur’s account of fiction, there is an analogy on one hand between the prefiguration of John Green’s own temporality and its configuration in TFIOS, and on the other hand between the configuration of temporality in the novel and the reader’s experience of his/her temporality in pondering the novel. The first aspect to be investigated is how prefiguration identifies the moment, events, and actions, and how a set of relationships between characters, background and foreground, in relation to the setting is established. The field of human acting is always prefigured with the ordering of actions, events, symbolism and temporality in TFIOS. We can understand the story’s unique structure, symbolic framework, and temporality during the stage of the narrative’s prefiguration.

Time and writing the novel

The writer should include in his novel a content that may be affected by the passage of time in his/her life while writing the novel. The distinction is clear between chronological, measurable time whose units never change (a minute is never more nor less than 60 seconds) and time as experienced by human beings (it seems to pass slowly or to pass quickly and its duration changes according to circumstances). The time John Green spent as a chaplain was very helpful, because he got to know a lot of different people with different kinds of cancer and talked to their families. Along with his vast wealth of literary readings, Green also read various books about cancer, which were extremely helpful.

Green’s time as a chaplain at a hospital and his interactions with Esther Earl, a girl he met and to whom he dedicated TFIOS, contribute to his honest portrayal of the mindset and emotional realities associated with life-threatening diseases. In his novels, Green attempts to write about sick young adults particularly after Esther passed away because of cancer in 2010. Esther’s parents have since published a collection of her writings called, “This Star Won’t Go Out: The Life and Words of Esther Grace Earle.” Her story consequently formed Green’s ante-narrative in TFIOS. He admits, “But if I hadn’t known Esther, I never would have written The Fault in Our Stars. I might’ve eventually finished a book about adolescent illness of some kind, but it wouldn’t have been this one” (Green, n.d.: 6). He discovers the true story of Esther Earl’s life told through her journal entries, letters, sketches, and poetry compiled with meetings and photographs from family and friends. In his interviews, Green talks about this big influence: “Esther taught me that a short life can be a good life, a full life.” He eventually realized that “despite the fact that their lives were cut short, these kids still led lives which were meaningful and which were filled with more than just pain (Hamer). This realization is what eventually enabled him to finally write his novel about sick kids” (Hazeleger, 2013: 20).

The relationship of Hazel with the author of her favourite book, An Imperial Affliction, is prefigured in similar experience. Asking John Green: “Have you ever had a similar experience to Van Houten’s in terms of meeting a fan, like Hazel, who was frustrated that you couldn’t give her the answers she was looking for?” Green says,

“This happens all the time. It happens a lot with Looking for Alaska, and now it is happening even more with TFIOS, which surprises me, because I did not think the ending of TFIOS was particularly ambiguous. (To be fair, I have a pretty high tolerance for ambiguity, I guess.) … I genuinely feel unqualified to tell you what happens after the end of the book, and to make something up—as Van Houten briefly attempts to—feels really disingenuous.

In general, I personally agree with a lot of what Van Houten says in the novel. He’s like a drunk, dickish version of myself, basically” (Green, n.d.: 3)

In accordance, the views of John Green configured in the actions of the story are prefigured in the author Van Houten whom he creates in the narrative. From these particulars, Green formed an emplotment, Mimesis2, asserting: “I wrote the book. I was conscious of the fact
that I was writing a book while I was writing it. I was conscious of the fact that I was using words to try to tell a story that would find life in your mind” (Green, n.d.: 2)

**Fictional Time: Time and the way the writer handles time.**

**The reader's time, the characters' time**

As time passes, life circumstances give rise to new experiences and new opportunities for reflection. We can redescribe our past experiences, bringing to light unrealized connections between agents, actors, circumstances, motives or objects, by drawing connections between the events retold and events that have occurred since, or by bringing to light untold details of past events. In her book, *The Eye of the Story* (1990), Eudora Welty also asserts,

Fiction does not hesitate to accelerate time, slow it down, project it forward or run it backward, cause it to skip over itself or repeat itself. It may require time to travel in a circle, to meet itself in coincidence. It can freeze an action in the middle of its performance. It can expand a single moment like the skin of a balloon or bite off a life like a thread. It can put time through the hoop of a dream, trap it inside an obsession. It can set a fragment of the past within a frame of the present and cause them to exist simultaneously (166).

Time is an important factor in the narrative configuration and the fictionality of the characters. In this regard, Green deals with two kinds of time from the outset: the literal time addressed to the reader, measurable by the clock, or chronological time; and the fictional time or reader's sense of how much (fictional) time has passed in the characters' lives. In the literal time, the act of reading establishes the contact between the world of a fictional narrative and the world of the reader. In the fictional time, characters have performed actions requiring more than the mere sixty minutes of the reader's real time.

Green's narrative creates (or, to use Ricoeur’s term, “configures”) a separate world of meaning, a world with its own sense of space and time. However, Green employs in *TFIOS* a temporal distortion, i.e., the use of non-linear timelines and narrative techniques. What is depicted as the "past" and the "present" within the plot does not necessarily correspond to the "before" and "after" of its linear, episodic structure. For example, the novel may begin with a culminating event, or it may devote long passages to events depicted as occurring within relatively short periods of time. On the relation between time and any story, Paul Ricoeur writes in an essay titled "Life in Quest of Narrative":

There are two sorts of time in every story told: on the one hand, a discrete succession that is open and theoretically indefinite, a series of incidents (for we can always pose the question: and then? and then?): on the other hand, the story told presents another temporal aspect characterized by the integration, culmination and closure owing to which the story receives a particular configuration. In this sense, composing a story is, from the temporal point of view, drawing a configuration out of succession.

[How else can we make life meaningful?] We can already guess the importance of this manner of characterizing the story from the temporal point of view [since.] for us, time is both what passes and flows away and, on the other hand, what endures and remains (Ricoeur, 1991: 22, emphasis added).

As is clearly featured in most of the English novels, narrative proceeds in a temporal succession from commencement to end. In terms of the relations between past, present and future, the events in *The Fault in our Stars* happen "in the immediate past" (Wyile, 1999: 186). Hence, "]the fact that little time has passed between the narrated events and the act of narration itself means that the narrated events have had little time to impact the life of the narrator" (Hazleger, 2013: 27).

