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## Dread, Death, Dasein: An Existential Study of *The Fault in our Stars* by John Green

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**Abstract:** *This particular study aims to interpret and analyze The Fault in our Stars by John Green, to find out certain existential elements like Dasein, Dread and Death. Dasein as Joseph Childers (1995) mentions that Dasein for Heidegger is a way of being involved with and caring for the immediate world in which one lives, (p 70), Dread which for Kierkegaard that anxiety is a way for humanity to be saved as well, and Death as mentioned by Frank For Sartre at the point of death the person does not have a past, as he or she is now dead and cannot continue to write in the log of the present, rather, a person then becomes his or her past. While conducting this particular study a qualitative textual analysis technique has been used as method.*

**Key Words:** Existentialism, Dread, Death, Dasien, The Fault in our Stars, John Green

### Introduction

This novel by John Green (2012) *The Fault in Our Stars* is apparently a gloomy love narrative of two teenagers Hazel and Augustus. Both of them are having cancer. While reading the novel, tears may come in ones eyes when see their courage during suffering from a life of threatening disease. What the researcher observed the most is their belief in their own existence. The girl Hazel considers herself to be as a cancer perk, and a walking grenade. On the other hand Augustus fears oblivion; and so aims to find meaning in his own existence. This particular novel by John Green (2012) deals with the certain themes of existentialism like Dasein, Dread and Death. This particular study aims to illustrate these themes under the theoretical frame work of existentialism, while using contextual analysis technique.

In the novel when Hazel and Augustus begin their journey of love, they are fully excited and hopeful. Hazel calls their love story as an epic as she mentioned once in the novel and she even expresses

her feeling while calling her love connection as an epic. (pp. 20, 73) Touhami, Ibtissam (n.d) mentioned that there love affair is not different in affection from that of Romeo and Juliette but their relationship is not of a simple kind of love story. They have an unusual and full of complications affair. They face difficulties with weak and miserable health issues. They have worries regarding the progressing cancer tumor that they are almost helpless to stop; their parents are worried for losing their beloved offspring because of the deadly disease. Even the cure, medications and medical apparatus used during treatment are like an alarming/threatening reminder to remind them of their helplessness in such uncertain conditions if they will get rid of this cursed health (p 2). Due to such kind of condition their upcoming life is uncertain and so is their whole existence. While suffering from cancer both the teenagers Augustus and Hazel are spending much more time in thinking just to realize the spirit of their life on the contrary to other kids of their age. As the young characters are aware of their minimum time so

both of them feels that they should know all about their existence. Touhami, Ibtissam (n.d) commented that throughout the narrative the author through his strong characters and actions performed by these characters displays an impressive elaboration of stream of consciousness revealing the elements of abandonment, despair and torment of suffering (p 2).

It is tough to explain Existentialism in one single sentence, yet again the basic concept of the philosophy of Existentialism is that it is the individual who constitutes his or her essence of life and as per Sartre (1948) existence precedes essence, also explained by Touhami, Ibtissam (n.d) when he states that every individual is free and very much aware to act independently. Every individual is empowered to act according to his/her free will. This free will and independence once adopted by any tormented individual may also be labeled stereotypes later on. Sartre, P, Jean (2014) writes as quoted in *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1948) ...*man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards*. Same in the novel *The Fault in our Stars* the two main teenagers go ahead from the phase that in which they are cancer patients to the other phase that is of individuals who regardless of the facticity, also have a free will to make decision knowingly in order to have control over their life, while creating values of their own and meaning of their existence.

### Research Objectives

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- To explore understanding of life of the main characters in the novel
- To point out certain existential elements like, Dread and Death and Dasein.

### Research Questions

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- Which main characters in the novel search for the reason of their existence?
- How the main characters in the novel experience Dasein, Dread and Death?

### Theoretical Framework

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While conducting this particular study, existentialism has been used as a theoretical framework that has been defined in *Oxford Living Dictionaries* as a philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and

responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will. Existentialism is a philosophy of life emerged in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century by different European philosophers introduced different existential concepts differently, but they commonly believed that the deep philosophy is developed by ordinary human thinking and having general human subjects. Along with that the general living, feeling, thinking and acting by a general human being in a specific situation also leads to originate a deepest. Flynn Thomas (2006) stated that the chief assessment of existentialist philosophy attributes to be freedom and its important feature is legitimacy. Existentialists approach is that a sense of disorientation, unpredictable and uncertain circumstances and seemingly chaotic and irrational world is what could be rightly called as *The existential attitude*.

### Research Methodology

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Qualitative textual analysis has been used while conducting this particular study. It is the analysis and interpretation of a subject matter during research work in which researcher judges and interprets the subject matter, in terms of its configuration. For this purpose, the analytical and explanatory methods have been used for current study. This study is analyzing and interpreting the selected novel John Green's novel (2012) *The Fault in our Stars* published by DUTTON BOOKS in 2012 in USA in order to find out some certain Existential themes as for instance Dasein, Dread and Death. The study encompasses different perspectives of the existentialism with special reference from the text and major characters. It mainly focuses on the how individuals act when their existence is in danger while facing some adverse situations. The study aims to find out an acceptable solution to some stereotypes that resides within societies.

