

Depictions of Youth Challenges in Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* and John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*

Majd Amjed Qudimat
Middle East University, Amman, Jordan

Nasaybah Walid Awajan
Middle East University, Amman, Jordan

Abstract—The study attempts to investigate John Green's and Jennifer Niven's representation of young adult challenges and how they cope with them in their novels, *The Fault in Our Stars* and *All the Bright Places*. Both novels are analyzed by using the lens of postmodernism. The significance of the study lies in its singularity in establishing connections between the chosen novels aiming to find the interrelationship between the struggles, challenges, and issues faced by young adults, and the way they deal with them. It also highlights the power of speaking up and the significance of human connection in supporting young adults. The significance of this study also lies in its singularity in establishing connections between two novels by comparing between them, aiming to find the interrelationship between the struggles, challenges, and issues faced by youth, the way they cope, deal, and interact with them and how these challenges construct their identities and build their characters. Another reason is that the study highlights the power of speaking up and the significance of human connection in supporting young adults in responding to the demands of their lives.

Index Terms—young adult, challenges, mental health issues

I. INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood is a unique developmental period during which there are critical milestones of growth and maturation that allow the young adult to participate in self-exploration and identity formation. This period of transformation, when young people move from childhood to adulthood, is full of immense possibilities and potential. This phase is considered the second most critical developmental period in young people's lives after early childhood. It is also filled with challenges and obstacles. Arnett (2004) affirms that the transition faced when leaving childhood and entering adulthood is a difficult time for emerging adults, laden with many changes and important decisions.

Mitchell (2002) highlights that young adult literature's range and intensity are comparable to any other genre, with recurring themes such as love, death, loss, racism, and friendship, with even more current issues represented. Mitchell (2002) also argues that young adult novels have the power to make certain issues, which are very complicated, concrete, and comprehensible. This genre provides insights into the journey of growing up and navigates the complexities of a young adult's life. It has the power to inspire, empower, and provoke thought, contributing to personal growth, social awareness, and cultural dialogue by depicting the experiences and challenges faced by young adults.

All spheres of life have changed between the past and the present: society, culture, technology, and economy. There are unimaginable differences between youth and their challenges today and in the past. Szafraniec (2019) and Yousef (2024) note that due to social, economic, and cultural changes occurring in the contemporary world, social roles are being profoundly redefined, familiar rhythms of living are being disturbed, and developmental standards are being altered. Because of the rapid advancement of life, there has been a gap between the generations, which is why challenges vary significantly from one era to another.

Contemporary challenges and issues, as mentioned before, are different from those faced by previous generations for many reasons, such as shifts in social norms, technological advancement, and economic changes. In the past, young adults faced challenges that seemed different and less severe than nowadays. However, historically, young adults faced significant challenges such as racial discrimination, limited access to education and career opportunities, social codes and heavy family obligations. They struggled to fit into societal molds amidst economic downturns. Additionally, the lack of education and mental health awareness made these struggles even more daunting.

Crockett and Silbereisen (2000) show a great example of how social changes and new circumstances cause serious challenges for young adults through Elder's (1974) studies of The Great Depression. During the 1930s, the economic downturn created financial strains for many families in the United States, so they had to reduce their expenses and find ways to generate additional income. In response to this challenge, young adult-males initiated income-earning activities earlier than usual by finding work opportunities outside home. In addition, young adult females contributed to the family economy by helping their mothers produce goods for the family's uses. Consequently, young adults gained independence,

exhibited more autonomous behavior, and developed higher self-esteem.

In this contemporary intertwined world, youth are confronted with a myriad of serious challenges and obstacles that constitute their experiences, identities and characters on their journey to adulthood. Contemporary challenges and issues are different and new, and it can be challenging for older generations to relate to or to understand what makes young adults worry today, simply because contemporary life is much more complicated, advanced and developed. These challenges and problems influence young adults' perspectives, aspirations and identities. Coping with such a variety of challenges and issues adds layers of complexity to young adults' lives nowadays.

Young adults' problems initially attracted scholars in the 1920s, and after the Second World War, they grabbed more attention because this genre's audience became much broader. According to Cart (1996), the 1960s would be "the decade when literature for adolescents could be said to come into its own" (p. 43). This genre of literature still occupies one of the most critical places in contemporary literature as it comprises the radical challenges of society.

Contemporary young adult novels contain themes that mirror the problems facing many of today's young people. Stallworth (1998) mentions some of the reflected themes in contemporary literature such as identity, violence, social alienation, illness, relationships, community impact, mental health, marginalization, racism, inequality, faith, social integration, loss, bullying and suicide. These themes are challenges and obstacles that shape young adults' identities, foster their resilience, build their character and promote personal growth. These challenges and obstacles teach essential life lessons, provide valuable learning experiences and strengthen young adults' problem-solving skills. On the other hand, they might draw them into the ocean of lost souls.

Considering the presented topics, the chosen works of the contemporary young adult writers John Green and Jennifer Niven were a case in point because their chosen novels feature young adult protagonists grappling with a multitude of complicated challenges and issues. They also tackle themes of love, racism, friendship, identity and existential questions, often accompanied by sensitive topics such as loss, mental illness, grief and self-discovery. John Green and Jennifer Niven are celebrated for their writing styles and ability to craft compelling narratives that match the experiences and emotions of young adult readers nowadays. Their literary works portray young adult challenges, experiences and emotions, which are relevant and relatable to many young adults who navigate the challenges of young adulthood.