After the narrative's particulars are arranged, John Green is able to suggest the amplified and distinct quality of *TFIOS*’s settings. In this novel, years and dates are not exactly mentioned, and can be disconnected from their function, with emphasis on the determination of time, or the clock hours. The narrative probably takes place anytime between 2008 and 2012, based on context clues. The characters are introduced and the setting is given: America (Indianapolis) and Amsterdam: and technology, airplanes, cars and cellphones, are mentioned in the novel. It is presumably not in the future, because there is nothing used that does not exist. Though the disease Hazel suffers does not exist, nor does her ‘cure’, as is explained in the ‘Acknowledgments’, it is not a future condition, it is just free writing. John Green emphasizes this notion by using a linear narrative structure in *TFIOS*, that is chronological. However, a non-linear timeline of flashbacks or flashforwards is used. "The structural time devices of narrative are not always linear and may include flashback, flash-forward, repetition and ellipsis" (Boje, 2001: 121). It is often difficult to distinguish in *TFIOS* between primary and secondary narratives, or between past and present. The entire text is narrated in the past tense, from the opening sentence throughout the novel, "so the reader would know that Hazel is telling the story of something that happened to her in the past—at least until the last sentence" (Green, n.d.: 8). The duration of time between the events occurred and the events narrated is not obvious or
determined. Actions’ immediacy is related to whether they actually occurred before Hazel's disease or in the midst of her pain and suffering, with the exception of the last sentence when "Hazel reads Augustus' eulogy for her she answers him in the present tense, implying that Hazel who was reading that letter is also the one who narrated the entire story. Whenever Hazel addresses the implied reader it becomes clear that the events she is describing did occur in her recent past" (Hazeleger, 2013: 28).

Features such as analepsis or a flashback (the author jumps back in time) and prolepsis or a flashforward (the author jumps forth in time) are used in TFIOS to recount or reveal events that occurred or will occur in the novel. They are employed not only as a narrative structure, but also to develop a character. Analepses or flashbacks go back into the past of the dynamic character, Hazel, through conversations with people close to her like her mother, her father, her friend Kaitlyn, and Augustus. However, the flashbacks are very short and clearly marked in general; they take up much less of the time and space of the novel than does the primary narrative.

Analepsis functions in the mode of memory, "since the memory itself is an event in the fictional present" (Currie, 2007: 77). When the doctors determine that Hazel is too sick to travel to Amsterdam, she has a flashback: The thirteen-years-old Hazel in the ICU and woke up in the middle of the night having trouble breathing, dyspnea, as fluids filled her lungs. She went through all the required treatment; it was then that she started taking a special type of medication to keep her alive. This flashback urges Hazel to admit: "Anyway, that was the last good day I had with Gus until the Last Good Day." This "should have been the end," she says (Green, 2012: 252). This helps her relate to the death of other people and cancer victims in general. As a narrator, and through recollection, Hazel brings the full meaning of her experience into a wider and clearer vision. She recognizes that it had then a major effect on her that extended into the present.

Determination of time is very important: The previous flashback reflects that serious events happen in the middle of the night; a notable example is clear when the Lancasters receive a phone call delivering the news of Gus's death. Hazel's parents walk into her room, and without a word, she knows what it is and she begins to cry. She recalls a time when undergoing treatment and the nurse asked her to rate her pain on a scale from 1 to 10. Hazel said 9, and the nurse said she was a fighter for calling a 10 a 9; she was saving her 10 for this moment of pain.

Green uses not only flashbacks, but even flashforwards or foreshadowing, i.e., he refers to an event which has not yet happened. Though set in the past, TFIOS is one of the coming-of-age stories that focus on the development of the teenage characters from youth to adulthood.

They are constantly facing the fact of their own impermanence, which leads the characters to walk a line between moving into adulthood and holding onto their youth. Their youths were a time in which they were healthy, so they are afraid to let them go, and their passage into adulthood is threatened by their cancer, so the characters are determined to pass into adulthood before it is too late (Florman and Kestler, 2016: 1).

It is not necessary that a narrative has a happy ending, but it has coherence and structure. However, the possibility of redescribing the past offers us the possibility of re-imagining and reconstructing a future inspired by hope. Portions of stop action time can be focused on, rearranged, or repeated so that the narrative attains its emplotment. Unfolding relationships, struggles and motives are said to depict the time and events that create the temporal structure within the narrative. In our analysis of Green's text, we attempt to analyze the events depicted, particularly, the heroes' conflicts and struggles within the boundaries of narrative temporality. Green intentionally shortens the timeline of Augustus’s suffering and deterioration at the end of the novel stating:

"I didn’t want to be unnecessarily cruel either to Augustus or to the reader. I talked a lot with doctors and families of sick people about this, about the timeline and the pace of deterioration etc. to make sure I was reflecting it as accurately as possible. It is a very, very difficult thing to live through, because a lot of what you value about life, particularly as a teenager—autonomy, physical vibrancy, social connections, dignity—is stripped away from you, … because I didn’t want to romanticize suffering, and I didn’t want to conflate it—as so many stories do—with beauty (Green, n.d.: 26).

Narrative style: Reader-narrator relationship

TFIOS can be easily classified as a Young Adult novel in which the protagonists, Hazel and Augustus are adolescents, whereas parental figures are either absent, play a less noticeable role or are a source of conflict (Cole, 2009: 49; Nilsen and Kenneth, 2009: 28-29). Thus, the adolescents in the narrative take the credit for their actions and accomplishments (Nilsen and Kenneth, 28). Many aspects of the narrative style are presented in TFIOS. As a Young Adult novel, it is written and narrated by an adolescent. In a direct straightforward manner, the sixteen-year-old protagonist, Hazel Grace Lancaster, narrates her story in the first person, from a female’s prospective giving the reader access to her thoughts but also limiting the reader's perspective to what she perceives. The first person narrative serves to allow readers to identify with the protagonist who is involved in the action. Hazel narrates her romantic entanglement
with Augustus Waters, a seventeen-year-old, whom she meets at a cancer support group at a church called the Literal Heart of Jesus and who has lost his right leg to Osteosarcoma (a cancer that starts in the bones), but seems to be in remission. With the passing of time, their relationship profoundly changes Hazel's character, from a depressed girl who had allowed her cancer to consume her and confine her to remain at home with her parents, to a vibrant who is ready to live her life befriending Gus and spending time with him. Gus says to Hazel, "Don't tell me you're one of those people who becomes their disease" (Green, 2012: 32). The two teenagers bond and travel to Amsterdam, but soon they discover that Augustus's cancer has recurred. Eventually Gus passes away, and Hazel realizes that as much as the pain of losing Gus hurts, she still thinks that getting to know his pain was worth it.

It is worth noting that the narratee (a person inside the text to whom the narrator speaks) is not identified in the TFIOS. In accordance, as Leech and Short (2007) point out, the reader becomes the narratee himself/herself (211-212). In TFIOS Hazel is addressing the readers, disclosing her story through asking herself certain questions to anticipate a narratee: "Why did the cast rotate? A side effect of dying," (Green, 2012: 4) and the way she describes events: "So here's how it went in God's heart" (Ibid: 4). The reader's involvement, through first person narration, is a way used to establish a form of confidence and to create a sense of familiarity between the narrator and narratee in an attempt to fully engage him or her with the text (Wylie, 1999: 192), causing the reader to become biased towards the main character (Leech and Short, 2007: 213).

In chapter one, Hazel introduces her physical condition to the narratee unfoldng her mother's request to join a Cancer Support Group. The tone of familiarity is supported by Hazel's informal and colloquial style of speech: "I noticed this because Patrick, the Support Group Leader and only person over eighteen in the room, talked about the heart of Jesus every freaking meeting" (Green, 2012: 4). This informality of speech allows the reader to identify with the role of a confidant. Leech and Short divide the matter of tone into conversational and authorial tone. As we see throughout TFIOS, conversational tone mainly pertains to the conversations characters have with each other, and where Hazel is addressing the narratee. Gus always answers the cell phones by saying "Hazel Grace" indicating, as pointed by Green, "there is no longer a need for hello; there's this instant familiarity so conversations start quicker than they used to, which I find fascinating" (Green, n.d.: 27) While authorial tone pertains solely to the relation between the author and the reader. John Green, the author, is secluded from the process of narration and the authorial role appears to be taken over by Hazel, the narrator, who does inspire the readers to moments of openness:

Like, I realize that this is irrational, but when they tell you that you have, say, a 20 percent chance of living five years, the math kicks in and you figure that's one in five . . . so you look around and think, as any healthy person would: I gotta outlast four of these bastards (Green, 2012: 5).

With reference to the 'concordance-discordance,' which is inspired by Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative and time, the narrative mediates through emplotment between certain events and the whole story, discordant particulars and the concordant whole, time as a chronological succession of events and time as a configured factor. John Green specifies the discordant particulars of the narrative, along with its temporal disjunctions, to show how the narrative is configured with a synthesis of these heterogeneous elements, with the exclusion of overcoming the discordance completely. The novel opens with "Late in the winter of my seventeenth year", not to trigger fear in the readers that Hazel might die at any moment, i.e., her own experience in the first person narration. Her illness is explained through Shakespearean allusions, most notable in the title which plays out across the book and functions to reinforce its themes. This illusion is referred to in the letter Augustus receives from Van Houten; the title is derived from Shakespeare’s play Julius Caesar, in which the nobleman Cassius says to Brutus, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, / But in ourselves, that we are underlings" (Qtd. in Green, 2012: 111). This quote has many implications as it is related to the fates, lives and decision-making processes of the two main characters, Hazel and Augustus, who have been stricken with acute forms of cancer. It implies that it is not the stars, nor fate or destiny or a higher power, which cause our problems, but rather ourselves. Another Shakespearean illusion is examined by Hazeleger (2013):

The notion of stars being indicative of one's fate also feeds into Van Houten's second allusion to Shakespeare, that of the star-crossed lovers, which is the description of the two lovers from Romeo and Juliet. By referencing the star-crossed motif TFIOS employs the same dramatic irony as Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: the reader knows right from the start that the love story can end in nothing but tragedy (70).

**Reader-Writer relationship**

As mentioned above, both the past and future of a narrative are represented simultaneously through the reader's progression on the pages of the novel. Consequently, the writer must depend on the reader's conditioned response to the written text in order to
communicate a coherent narrative. John Green, through Augustus, declares that there is a contract between writer and reader and that not to end a book violates that contract. Green ends TFIOS midsentence declaring that it has hope. "The reader violates the contract when s/he reads poorly or distractedly or ungenerously. (It seems to me that mutual generosity is kind of the key to the reader-writer relationship" (Green, n.d.: 1).

Though the structure of the novel highlights a progression of the narrative events while time moves linearly, Green sometimes inserts his digressions into a moment of the characters' time, seemingly freezing their time while providing information which furthers the "main story" of the novel. A good example of this is when Hazel discusses Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a theory that says that a person needs health and safety in order to think about love, art, or self-actualization; "certain needs must be met before you can even have other kinds of needs" (Green, 2012: 211). Green supports Maslow's theory by drawing a pyramid, according to which Hazel is stuck on the second level, esteem needs through self-worth and accomplishment; "unable to reach for love and respect and art and whatever else." She disagrees with Maslow's hierarchy "utter horseshit. The urge to make art or contemplate philosophy does not go away when you are sick. Those urges just become transfigured by illness" (Ibid: 212-213). The irony seems to refer to Augustus who though so sick, he is able to love Hazel.

Another digression is amply structured within The Fault in Our Star as a book about the love for fictional books, albeit about disease. Hazel always enjoys reading, but she has a personal connection with an all-time favorite work of art, called An Imperial Affliction, written by an American author, Peter van Houten, a character in the novel as well. Hazel does not tell people about it as there are "books so special and rare and yours that advertising your affection feels like a betrayal" (Green, 2012: 33). Her mother, for instance, regards the title of the novel as a book about the love for fictional books, An Imperial Affliction, which is a conditional need to Hazel. Hazel always enjoys reading, and she has a personal connection with an all-time favorite work of art, called An Imperial Affliction, written by an American author, Peter van Houten, a character in the novel as well. Hazel does not tell people about it as there are "books so special and rare and yours that advertising your affection feels like a betrayal" (Green, 2012: 33). Her mother, for instance, regards the title of the novel as a book about the love for fictional books, An Imperial Affliction, which is a conditional need to Hazel.