All the Bright Places is a young adult novel written by Jennifer Niven. The novel seems like a regular young adult novel. Still, in fact, it contains interesting events, incidents, and young adult characters that are related to this study when they are analyzed thoroughly. The novel follows the story of Violet Markey and Theodore Finch, two high school students who meet under unusual circumstances and embark on a school project together. As they embark on a journey of exploration filled with both sadness and joy to various places and landmarks in their hometown, Indiana, they discover themselves, and it turns out that this journey of exploration is not only physical but also a spiritual quest of self-discovery. Markey and Finch forge a deep bond with each other as they grapple with their own personal struggles.

The Fault in Our Stars, a novel by John Green, narrates the story of two young adults who fall in love with each other, but their relationship is quite complicated because of their medical conditions. Both Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters suffer from their experiences with cancer. Hazel Grace is a sixteen-year-old girl who has been dealing with thyroid cancer since she was a child. She is in an advanced stage, and her treatment options are limited. She meets Augustus Waters in a support group for cancer patients. Augustus Waters lost his leg to cancer, but his medical conditions are stable at the right moment; he has got Hazel's attention. As they bond over their shared experiences and love for literature, they embark on a journey of love and self-discovery.

The current study aims to explore young adult challenges in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* and Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places*. It also aims to investigate how young adult characters deal with these challenges and issues throughout the narratives. Both novels can serve as an extension to raise awareness for young adults, and assure them that even during struggles and challenges, life can hold moments of joy, beauty, connection and purpose. The significance of this study also lies in its singularity in establishing connections between two novels by comparing between them, aiming to find the interrelationship between the struggles, challenges, and issues faced by youth, the way they cope, deal, and interact with them and how these challenges construct their identities and build their characters. Another reason is that the study highlights the power of speaking up and the significance of human connection in supporting young adults in responding to the demands of their lives.

In the current study, researchers employ a thematic analysis under the umbrella of postmodernism to investigate the challenges young adults confront in Jennifer Niven's novel *All the Bright Places* and John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, in addition to exploring the role of human connection, communication and support systems in helping individuals surpass serious challenges and problems and enhancing the quality of their lives. Grenz (1996) defines postmodernism as an intellectual mood and a range of cultural expressions that challenge the core ideals, principles, and values that lay at the heart of the modern mindset. It refers to the emerging epoch, the era in which we live. This phenomenon encompasses many dimensions of contemporary society. Grenz (1996) claims that the emerging generations are no longer confident that humans will be able to solve the world's great problems and that they perceive life on Earth as fragile. He also claims that they believe that the survival of humankind is now on the line.

II. DISCUSSION

Interpersonal Relationships Challenges

According to Feldman (2000), an interpersonal relationship is a contribution of a person to a well and great relationship through an internal factor within the person himself/herself. Paulhus and Martin (1988) define it as the relation between friends, family and the social circle whom we hang with. In literature, relationships allow scholars to delve deeply into the characters' lives and psychology, as well as to explore the variety of human connection and conflict that shape the characters' inner growth.

There are three categories of interpersonal relationships that are depicted in John Green's novel *The Fault in Our Stars* and Jennifer Niven's novel *All the Bright Places*: romantic relationships, through which challenges of love, and heartbreak are analyzed; familial relationships which capture family members bonds and the tensions between them; friendships, which are a space that provides the characters with support and helps them to discover themselves.

Relationships are meant to be a source of comfort and mutual understanding. They are supposed to be young adults' anchor through hard times, but they sometimes can be challenging for them as they navigate this transitional phase. Especially when young adults experience mental or physical illness, relationships can become significantly challenging. Manne and Badr (2008) mention that Partners or couples deal with challenges, such as worry about the likely loss of their partner and their ability to provide support to the patient.

Social Interaction Challenges

Social interaction is part of human nature. Kurniawan (2012) notes that humans are social beings, they need each other. They go on this complicated journey of forming new relationships and participating in activities adapting to new social, cultural and institutional frameworks because they need to feel a sense of mutual understanding, belonging and connection creating a status of balance that fosters social harmony. But sometimes the interaction between people in society itself shows a conflict or problem (Harris & Orth, 2019). In both novels, social interactions often waver between moments of integration and alienation.

In Green's novel, social interaction is a great mixture of meaningful integration and painful alienation. Hazel and Augustus are exposed to a totally different social experience than other young adults, their social interactions are controlled by the health conditions that their illness implies. Their experience with cancer forces them to live in a world that is defined by medical treatment, hospitals and support groups. Their interactions with others reveal both the healing power of interaction and sometimes a profound isolation that their illness brings.

Hazel's struggle with cancer separates her from normal young adult life which involves attending school, parties, travelling and fun activities. This alienation intensifies when her condition worsens. The way she feels is clear and obvious in her speech to her parents (Green, 2012). Her illness makes her feel like a grenade that might explode anytime, the thing that drives her to push people around her away. She tightens her circle to only include her parents. She fears the pain and grief that her death could cause for her beloved ones. She does not want them to suffer from the feeling of loss.