Late in the winter of my seventeenth year, my mother decided I was depressed, 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: 3).

An Imperial Affliction is one of Green's weaving of essential structures used in prefiguring the main narrative; it is a contract between reader and writer, a story that is used in the emplotment of the narrative. It narrates a condition of suffering or distress of a young girl named Anna who is diagnosed as victim to leukemia. The book has an open end; that is, it ends midsentence or a sudden ending as the protagonist Anna apparently dies during her narration. Hazel has been looking for answers ever since she has finished the book a few years before; Ann corresponds to her own experience. She tells Gus that she has written hundreds of letters to ask the book's author, Peter Van Houten, and she is eager to make a conversation with him to find out what happened to the characters and the people Anna leaves behind, such as the fate of Anna's mother, her relationship with the "Dutch Tulip Man", and her pet hamster Sisyphus. Augustus travels with Hazel to Amsterdam where Imperial's author lives.

Time is related to the actions of the novel that ends in an open sentence, like An Imperial Affliction; its ending is related to the ambiguous ending of Hazel's cancer story. The reader expects from the beginning that someone is going to die in the story. Confronting with Hazel's problem, the reader expects her death. In the reader's first detailed introduction to this book, Hazel comments on its midsentence ending of Imperial as the reason for her love to it: "I know it's a very literary decision and everything and probably part of the reason I love the book so much, but there is something to recommend a story that ends" (Green, 2012: 49). However, Green explains the fact that Anna died mid-sentence in the book and Hazel is still living, as he himself possesses a gift for hope.

[The] first-person narration takes the teeth from the monster in any story, right? The I survives: You know, because the I is telling the story in the past tense, as something that happened to that I, and here the I is, still writing. [...] (I really tried to make TFIOS a hopeful novel, but I did not want it to be the kind of easily won or ill-considered hope that both Hazel and Augustus find so little consolation in) (Green, n.d.: 17).

Hazel's and Gus's obsession to meet Van Houten is also symbolic of their own questions and fears about their own deaths, what it is like to be dying and not have died. Not only do they long to know what happened before, but what comes after is what they need to know. We thus have an analepsis and prolepsis in the very same scene. Though Augustus is a big fan of The Price of Dawn series, a fictional novelization of a video game, he is also obsessed with An Imperial Affliction. Both get mentioned often, though only the latter is quoted directly by both Hazel and Augustus, and early in the epigraph of TFIOS indicating the main time of the work:

As the tide washed in, the Dutch Tulip Man faced the ocean: “Conjoiner rejoinder poisoner concealer revelator. Look at it, rising up and rising down, taking everything with it.”

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Water,” the Dutchman said. “Well, and time.”

- PETER VAN HOUTEN, An Imperial Affliction

Literature features heavily in TFIOS in general, a fact that
refers to Green's extensive readings and pastiche style of writing, that work as particulars prefigured and configured respectively. Though attributed to Van Houten, Green actually wrote the epigraph himself. It alludes to the epigraph of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* which features a poem and is similarly written by a fictional character, *Thomas Parke D'Invilliers*.

Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;  
If you can bounce high, bounce for her too,  
Till she cry, “Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover,  
I must have you!”

- *Thomas Parke D'Invilliers* (Fitzgerald).

After learning of the email response that Augustus has got from Van Houten, Hazel shares with him the Emily Dickinson poem from which the title of *An Imperial Affliction* is drawn (Green, 2012: 71). The poem's theme of death and mortality foreshadows later events in TFIOS, as well as the potential future challenges that both Hazel and Augustus might face.

**Moments of pain and love**

Action configuration of adolescents is marked by physical changes and psychological development as well. Because Green looks inside the minds and hearts of his characters so effectively, configuration manifests itself in both internal or psychic and external or physical action. Green reveals not only physical detail, but also memories, motives, and private thoughts. What visually appears to be a moment can actually span several paragraphs or pages of narrative time. In keeping with the narrative theory of Ricoeur, Green explores different mediations within the narrative. The principal characters live within a predicament of seclusion represented by their physical surroundings, their conflicts and struggles, and surrounded by friends and parents who play an active role in the emplotment. This creates a factor that drives the action to its refigured denouement, i.e., the end of the narrative, in which everything is explained, or the end result of a situation, such as the death of Gus, or meeting Van Heton in Amsterdam.

Many of the adolescent characters in TFIOS are stagnated developmentally due to their experiences with cancer that makes a complicated passage into adulthood. Augustus, Hazel, and Isaac fight to keep cancer from defining who they are. They try to prevent it from consuming not only their time, but also all their very essence. They have different cancer conditions and have to face impending death on a daily basis. However, Hazel and Gus carry out a relationship to envisage the world together; their bond, as time goes on, is both impressive and healthy in a rather unhealthy world. Hazel's disease, stage 4 thyroid cancer developing fluid in her lungs, is diagnosed three months following her first period. She is always seen carrying an oxygen tank as her companion; with a cannula in her nose to facilitate breathing. Hazel also uses a different oxygen machine that she has named “Philip” when she sleeps.

Augustus or Gus is also a cancer survivor who meets Hazel at the Support Group (a network connecting the cancer patients and characters) that his best friend Isaac brings him to. Having his half leg amputated, he remains in remission from osteosarcoma. Gus frequently jokes about the prosthetic leg he wears. Hazel, the narrator, and therefore the reader, learns a lot about him, his opinions, and his family. Even his friend Isaac has a rare form of eye cancer that has caused him to lose one of his eyes and must get the other eye removed. Isaac also wears glasses with such a strong prescription that the lenses look like coke bottles.

Green's style mirrors the main characters' feelings through metaphors and symbols within the passage of the narrative's time, and through their relationship with whoever surrounds them. Green indicates that “[t]he truth is that metaphor and symbol are all around us, and that we are constantly reading our lives and the world symbolically. I want figurative language and symbols to be as deeply integrated into the story as they are into our lives” (Green, n.d.: 3). Throughout the novel, the scope of water symbolism encompasses the powers of destruction and sustainment. Its character is dually displayed as it manifests itself to be both a life force destroyer and a life sustainer. Water is portrayed as a destroyer when Hazel's cancer fills her lungs with fluid and causes her halfway drowning through the course of the novel. The notion of drowning is connected to Hazel's grief and time, particularly the tide.

But she kept asking, as if there were something she could do, until finally I just kind of crawled across the couch into her lap and my dad came over and held my legs really tight and I wrapped my arms all the way around my mom's middle and they held on to me for hours while the tide rolled in (Green, 2012: 267).

Equally important, scenes of water in the novel involve a thematic allusion in the quote from T.S. Eliot's most famous poem 'The Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock' that Hazel knows and memorizes quite well in her community college. In Amsterdam, the poem's closing lines that feature water are recited by Hazel to Gus: "We have lingered in the chambers of the sea/ By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown / Till human voices wake us, and we drown" (Qtd. in Green, 2012: 164). The last line in particular is related to "the suffering of drowning, which suggests she is still preoccupied with causing pain. This line also foreshadows the pain she will later feel over Augustus" (Florman and Kestler, 2016: 2). In contrast, as a symbol of a life force sustainer, water
provides control over disease. In their first day in Amsterdam, Hazel and Gus enjoy a great time, ride through a canal and go to a Dutch restaurant, Oranjee. Hazel sees various boats overcome the water by floating on top of it. The waiter's reference to the stars "we've bottled all of the stars tonight" is related to the title of the novel. "In the title, the stars refer to their fate, but in Amsterdam, the stars have been bottled, suggesting that their fate has been subdued, at least for the moment" (Ibid: 2)

Gus is a heroic character, or let's say Aristotelian tragic hero. For Green, his "journey is not the voyage from weakness to strength. The true hero’s journey is the voyage from strength to weakness. And to my mind, that makes Gus very heroic, indeed" (Green, n.d.: 13). At the start of the novel, Gus seems powerful in his control of his fatal disease. He introduces himself as a new participant at the support center saying that he had a touch of cancer before and he is brought here today upon the request of his friend Isaac. In fact, he is the person who dies at the end of the novel. The metaphoric smoking cigarette is notably connected with Augustus who regularly hangs it unlit out in his mouth. By pretending to control this 'killing thing', Gus seeks to get a certain sense of control over his physical decline. Hazel realizes this when smoking is prohibited:

"Sir, you can’t smoke on this plane. Or on any plane."

"I don’t smoke," he explained, the cigarette dancing in his mouth as he spoke.

"But-"

"It’s a metaphor," [Hazel] explained. "He puts the killing thing in his mouth but doesn’t give it the power do kill him."

The stewardess was flummoxed for only a moment.

"Well, that metaphor is prohibited on today’s flight," she said (Green, 2012: 146).

YAL novels typically revolve around conflicts, emotions and themes that are important to teenagers such as assuming membership in a larger community, becoming independent of one's parents or coming to terms with oneself (Nilsen and Kenneth, 2009: 35-38). YAL novels tend to imbue their protagonists with admirable qualities which allow them to stand up to hardships and give readers someone to admire and model their decisions after (Ibid: 34-35). In a scene that reflects the image of sickness versus wholesomeness, Hazel joins Gus in a picnic to a park featuring a giant skeleton playground called Funky Bones. Gus jokes that he has brought all his romantic conquests here and that is why he is a virgin. He draws a small circle for the 17-year-old boys with one leg within a big one for the virgins.

Even within the unorthodox framework of a love story between two cancer patients, certain reassurances are still given. Augustus turns out to be a virgin – no one will sleep with him because of his physical shortcoming. (Then again, maybe they all turn on their heels when they hear that “humble abode” stuff.) It’s a bummer about the cancer but at least Hazel has bagged herself a hot virgin. She need never know the hell of flicking jealously through Facebook snaps of his ex-girlfriends or future ones, for that matter (Gilbey, 2014: 57).

Hazel and Augustus experience a passage into physical and emotional development that their peers do not attain. Consequently, their chronic disease makes them able to develop deep understandings of life, death, love.

The most gut-wrenching scene in the novel is the Anne Frank House scene later in Amsterdam that shows a combination of pain and joy. For the lack of elevators, Hazel must walk up all the stairs and climb a ladder, which puts a strain on her breathing. The scene was constructed in a manner that affects the feelings of the reader towards Hazel and her cancer; it makes the reader feels upset and worried. Hazel describes this experience with the sort of limitation her cancer disease imposes on her. During the moments of pain, as the voice talks about capturing beauty, "Augustus takes it upon himself to lay a tongue sandwich on his beloved." In this key love scene, "Incredibly the fellow museum-goers applaud en masse" (Gilbey, 2014: 57). This scene may remind the audience that during the time Anne Frank lived in the house there were also joyful moments of love.

The scene is followed by Gus's and Hazel's direction to Gus's room and making love for the first time. "Honestly," Hazel says, "it was probably the longest time we'd ever spent together without talking" (Green, 2012: 208). It is the time when their development occurs by losing their virginity to one another. She leaves him with a love letter in which she draws a big circle of virgins and a small circle of "17-year-old guys with one leg" outside the big circle. Touching his scar as a gesture of acceptance, and struggling together to seize the moment in a sense of humour, form a romantic and realistic scene in which time seems more like a circle of movement in their coming of age. Their fulfillment of love and desire is their way to experience their temporality.

The world of the reader

Throughout the novel the readers attempt to read about the importance of young adolescent love and pain. Hazel and Augustus experience many things that most young adolescents do not undergo, but the significance of how each character handles these hardships is also a great reading for young adolescents. Hazel approaches her disease and the world around her with a healthy dose of
humour and sarcastic remarks. For instance, her first conversation with Gus is quite humorous, as they see Isaac and his girlfriend, Monica, repeating "Always" to one another. They joke about the misuse of the word literally and Isaac's session with Monica:

They were close enough to me that I could hear the weird noises of their mouths together, and I could hear him saying, "Always," and her saying, "Always," in return. Suddenly standing next to me, Augustus half whispered, "They're big believers in PDA." "What's with the 'always'?" The slurping sounds intensified. "Always is their thing. They'll always love each other and whatever. I would conservatively estimate they have texted each other the word always four million times in the last year" (Green, 2012: 18).