She meets Augustus in a support group, her relationship with him starts to consolidate which represents integration at its most profound levels. She finds someone who sees the world the same as she does based on their shared experience with cancer. Their bond gives her a sense of personal fulfillment as she has him besides her sharing love and support, until she loses him.

Augustus is more socially connected than Hazel. He attends support groups; he also has his friend Isaac by his side. When his relationship with Hazel develops, he starts feeling more accepted and loved. Their relationship provides him with the courage to confront his fear of being forgotten. But after the aggressive return of cancer, he starts feeling a sting of alienation. His relationship becomes a burden on his shoulder because of his own fears. He fears that Hazel sees him weak and pitiful. He also suffers from losing his sense of control and dignity, so he distances himself from her.

In Niven's novel, social interaction reveals both the beauty and the alienation that can accompany relationships, especially for young adults who face personal struggles. Anwar (2023) states that Violet possesses a limited social network. Violet isolates herself after the tragic car accident. This kind of self-imposed isolation has a profound impact on her ability to interact with others and weakens her social relationships. Although she used to be outgoing, popular, and actively engaged in school activities before, her grief creates a barrier between her and the world of young adults at her age. Her healing journey begins when Finch pushes her to re-engage in activities that help her to confront her grief and overcome it. Her relationship with Finch guides her to the right path and gives her the strength to rebuild her social ability, she starts to trust people, involves herself with them more and experiences joy again. This shows that meaningful relationships can be a powerful force that helps young adults to break free from their struggles because they serve as coping systems.

On the other hand, Finch experiences a paradoxical social world that both embraces and rejects him in different ways. He is sometimes welcomed, loved and accepted, but other times he is bullied, labelled and subjected to stigma because of his mental issues as well as unpredictable behaviour that form a huge challenge for him. His social interactions waver between moments of integration and deeper alienation. Cahya et al. (2022) demonstrate that Theodore Finch underwent social conflicts. The causes of these conflicts refer to the difference in his perception and the difference in his personality.

Navitha and Pettugani (2019) show that most young adults are socially alienated because of the lack of attachment with parents, sudden changes in their comfort zone, lack of interactions with their friends, lack of friendly environment and bullying. Theodore Finch suffers from most of the mentioned elements. He struggles with mental issues and the fear of vulnerability. He believes that if he reveals his mental health issues, he will be judged and labelled. He is already labelled

as a “freak” due to his unpredictable extreme behaviors, and this label frustrates him a lot. He feels like an outsider among his peers, which is the reason that pushes him to avoid interaction furthermore to isolate himself for days, sometimes for weeks, whenever he feels low or overwhelmed. Confronting society, peers and parents adds layers of complexity to his challenges, so he develops self-defense mechanisms by avoiding the pressure of people and social interaction.

On the other hand, Finch maintains good interpersonal relationships with Violet Markey. She symbolizes a haven for him, as she provides him with a space where he feels that he is loved and understood, which encourages him to confront his struggles. She inspires him to unconsciously enhance his coping mechanisms, because her presence alone offers him a sense of stability. She is his companion who colours his life (Niven, 2015). Through his relationship with Violet, he finds some sense of belonging, solace and healing.

Health Challenges: Physical Illness, Mental Illness and Mental Issues

Physical and mental illness reflect the complexities of the human experience. These two novels delve into the challenges that mental and physical illness imply on young adults' lives, their relationships, and the way they perceive life. Physical and mental illness, especially if the physical illness is terminal like cancer, cause immense suffering, pain and loss sometimes accompanied with stigma and isolation. They reshape young adults' identities, the way they perceive life and influence their interpersonal dynamics. Both novels portray how physical and mental illness can be challenging to young adults. Green highlights the impact of stage IV thyroid cancer and osteosarcoma, which are incurable illnesses, on the young adult characters Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters. On the other hand, Niven portrays several mental health issues that confront young adults, with a focus on bipolar disorder, depression, and the effects of unresolved trauma.

Young adulthood is normally marked by its unique emotional, multiple physical and social changes that help young adults to develop their personalities as well as build their identities. But there are young adults with serious illnesses that force them to fight for life every day or count days to live. They are different from other young adults who are in good physical health and have stable minds. Illness redefines young adults' lives. The more complex and incurable the illness is, the harder the challenges and the limitations it imposes, especially if the illness is cancer.

Cancer imposes a range of limitations that significantly affect young adults' daily life and emotional well-being. It makes simple tasks feel overwhelming. It disrupts young adults' routines and plans because of its unpredictable development and furthermore aggressive attacks. As mentioned before, it affects their social interactions, relationships become strained, it also prevents full participation in activities because of the regular medical examinations, appointments and treatments, which lead to alienation or a sense of exclusion from communities. In addition to the fear of being misunderstood or judged because of their bad conditions and sometimes disabilities, young adults fear the future because no one can predict what awaits them and their loved ones.

Green's novel reflects the real image of the struggles and challenges that cancer fighters face. It is about two young adults who suffer from two different types of cancer. Hazel Grace suffers from thyroid cancer that has affected her lungs causing respiratory issues and Augustus Waters suffers from osteosarcoma accompanied with leg amputation. Each of them is a warrior who fights the enemy which was made up from their own cells. As the novel suggests, cancer is a side effect of evolution.