Gus explains to Hazel that Isaac's and Monica 'always' if their public display of affection (PDA) or their way of saying they always love each other. "The joke Augustus makes here not only hinges on the absurdity of the number four million, but on the combination between that number and the word "conservatively", which increases the absurdity of the number" (Hazeleger, 2013: 36). John Green also indicates the importance of using the word 'always' in this story:

Well, always is just an inherently ridiculous concept, but of course you want to say it to people you love, right? You want to promise them that you will always love them, that you will always take care of them, that they needn't worry because you're always going to be there. You won't always be there, because at some point you’ll be dead or stuck in traffic or in love with someone else or whatever (Green, n.d.: 8).

Time is ironically misused as Monica will leave Isaac as soon as he becomes blind. Moreover, there is irony in Isaac's name along with his blindness. Asking Green: "Was it just ironic that Isaac went blind? Or was it intentional that his name is EYE-saac and he went blind?" Green answered: "I'm not good at spotting puns or I might've named him something else just because I don't want to distract readers. Anyway, he's named after this Isaac, who also went blind, and who plays a pretty big role in Judeo-Christian-Islamic history" (Green, n.d.:29).

Overjoyed, Hazel in another scene reads the e-mail to Gus and they keep talking until 1:00 AM. Hazel decides it's time to hang up. "Okay," Gus responds. "Okay," Hazel says back and Gus says, "Perhaps our OK will be our always" (Green, 2012: 30) Green further states:

Most of us (me included) don't think about the ridiculousness of what we're actually saying when we say, "I'll love you forever," or "I will always remember this day," or, "I'll never forget" you" or whatever. Like, I say those things all the time, like most people do. But Hazel and Augustus are both a lot more measured in the way they imagine themselves and their love for/responsibilities to other people, hence them adopting "okay" as the word that serves as an expression of their love for each other. It's important to note that forever is not a long time just as infinity is not a large number. Forever is infinite, and it's a very bold to make declarative sentences about infinities (Green, n.d.: 8).

The unfolding of the narrative scene by scene becomes a favourite method of Green's story of a couple who spends hours in joy in spite of their illnesses. "The humor also gets some time to shine", that you continue reading and find yourself "laughing at most of the jokes. But once the couple gets home from Amsterdam, the problems start to pop up again" (Finnigan, n.d.: 2). So grief and humour contribute to making the book enjoyable.

Even though death haunts the scenes, however the story could still be considered a happy one, until Gus's condition deteriorates and is forced to undergo more aggressive treatment. The doctors then decide to take him off the chemo-therapy, and confine him to a wheelchair. His days are now numbered. On his last day in Amsterdam, Gus informs Hazel about his relapse a few weeks ago; he went into the ICU and "went in for a PET scan." He says his scan "lit up like a Christmas tree, Hazel Grace. The lining of my chest, my left hip, my liver, everywhere." "It's not fair," Hazel says. "It's just so goddamned unfair." "The world," he says, "is not a wish-granting factory" (Green, 2012: 213-214). This tragic downwards spiral leads to his death.

Joy and sorrow are fused together to the utter alarm of the reader in TFIOS. "We have bottled all the stars this evening, my young friends", says the waiter at Oranjee in Amsterdam (Green, 2012: 163). This has a greater impact on the characters' lives: the turn of events that they cannot control, or the fleeting moments of beauty that they choose to seize. This happy dinner scene is followed by a terrible scene that produces to the climax, i.e., Hazel's and Gus's meeting with Peter Van Houten to know the answers of their questions. They discover he is not the person they wished to meet. "A shift occurs in the way Hazel feels towards Van Houten which impacts their relation and the conversational tone" (Hazeleger, 2013: 40). Van Houten only responds with philosophical nonsense and interrupts her to deviate their conversation to such topics as Zeno's paradox and Swedish Hip-hop music. He proves uncooperative concerning Hazel's questions:

Nothing happens to the Dutch Tulip Man. He isn't a con man or not a con man; he's God.
He's an obvious and unambiguous metaphorical representation of God, and asking what becomes of him is the intellectual equivalent of asking what becomes of the disembodied eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg in Gatsby. Do he and Anna's mom get married? We are speaking of a novel, dear child, not some historical enterprise (Green, 2012: 191).

Van Houten insults Hazel saying: "You are a side effect of an evolutionary process that cares little for individual lives. You are a failed experiment in mutation" (Green, 2012: 192-3). He treats Hazel as a naive 'child'; she replies to his insult by calling him "douchepants" to his face. He insults Gus's sicknesses as well. Van Houten tries to place himself on the intellectual level and regards Hazel and Gus as intellectually inferior. Losing all respect they ever had for him, Hazel and Gus storm out and leave without getting the answers they desire.

Later in the novel, Van Houten attends Gus's funeral with a change of heart in support of Hazel. This time, the conversational tone has changed as Hazel does force him to answer all her questions. He tells Hazel that his daughter died, and that she reminds him of her.

"You had a kid who died?"
"My daughter," he said. "She was eight. Suffered beautifully. Will never be beatified."
"She had leukemia?" I asked. He nodded. "Like Anna," I said.
"Very much like her, yes."
"You were married?"
"No. Well, not at the time of her death. I was insufferable long before we lost her. Grief does not change you, Hazel. It reveals you."
"Did you live with her?"
"No, not primarily, although at the end, we brought her to New York, where I was living, for a series of experimental tortures that increased the misery of her days without increasing the number of them" (Green, 2012: 285-286).

Hazel now realizes that Peter Van Houten had a daughter who died of cancer, a past event that affected his relationship with her and Gus. Simultaneously, she also asks why time did not heal the grief of his daughter's loss wondering how her death destroyed his personality.

"We all want to be remembered": Memories of the past as part of the present

Rather than simply setting the scene in the present tense, Green allows Hazel to adopt an extratemporal perspective, knowing how to guide us. Ricoeur does not agree with Halbwachs's theory of collective memory - that memory functions are shared in relation to a group - and he argues that "childhood memories are an excellent reference" to the singular and subjective nature of memory. "They take place in socially marked places: the garden, the house, the basement, and so on" yet "the influence of the social setting has become imperceptible to us" in that it shapes our behavior and our memories without us knowing it, becoming "a dimension inherent in the work of recollection." (Ricoeur, 2004: 221-2) It is psychological rather than physical memory; it is this type of memory that Henri Bergson called, in Matter and Memory 1988, 'habit-memory'. In Bergsonian terms, "The memory "no longer represents our past to us, it acts it; and if it still deserves the name of memory, it is not because it conserves bygone images, but because it prolongs their useful effect into the present moment" (Bergson, 1988: 81-82).