Hazel's cancer physical challenges lie in all the pain that she constantly feels, in addition to the fluid which drains her lungs causing her choking attacks. She always needs to stay connected to supplemental oxygen to compensate for her reduced lung function and because of her weak respiration (Green, 2012). Her physical challenges also lie in the fluid that fills up her lungs. In addition to the physical limitations that restrict her mobility and her ability to engage fully in everyday activities. She often tires quickly, which makes even simple actions such as going upstairs exhausting. Hazel's advanced case has made her dependent, which adds a layer on her challenges.

Augustus is a 17-year-old young adult, who is diagnosed with osteosarcoma. He has his leg amputated after a long battle with cancer. The amputation of his leg prevents him from participating in activities and playing basketball, which is his favourite hobby. He feels discomfort from his prosthetic; he tries to adapt to life with it. At first Augustus appears so pleased with his stable health condition, as he answers when Patreick asks him how he feels (Green, 2012). His chances of living appear to be better than Hazel's, whose health condition grows worse throughout the novel. Unexpectedly, cancer returns to Augustus and spreads aggressively. He becomes more vulnerable, exhausted and independent. He always prides himself on being strong and in control, which makes the way his illness strips him of his physical capability hard for him to accept.

On the emotional level, dealing with cancer symptoms alongside life goals adds layers of stress, exhaustion and complexity to the character's life. It also contributes to their mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression. Besides, cancer affects the way they perceive life, its physical limitations defeat their dreams, ambitions and confidence. Both experience feelings of regular fear, pain and sadness. Furthermore, they feel overwhelmed because of the bad conditions they are put in.

The most emotional portrayal of cancer's reality is Augustus himself after the aggressive return of his cancer. Soon enough he loses his strength, and Hazel is forced to witness all the disgrace and pain her lover suffers from. Augustus becomes terrified and pitiful while trying to hide his feelings from his family and from her. His deepest fears are losing control, living unnoticed and to be forgotten. He fears oblivion but he ultimately confronts fears. Jebaselvi and Sivakumar (2022) portray the emotional and the psychological struggle of young adult cancer patients. The study shows that the emotional complications which are not dealt with can lead to anxiety, sadness, withdrawal, or no interest in living. Onthoni

et al. (2022) conclude that Hazel Grace is in a dominant state of anxiety because of her illness. Anxiety has an adverse impact on the social interaction of the patient. Hazel's worry about her parents and Augustus and the way she tries to isolate herself because she does not want anyone to get hurt or suffer from the pain of her loss, prove that she is trapped in a loop of worry and anxiety (Green, 2012).

Mental issues and disorders impose serious challenges on young adults' lives. Whether these challenges and the struggles are diagnosed mental illness or just mental issues which arose in response to stress or specific situations, they are still a burden that falls heavily on young adults' shoulders. Young adults who confront mental challenges start to have mood swings; their social engagement and their behaviour usually change which impacts their ability to function. It is important to highlight that mental issues can develop into a mental illness if they are left unaddressed although they are generally less severe and often situational. In contrast, mental illness or disorder is more persistent and more recurring, with a deeper impact on young adults' lives.

Anwar (2023) mentions that *All the Bright Places* provides a platform of psychological and social problems. It delves into the complexity of two young adults' minds and the emotional struggles that accompany their psychological challenges. Each one of them has their own struggles and challenges which eventually push them to attempt suicide at the ledge of the school's bell tower, where they first meet.

Finch is an unstable young adult who fights alone in a battle against his asleep periods, racing thoughts of death and suicide, as well as mood swings. His young adulthood phase is marked by intense mood swings, deep depressive periods or manic episodes, insomnia or hypersomnia, lack of interest and recurrent thoughts of worthlessness or guilt. These symptoms that are clearly portrayed in the novel indicate that he suffers from depression which makes him feel detached and exhausted.

According to Krog (2023), Finch has no established or named mental diagnosis, but he struggles with a variety of symptoms. He addresses his symptoms such as awakening and sleep, which reflect his alternating periods of depression and mania. When he experiences the asleep period, he isolates himself and avoids any kind of social interaction (Niven, 2015). He prefers being awake, because he has a lot of energy during this period, this energy allows him to engage in physical activities and fall in love. Krog (2023) sees that these alternating periods of depression and manic episodes align with the American Psychological Association's definition of bipolar disorder.

Ratushima (2017) concludes his study of Finch's mental health with the following result, all the constant verbal and physical abuses from his father or from his peers who bully him at school make his mental illness, which is bipolar disorder, develop. Finch's external conflict affects his mental stability leading to internal struggles. Bipolar disorder has two states or episodes as it is called, and it is possible to have a mix of both episodes. He mostly experiences mixed episodes as mentioned before. He is described as depressed, moody, suicidal, aggressive, smart, caring, and anxious. All these descriptions reflect Finch's suffering from a mental illness, especially bipolar disorder.