Arranging the past events in the characters' memories "confirms perpetually the chronological order of events from which they digress, and in such a way that the intelligibility of remembered events depends on the reconstruction of their chronological order. The representation of memory, in short, does nothing to question the forward movement of time" (Currie, 2007: 78). Although Hazel is expecting her own death, the characters "live in an era where they've been able to slow the progress of their tumors, but not totally get rid of them. So for adolescents like Hazel and Augustus, the future is one big question mark" (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008). Even the idea of the universe and oblivion is prefigured in Green's influence by Kierkegaard, and by Vi Hart "the thinker who most deeply influenced [his] thoughts on the topic, and who gave [him] a vocabulary for talking about it" (Green, n.d.: 2).

Oblivion: the state of being forgotten or unremembered

From the Shakespearean works cited in TFIOS by Van Houten is the Fifty-Five sonnet and the MacLeish poem inspired by it: ("Not marble, Nor the Gilded Monuments," which contains the heroic line "I shall say you will die and none will remember you.") (in Green, 2012: 112). Shakespeare describes time as being sluttish; (What a slut time is. She screws everybody.) This reference enforces the motif of time being against Hazel and Augustus in a humorous effect that refers to the notion of time being a destructive force: the power of time being something which causes decay. The theme of being remembered after impending death is a major theme in TFIOS. As their physical conditions deteriorate, they do not have much more time to live; they think of their existence and place in the world. Augustus believes in the idea of afterlife and fears of fading into oblivion, but not "earthly oblivion", that he would fail to carry out anything meaningful in life to be remembered for after his death. He is obsessed with the idea of dying for something heroic:

I believe humans have souls, and I believe in the
Hazel is fulfilling her own and Gus's wish to die for something. The oblivion fear is something else, fear that I won't be able to give anything in exchange for my life. If you don't live a life in service of a greater good, you've gotta at least die a death in service of a greater good, you know? And I fear that I won't get either a life or a death that means anything (Green, 2012: 168).

There will come a time when all of us are dead. All of us. There will come a time when there are no human beings remaining to remember that anyone ever existed or that our species ever did anything. There will be no one left to remember Aristotle or Cleopatra, let alone you. Everything that we did and built and wrote and thought and discovered will be forgotten and all of this will have been for naught. Maybe that time is coming soon and maybe it is millions of years away, but even if we survive the collapse of our sun, we will not survive forever. There was time before organisms experienced consciousness, and there will be time after. And if the inevitability of human oblivion worries you, I encourage you to ignore it. God knows that's what everyone else does (Green, 2012: 12-13).

Unlike Gus, Hazel's nihilistic perspective of life and death suggests that "It's really mean ... to say that the only lives that matter are the ones that are lived for something or die for something" (Green, 2012: 169). Her pragmatic understanding of the frailty of humanity helps her remain grounded. Gus expresses his desire to give up his wish to live behind some great deed before he dies "to lead an extraordinary life." (Ibid: 169) Hazel reminds him that his parents and she love him and that it should be enough, affirming that it is all worth it. Ironically, at the height of declaring their love for one another, the inevitability of 'oblivion' becomes the most gruesome fear. Gus expresses his love for Hazel in his own grim words:

"[W]hen I died," she says, "they'd have nothing to say about me except that I fought heroically, as if the only thing I'd ever done was Have Cancer" (Green, 2012: 100).

Hazel, however, agrees with Augustus that one should leave a mark on the world to be remembered. She fears of hurting those who love her by her imminent death as did Anna in the fictional novel, *An Imperial Affliction*.

In her speech, sadness is mingled with gratefulness for Gus who grants her 'a forever within the numbered days'. Thus, "[y]ou may want to bring out your calculator and some log paper, but basically Hazel + Gus = infinity tears" (Silman, 2014: 3). They both say "I love you" to each other one last time. Gus dies eight days later. "It was unbearable, the whole thing. Every second worst than the last," narrates Hazel (Green, 2012: 262).

Gus's last act of struggling with his illness and impending death was at a gas station where he calls Hazel in the middle of the night to ask her to come to
rescue him (Green, 2012: 242-247). She finds him covered in his own mucus and vomit, his stomach is infected from the G-tube. John Green was influenced by a poem called “The Red Wheelbarrow” by William Carlos Williams. Hazel recites this poem to Augustus as they wait for the ambulance to arrive, the only poem she could bring to mind. It adds to the emotional impact of this scene. It says,

so much depends upon a red wheel barrow glazed with rain water besides the white chickens (qtd. in (Green, 2012: 246-7).

It contains one sentence of four two line stanzas that describe not just a wheelbarrow but a whole scene, a moment stuck in time. Williams’s strange form of the poem emphasizes the complexity and gravity of reality, but its beauty reflects “the pleasure and importance of observing the universe” (Green, n.d.: 17).

With reference to the narrative theory of Paul Ricoeur, different mediations within the narrative are explored. The main characters in TFIOS are presented in the emplotment with an acute sense filled with physical and psychological struggles and conflicts. Green in some instances uses a highly experimental style of narrative where the reader is provided with the views of other characters. “They are not necessarily focalization shifts, as Hazel is still the one who perceives them and presents them to the implied reader, but they do offer a perspective different from Hazel’s on the situation. These instances are the letters, texts, and emails other characters such as Peter van Houten and Lidewij Vliegenthart write to Hazel or Augustus” (Hazeleger, 2013: 28). Furthermore, the narrator can help the narratee to deduce the characters’ views. However, the eulogy defined by the OED, as “a speech or a piece of writing praising a deceased person, or celebrating a person’s life” Augustus writes for Hazel at the end of the novel is a good example of denouement refiguration.