Violet is not officially diagnosed with mental illness but suffers from clear symptoms that appear throughout the novel as challenges that she tries to get rid of. Everything starts after she loses her beloved sister Eleanor in a car accident. Before her sister's death, Violet had a close, cozy relationship with her older sister, she was her role model and her best friend. They shared interests, both loved writing as well as running online magazines. Violet and her sister shared a strong bond filled with laughter, dreams, and mutual hobbies. Eleanor gave her a sense of purpose; she encouraged and inspired her to live a wild young adult life. But after Eleanor's traumatic death, Violet becomes a new girl without purpose, she feels lost and detached, she struggles to reconstruct her identity without her sister by her side. She also suffers from survivor's guilt, especially when she tells her sister to take the road on which the accident occurs, and she is the one who survives. This feeling of guilt compounds her grief which prevents her from going back to her normal life and living it fully like she once did with her sister.

Hermanto and Prasaja (2023) analyze Violet's character using Freud's Theory of Personality and show that Violet's car accident and her sister's death have an impact on her psychology. The mental effects that she experiences consist of anxiety, trauma, depression and suicide. Her mental instability, her struggle with sadness, guilt and grief, push her to lose her interest in social interaction as well as engagement in school activities. All these challenges eventually lead her to have suicidal thoughts.

Abu Bakar and Abidin (2020) prove that the novel has explored depression and suicide. According to Abu Bakar and Abidin (2020), all elements of cognitive distortions in Beck's cognitive theory of Depression are evident in the novel such as all-or-nothing thinking, magnification and minimizing, overgeneralization, mental filter, personalizing, jumping to conclusions, labelling, mind reading, emotional reasoning and disqualifying the positive. Each element is portrayed to varying degrees as shown by the two main characters Finch and Violet. Violet's depression is characterized by her weak social interaction and lack of motivation.

Trauma

Trauma manifests itself in the effect of a physical or mental painful catastrophe and the extreme circumstances that an individual goes through, which might cause damage to the body or shock to the mind. There are different viewpoints on the nature of the bond between trauma and literature but all the theorists who are specialized in analyzing the connection between trauma and literature agree that literature can deal with various traumatic experiences with specificity and is able to portray the exclusive nature of each experience in its social and cultural contexts Davis and Meretoja (2020). The chosen novels examine the traumatic experiences of the main characters and the ways they respond to it.

The characters cope with the trauma of being cancer victims. The novel illustrates the traumatic lives of Augustus and Hazel that are haunted by their painful experiences with illness. The two main characters confront the psychological consequences of dying (Green, 2012). Augustus' and Hazel's fear of death unfolds through their relationship as they keep discussing and thinking about their lives and shared experiences together. They appear to be preoccupied with finding an answer to the question of what will happen after they die. The shadow of death does not just haunt them, it also reshapes their priorities, relationships and the way they find meaning in their life. Peter (2015) shows that trauma theory can be applied easily in Green's novel since the effect of grief and trauma are evident in the surface level of the narrative.

Thyroid cancer has caused Hazel to be traumatized; she always keeps thinking about death. Her daily routine is ruled by medical treatments and appointments which is unusual at this age. She was thirteen when she was first diagnosed with cancer, she grew up threatened by sudden death. The fluid that fills her lungs gets worse each time which causes her panic attacks that it will be her last day each time she enters the hospital (Green, 2012). This demonstrates how traumatic Hazel's experience with her deadly illness is.

Likewise, Augustus' trauma stems from his illness in addition to the existential fears it brings. Cancer strips him of his sense of ability as well as control. It makes him feel helpless as it forces him to be dependent on what he detests the most. His deepest fear is oblivion, that is the reason why he always tries to leave an unforgettable legacy behind him. When his illness comes back aggressively, he becomes traumatized by the realization that his life might end before he can achieve his goals. For him, he would not consider himself remembered at all if he was not remembered greatly (Green, 2012). Augustus yearns to do something heroic before he dies. He wants to be remembered for something great but being a cancer patient has made his dream a million times more difficult to achieve.

Mahdani (2023) notes that many of the inner problems the characters must deal with are brought on by prior traumas and open wounds that have never healed. Gorat's (2020) study proves that the two main characters are found suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. Gorat (2020) also mentions that an accident which involves death, bullying and a bad family environment are the causes of their traumatic experiences.

Finch's traumatic experience lies in his turbulent dysfunctional family, bullying and his struggles with mental illness. Finch is haunted by his past which is filled with violence and rejection, his father used to physically and emotionally abuse him and his mother when he was young. His father abandoned them and started a new family, but he still holds Sunday meetings in which he never misses a chance to bother Finch. Finch always feels like an outsider even at his school where he is bullied and labeled as a "freak" by his peers. He also is traumatized by his battle with his undiagnosed bipolar disorder which manifests in extreme mood swings, unpredictable behaviour and the periods.

Violet's trauma lies in the loss of her sister Eleanor in a car accident. Violet blames herself and holds herself responsible for the accident because she was the one who told Eleanor to take Bridge Street that night. She becomes consumed by her grief which makes her withdraw from her past life's activities, hobbies and even her friends. Her trauma manifests in her feeling of fear, guilt, avoidance and anything that reminds her of her sister, including writing. Violet creates barriers between her and socializing to protect herself from further pain. Edeh (2023) notes that Finch and Violet experience trauma and conflicts that influence them to become who they are. Peter (2015) states that the central claim of contemporary literary trauma theory is that trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity. Finch breaks down and escapes from his challenges by committing suicide, whereas Violet gains a profound understanding of how to keep living and build resilience.

Existential Challenges: Life, Destiny and Fate

Life is a complex journey filled with purpose and uncertainty. It portrays an image of the possibilities which are shaped by personal choices and the forces that go beyond people's control. Some of the characters in both novels carve out their own futures, meanwhile some of them are just forced to face their fate. These characters face dilemmas that influence their moral values and aspirations. Their unpredictable lives may lead to either triumph or tragedy. Fate adds a layer of complexity, because it is predetermined, and it is beyond human control. When the main characters of the novels mentioned embark on their journeys, they confront existential questions about their purposes and the meaning of their lives. Existential challenges arise from the fundamental questions of existence that the characters start to have such as the meaning of life, the purpose, and the inevitability of fate. Fate is often connected with loss and the unpredictability of the future. The characters face challenges in accepting the inevitable twists of life such as incurable illness and death. Together, life, destiny, and fate form existential challenges and struggles for all the characters. Peter (2015) notes that existential agony is a concept that is in general held to be a negative feeling which arises from the experience of human freedom and responsibility. Xayrulloeva (2023) emphasizes that the characters suffer from challenges of the inevitability of fate, accepting harsh realities and the inevitable defeat faced by cancer patients in their inglorious battle. Anusi et al. (2017) illustrate how fate can be challenging to young adults. They add that fate separates Hazel and Augustus, ends their love story and their hope of being together, it also leaves Hazel with the agony of loss.

Hazel believes that her death will be devastating to the ones who love her, and it will hurt them, especially her parents and Augustus. Through the novel Hazel seems to be preoccupied with searching for answers to her questions at the end of her favourite book *An Imperial Affliction*. She wants to find out what happens to the characters after Anna's death, especially her mother who is left alone. She compares Anna's mother to her mother. That is the reason why she becomes obsessed with the ending and tries to reach out to the author just to calm herself on what will happen to her own parents after her death. She tries to minimize the impact of her death on others to protect them from the pain of losing her. Peter

(2015) mentions how Hazel's philosophical standpoint changes through her strong bonds with Augustus.

On the other hand, Augustus Waters sees life from his idealistic viewpoint, he is determined, and he craves to leave a great legacy after he dies. Regardless of his struggles with cancer, he strives to live his life to the fullest and refuses to let his illness control him or define him. He is concerned with making an everlasting impact on this world because he wants to be remembered. Life is his opportunity to create a meaningful impact. He enjoys being in control, this is evident through his metaphor for the unlit cigarettes. He carries a cigarette and places it in his mouth to show that he can face danger without giving it the power to destroy him. He approaches life with a sense of humor and charm, masking his weakness.

When his health conditions deteriorate, Augustus struggles with the loss of his independence and the shocking reality that he may not achieve his goal of leaving a grand legacy which he has always hoped to achieve. This twist forces him to realize the value of personal connections. When Hazel reads "*I got my wish, I suppose. I left my scar*" (Green, 2012, p. 313). Hazel realizes that Augustus desires to be remembered after his death, which is his main purpose. This mentioned quotation emphasizes the dual nature of pain in the novel. The scar Augustus leaves is an emotional scar which brings pain to Hazel.

Deeb (2016) notes that love gives them both the power to fight their disease. Their philosophical perception of life intensifies when the idea of inevitability and death are intertwined. They are aware that human beings are bound to die, hence the pressing need to be remembered. Hazel's experience of losing Augustus allows her to recognize the fact that her family will be able to make it through her own devastating death. Life is defined by the individual's relationships with others, and the meaning of these relationships is conveyed through the pain which is felt when a loved one dies.

Both Finch and Violet experience existential challenges. Finch's existential challenges stem from his struggle to find meaning in a world where he feels like he is out of place. His undiagnosed mental disorder makes him doubt and alienates himself. He strives to be understood, but his fear of labels, rejection and his unpredictable behavior push people around him away. Finch's existential challenges also lie in his search for a purpose that can make him hold on to life. He is deeply empathetic and attuned to the beauty in the little things, finding joy in moments others might overlook. Rahmawati (2021) lists the reasons behind Theodore's frequent suicide attempts that led him eventually to end his life successfully. The inferior feeling caused by his mental illness, his low self-esteem, his striving for superiority whenever a schoolmate bullies him, his style of life, social interest, creative power and the desire to decide on his own death.

Finch's perception of life is so badly influenced by his mental health challenges. He sometimes views life as boundless and full of chances, when he is in his awakening status. But during his depressive episodes, asleep as he refers to, his perspective shifts. Life feels overwhelming and meaningless. He struggles with a constant inner conflict between these two episodes, which shapes his random behaviors and unstable relationships. His connection with Violet offers him a sense of purpose temporarily, but his unresolved issues and pain, in addition to his inability to escape from his inner struggles force him to view life as something he cannot sustain. His negative perception of life reflects the depth of his challenges and the profound impact of mental illness on his life perception.