In the real funeral held for Gus, Hazel is surprised to see Van Houten there and learns that he and Gus were in touch prior to his death, and that Gus had told Van Houten that he could redeem himself by visiting Hazel and answering her questions. The final scene describes Hazel reading Gus’s posthumous eulogy which is different from other eulogies. It is a celebration of Hazel herself; in it he expresses his admiration for her beauty and personality. “He says all the nicest things you could say to anyone ever, about how funny and beautiful she is, and how it’s better to be loved deeply than widely, and how lucky he is to have loved her. “OK, Hazel Grace?” he writes. “OK,” she says” (Silman, 2014: 4). Gus adds that people can choose who hurts them. Gus likes his choice, and he hopes Hazel likes hers. The book ends with Hazel still looking up at the stars, replying, “Okay.” Hazel tells Gus that she does like her choices in life.

Actually, time is a constituent dimension of fiction as it expresses the basic human temporality of the present as a forward movement that will recall the past. The characters of the novel deal with the idea of loss: loss of health, loss of lovers and loss of vision realizing that their days are numbered. Augustus’ and Hazel's views on life and the afterlife are refigured in their strife to be remembered through heroic deeds or not hurting those who surround them with their death. The novel's end is different from its start; Gus, not Hazel, is the person who dies, notwithstanding his apparently control over his disease. Furthermore, Hazel gains a new understanding of life.

The Fault in Our Stars contains marking moments in which Green sought the reader’s high engagement. It addresses the reader as its main narratee in a highly experimental style of narration. “After all, even with their obvious limitations, the characters in this book demand control of their lives and try to make the most of the time they have—even if it turns out to be not so much time at all” (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008). The world of the fiction is a description of the world we see in a metaphorical way. The theme of love is dramatized with admirable refinement in the temporal structure of the novel. If this is so, the researcher may be justified in choosing to speak of love as “an infinite joy in a limited time.” A person may live a good life, though at a limited lifetime. “More generally, says Green, "I wrote this book partly because I was tired of reading stories in which dying or chronically sick people served no purpose in the world except to teach the rest of us to be Grateful For Every Moment or whatever” (Green, n.d.: 28).

The reception of the book:

The book was received well in the U.S. and on the international level; it has sold more than a million copies worldwide. The reviews of TFIOS have been largely positive in The Washington Post that admired the “authenticity of characters engaged in trying to live forever within the numbered days” and praised Green for deftly mixing “the profound and the quotidian in this tough, touching valentine to the human spirit” (Quattlebaum). Publishers Weekly named the book his “best work yet” and Time Magazine stated that the novel was “a good example of why so many adult readers are turning to young adult literature for the pleasures and consolations they used to get from conventional literary fiction” (Grossman; Publishers Weekly). Moreover, Time Magazine named the book their number one best book in the fiction category for 2012, saying that Green has managed to write “with wit, unpretentious clarity and total emotional honesty” (Grossman) (Hazeleger, 2013: 22-23). John Green spent a long time on making video blogs that
As the title of the book indicates, and as Green affirms, the teenagers who suffer from cancer are aware that it is not their fault. In addition to the typical developmental issues of adolescence, Hazel and Gus experience things that many do not have to encounter. The main idea emerging from *TFIOS* seems to be the theme of life and death, joy and suffering, connected with the time structure of the narrative.

To discover the meaning of love and suffering within Green's narrative style, he employs a narrative strategy that uses a linear and nonlinear narrative structure with a surprise ending. Though the fictional narrative reflects the discordance between Augustinian and Aristotelian accounts of time, it is discussed in terms of three dialectically connected mimeses; it is prefigured, configured and finally refigured in its discordant modalities of time, as Ricouer asserts in his theory to establish connections between time and narrative. Human action is prefigured with certain competences. In the emplotment/arrangement of such events that shape mimesis2 to a fictive purpose, the plot is not always linear, or a chronology of events, linked into a narrative structure. It may include mind recollecting scenes from a receding past recalling incidents that actually happened. The act of remembering is given in *TFIOS* to affirm the presence of the past in the narrator's moment or memory. As the narrative proceeds, pieces of Hazel's life unfold in moving back and forth to serve the reader's understanding that the novel is a mirroring of the real world. The novel begins with a culminating event, Hazel's impending death due to her cancer, and ends with the death of Gus.

Gus and Hazel attempt to live according to the support group mantra, "Living our best lives today", through a dialogue about death and oblivion. They try to find a meaning in their life and death. Love gave them the power to fight the disease. Green celebrates life even when it is associated with pain, suffering, and even the unexpected loved one's death.

Though Green explores the idea that reality can be quite different from our fantasies, Hazel is portrayed as romantic and realistic; she imagines things to stand against the disease and to live the last days of her life. Her fear of hurting others after her passing away leads to her obsession with the fictional novel, *An Imperial Affliction*, and by what happened to the family after Anne's death and the novel's abrupt ending. She believes that this knowledge will give her insight into the impact of her death will have on her family. Gus's main goal is to make something of himself before he inevitably passes away, so as not to be forgotten. Their philosophy is more intensified when mingling with the idea of inevitability and death. They know that every human being is bound to die, hence the pressing need to be remembered after their death. Therefore, it is more positive to embrace a full and well-lived life: "Moments of infinite joy within a limited time." Hazel and Augustus in accordance come to terms with their impermanence through their relationship. Augustus is able to realize his one act of heroism by sacrificing his wish from "The Genie Foundation" to take Hazel to Amsterdam. In a meta-textual sense, this act allows him to survive after death, as his story is told in the novel and will continue being accessed by readers of *The Fault in Our Stars*.

Hazel also develops a new understanding of life and death through her relationship with Augustus. Such relationship enables her to step out of her isolation and live her life for the first time, even in the face of her impending death. When Augustus' cancer is out of remission and he passes away, she is able to experience what it is like to lose a person one loves and yet work through it, which allows her to come to terms with the fact that her family will be able to make it through her own death.

In conclusion, it becomes clear that life is defined by the individual's relationships with others, and the meaning of these relationships is demonstrated through the pain felt when a loved one dies. Hazel demonstrates this understanding while reading Gus's eulogy, "Without pain, we couldn't know joy", that death is an event that could allow mortals to live and love to the fullest. Green's message is that although the lives of sick teenagers are cut short, they still lead meaningful lives filled with joy and happiness and not only pain and suffering. Green's creative figuration of time enriched by the employment of his real experience bestows grace and dignity upon his masterpiece, *The Fault in our Stars*.

Conflict of interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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