Rahmawati (2021) notes that Finch's feeling of inferiority enhances his thoughts of committing suicide. Finch also strives hard to overcome his mental illness by acting as if he is superior, which is clear in his rebellious behavior. She also mentions that his chaotic lifestyle contributes to his instability. Azzaharah (2023) notes that everyone controls his choices since they are free to choose whatever they want. Everyone has the right to make their decision, and they also have reasons for their choice.

On the other hand, fate interrupts Violet's quiet life. When it steals her only sister from her leaving her struggling with existential challenges. Her perspective on life revolves around her grief and her sister's loss in the car accident. She has all these questions in mind about why she is the one to live and Eleanor is the one to die. She struggles with survivors' guilt, she blames herself and she believes that she does not deserve to move forward, she thinks it would be a betrayal to her sister. Violet begins to overcome her existential challenges and starts to change the way she perceives life after her relationship with Finch develops.

He challenges her to step outside her social restrictions that are put by her, he also pushes her to overcome the past and embrace the present. He opens her eyes allowing her to rediscover the beauty of the world through their wander. Violet learns to connect with life and find meaning even in the small and unseen moments. Her perception of life shifts to resilience and hope because of Finch, whose influence helps her to understand that even during pain and grief, life is worth living. In the end, Finch's tragic destiny forces Violet to accept the fact of the unpredictability of fate as well as life. She also learns that it is important to cherish every single moment in life with those who she loves before fate steals them from her.

III. CONCLUSION

The Fault in Our Stars and *All the Bright Places* share both similarities and key differences, reflecting the diverse plethora of young adult challenges. The characters in both novels experience distinct yet overlapping challenges that demonstrate their personal struggles. Hazel and Augustus in *The Fault in Our Stars* struggle from the physical burdens of their terminal cancer and the emotional consequences that accompany their illness. In contrast, Finch and Violet in *All the Bright Places* battle their mental health issues and illness. Finch confronts bipolar disorder and feelings of alienation, while Violet struggles with grief and survivor's guilt after her sister's death. Another difference that is observed is the familial atmosphere of the characters; Augustus, Hazel and Violet enjoy good familial relationships which serve as a

source of support and understanding. Meanwhile, Finch's familial relationships are bad, which is another factor that contributes to his tragic end. The three mentioned characters managed to overcome their struggles and to start a new beginning except Finch whose struggles exceeded his capacity leading him to end his life as a way of escape. Despite these differences, the four characters share common challenges, including illness, emotional challenges, and the difficulty of finding meaning and purpose in life amidst hardship.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the Middle East University in Amman, Jordan, for their financial support granted to cover the publication fee of this research article.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abu Bakar, M., & Abidin, Z. (2020). A Study of the Elements of Depression in *All the Bright Places* 2015. *E-Academia Journal*, 9(1), 33-43. DOI: 10.24191/e-ajeaj.v9i1.9520
- [2] Anusi, A., Yusuf, F., & Helmeta (2017). *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green. *Jurnal Ilmiah Langue and Parole*, 1(1), 158-166.
- [3] Anwar, J. (2023). Analysis of *All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven through Freud's Psychoanalysis and Emile Durkheim's Theory of Social Integration. *JOUR*.
- [4] Arnett, J. (2004). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [5] Azzaharah, N. (2023). *Violet's Search for Meaning of Life in All the Bright Places Novel (2015) by Jennifer Niven: An Existentialist Criticism*. Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.
- [6] Cahya, T., Fanani, A., & Amiq (2022). Theodore Finch's Social Conflict in *All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven. *Journal of English Education Literature and Linguistic*, 5(1), 12-20. <https://doi.org/10.31540/jeell.v5i1.1596>
- [7] Cart, M. (1996). *From romance to realism: 50 years of growth and change in Young Adult literature*. New York: HarperCollins.
- [8] Crockett, L., & Silbereisen, R. (2000). Social Change and Adolescent Development: Issues and Challenges. *Faculty Publications, Department of Psychology*.
- [9] Davis, C., & Meretoja, H. (2020). *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma* (pp. 1-7). Routledge: Abingdon and New York.
- [10] Deeb, G. (2016). Moments of Infinite Joy within a Limited Time: The concept of Time in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*. *International Journal of English and Literature*, 7(8), 112-126.
- [11] Edeh, E. (2023). *Past Trauma Depicted in All the Bright Places*. A Thesis: Universitas Negeri Jakarta.
- [12] Elder, G. (1974). *Children of the Great Depression: social change in life experience*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- [13] Feldman, R. (2000). *Social Psychology: Robert S. Feldman*. Pearson College Div.
- [14] Gorat, R. (2020). The Influence of Traumatic Experience in Jennifer Niven's Novel *All the Bright Places*. *Morphosis: Journal of Literature*, 2(2). <http://openjournal.unpam.ac.id/index.php/MPS/index>. Retrieved on 13th August, 2023.
- [15] Green, J. (2012). *The Fault in Our Stars*. Dutton Books: New York.
- [16] Grenz, S. (1996). *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- [17] Hall, C. (2014). Bereavement theory: Recent developments in our understanding of grief and bereavement. *Bereavement Care*, 33(1), 7-12. doi:10.1080/02682621.2014.902610
- [18] Harris, A., & Orth, U. (2020). The link between self-esteem and social relationships: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 119(6), 1459–1477. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000265>
- [19] Hermanto, V., & Prasaja, Y. (2023). Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) in Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places*. *Uncolles*.
- [20] Jebaselvi, M., & Sivakumar, M. (2022). John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*: Psychological Review of Adolescents with Cancer. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(2), 4209–4213.
- [21] Kaplan, J. (2005). Young adult literature in the 21st century: Moving beyond traditional constraints and conventions. *The Alan Review*, 32(2), 11-18.
- [22] Kaplan, J., & Hayn, J. (2012). *Teaching Young Adult Literature Today: Insights, Considerations, and Perspectives for the Classroom Teacher*. Rowman & Little field Publishers: Lanham.
- [23] Konopka, G. (1973). "Requirements for Healthy Development of Adolescent Youth". *Adolescence*, 4, 291-315.
- [24] Krog, H. (2023). *Representations of Mental Illness in Young Adult Literature a Comparative Analysis of Turtles All the Way Down, All the Bright Places, and Highly Illogical Behaviour*. Norwegian University of Science and Technology.
- [25] Kumar, V., Alshazly, H., Idris, S., & Bourouis, S. (2021). Evaluating the Impact of COVID-19 on Society, Environment, Economy, and Education. *Sustainability*, 13(13642). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132413642>
- [26] Kurniawan, H. (2012). *Teori, metode dan aplikasi sosiologi sastra* [Theories of literary sociology]. Graha Ilmu.
- [27] Mahdani, V. (2023). *Inner Conflicts of The Main Characters in The Novel All the Bright Places: A Study of Literature Psychology*. Bosowa University.
- [28] Mitchell, D. (2002). *Young adult literature*. NCTE Cyber Brief.
- [29] Navitha, J., & Pettugani, S. (2019). A study on social alienation among adolescents. *The Pharma Innovation Journal*, 8(4), 534-537.
- [30] Niven, J. (2015). *All the Bright Places*. Alfred A. Knopf: New York.
- [31] Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at School: What we know and what we can do*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.
- [32] Onthoni, U., Rorintulus, O., & Lolowang, I. (2022). Anxiety in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*. *Journal of Teaching English, Linguistics, and Literature*, 1(2), 316-330.
- [33] Paulhus, L., & Martin, M. (1988). Functional flexibility: A new conception of interpersonal flexibility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55, 88-101.
- [34] Peter, R. (2015). The Struggle for Existence in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* in the Light of Existentialism. *ReTeLL*, Vol.

15. https://www.sjctni.edu/retell/content/2015_%20Roshini%20Peter_11-12-2019_11.pdf. Retrieved on 13.12.2022
- [35] Rahmawati, S. (2021). *Theodore Finch's Suicide in All the Bright Places Novel by Jennifer Niven (2015): A Psychological Perspective*. Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.
- [36] Ratushima, C. (2017). *Theodore Finch's Bipolar Disorder in Jennifer Niven's All the Bright Places*. Universitas Dian Nuswantoro.
- [37] Said, N. (2022). *The Love Conflict in Green's The Fault in Our Stars*. Hasanuddin University, Makassar.
- [38] Saputri, F. (2021). *The Conflicts Experienced by The Main Characters in Jennifer Niven's Novel: All the Bright Places*. Universitas Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim.
- [39] Stallworth, J. (1998). The Young Adult Literature course: Facilitating the Integration of Young Adult Literature into the High School English Classroom. *The ALAN Review*, 26(1), 25–30.
- [40] Szafraniec, K. (2019). Challenges and life orientations of youth. The context of transition countries. *Sociologija*, 61(2), 186-209. DOI:10.2298/SOC1902186S
- [41] World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Health and well-being*. <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/major-themes/health-and-well-being#:~:text=Mental%20health%20is%20a%20state,to%20his%20or%20her%20community>. Retrieved on 23 November, 2024.
- [42] Xayrullojeva, S. (2023). The Thematic Analysis of John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*. "Involta" *Innovation Scientific Journal*, 2(1), 27-31.
- [43] Yousef, N. T. (2024). Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives: Samiha Khrais's *The Tree Stump* as a Historical Novel. *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences*, 52(2), 495–508. <https://doi.org/10.35516/hum.v52i2.5165>

Majd Amjed Qudimat is an MA holder of English language and Literature.

Nasaybah W. Awajan is an associate professor at the English Language and Translation Department at Middle East University. She earned her PhD from The University of Jordan in English Literature. Awajan has been the Head of English Language and Translation department for two years. She taught as a part time lecturer at The Arab Open University and The University of Jordan. She also worked as an Academic Advisor for English Language teacher students and as the Academic Reading and Writing Lead at Queen Rania Teacher Academy. Her academic work is deeply rooted in the exploration of postcolonialism, Islamophobia, and political theatre, reflecting her commitment to addressing critical social and cultural issues through literary analysis. Awajan's research delves into the intersections of power, identity, and representation, particularly in the context of marginalized voices and the impact of colonial legacies. Awajan has supervised more than 20 MA theses that tackle topics on postcolonial literature, Shakespeare, Contemporary literature and feminist issues.