### Discussion and Analysis

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Existentialism in the broader sense is a 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy that focuses individuals existence, free will and making choice. According to this philosophy it is an individual who defines his or her own purpose in life and try to make lucid pronouncements even though existing in an absurd universe. In certain Existential elements *Dasein* refers both to the human beings and to the type of

beings that humans have. The root meaning of the noun is being there or being here. According to Heidegger the primary objective of phenomenology of *Dasein* is an approach that takes human being from a physical world to metaphysical world. And self ego is the major component which plays the central part. This novel search out *Dasein* in everydayness. To believe in one's self, like the characters of Hazel and Augustus have and the capability of doing something less general and more special is the true essence of *Dasein*. This explanation concludes that only thinking isn't the only technique of being *Dasein*. It emphasizes the question of human existence, and that there is no meaning in it. Certain themes of existential thought therefore add the dependability of our everyday interpretations of our personal approaches as compared to others, the relation between impartial facts and individual familiarity, the significance of the impermanence and mortality of life, the basic nature of relationships between people, and the role of society in the structure of the individual. Heidegger believes that an individual has to be very much aware of their personal responsibility for oneself although with this responsibility a situation of philosophical torment or anxiety may produce. It therefore concludes how an individual act while being free to decide according to own choice. The idea is that one has to rise above the absurd condition (suffering and unavoidable death) by practicing his or her personal freedom and choice. (Green 66)

In the novel *The Fault In our Stars*, Hazel remains passive as life happens to her, is limited due to cancer, she doesn't take seriously if she lives or dies as she thinks of herself as a cancer's perk, and a walking grenade that will definitely hurt everyone around her one day as she says:

Hazel says I didn't slip away. I was left on the shore with the waves washing over me, unable to drown (Green 34)

The dread that is one of the existential concepts is considered to be the one that shapes the existential concept of life is found in the lines of this particular novel quoted below in which we see Hazel explains her parents the logic behind her mindset that why she does not want to make relations with others. She thinks she is going to die soon because of the life threatening cancer and her death may hurt people around her because they would not be ready to see

me die and leave them behind. As in chapter six of the novel Hazel says:

I'm not depressed. I do not want to get out and I cannot be a teenager like other ones, as I'm a grenade (Green 31)

In the novel we also come across one of the basic philosophies of existentialism that every individual seeks meaning in his or her existence as we see Hazel's obsession after the reading of *An Imperial Affliction*, she wants to know that what would have happened to other characters in her favorite book *An Imperial Affliction*. She is seeking an answer for his quest to know about the other surviving characters in the book that is representing her own quest to find the meaning in her life and also after life, as she says in chapter fifteen of *The Fault in our Stars* *An Imperial Affliction* was my book, in the way my body was my body and my thoughts were my thoughts. (Green 2) And later in the novel we can observe Hazel begins to live and love on contrary to remain passive in life. She just realizes the significance of life. She is now of the view that life is more important because of the little but happy moments in it and accomplishments, not because of the number of days. Her vision can be observed when she writes a eulogy for Augustus. She mentions in chapter twenty of the novel:

I just wish for more numbers than I am expected to get, and God, I wish more numbers for Augustus Waters than he obtained. But Gus, my love, I cannot tell you how much grateful I am for our little infinity. I would not give it for the world. You gave me a everlastingly within the few days, and I am thankful. (Green 59).

Although Hazel and Augustus had very limited time to pass together but was very valuable and so they count it up as infinity. Hazel has been made aware of herself by Augustus. He assisted her while fulfilling her strong desire to see the writer of her favorite book *An Imperial Affliction*. Augustus Waters changed her understanding of life as she used to consider herself merely cancer perk and to be a grenade that may explode any time to ruin others life. Now she considers herself the one who may cause to bring change in one's life and that is the central idea of the novel that John Green wanted to make us know. John Green expresses his theory through the mouth of his character Augustus water when he is

trying to make Hazel realize about the significance of her deeds while rescuing a few kids. Augustus clarifies to Grace the importance of his actions symbolically as he rescues few children from a terrorist attack with vague identity, while playing a video game. Augustus says in chapter four of the novel as All salvation is temporary I bought them a minute. Maybe that's the minute that buys them an hour, which is the hour that buys them a year. No one's gonna buy them forever, Hazel Grace, but my life bought them a minute. And that's not nothing. (Green 22)

Augustus fear of oblivion and his search for meaning in his existence is referred in the novel to a Maslow's Pyramid. Maslow explains that when one meets his or her primary need/s, the person moves to another level that is higher than the previous one to get true meaning of one self. That is what we may call, leaving a mark in the world to be remembered. That will also be a proof that you were existed. Augustus believes that he is supposed to do something heroic in his life time. He says in the chapter eleven of the novel under study as you've gotta at least die a death in service of a greater good, you know? (Green 97) The same idea is also mentioned in chapter twenty two as quoted below: Outlasting death, we all want to be remembered. I do, too (Green 86)

### Findings

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- While studying *The Fault in our Stars* the researcher came across existential concept of Dasein which has been introduced by Martin Heidegger as one finds his or her own meaning in this world by making decisions having freedom to do so according to his or her choices. In the novel Hazel Grace considers her life to be meaningless and so remains passive while thinking about her death as she is suffering from cancer. On the other hand, Augustus also tries to find meaning in his life to do something heroic so that people may remember him after his death. And so, they both find meaning in their lives while loving each other.
- The study also came across another existential concept that is Dread which means "Existential angst". It is when negative feeling arises while practicing freedom and

responsibility. It also has been introduced by Martin Heidegger which means one fears while making decisions having freedom to do so. In the novel Augustus fears of oblivion represent this dread which Kierkegaard (1978) calls anxiety.

- The final finding of the study is existential concept of Death that has been defined by different philosophers differently. Martin Heidegger says Death is the part of one's existence. In the novel Augustus thinks about it that he will be forgotten after his death if he does not do something heroic as Sartre explains that death is what something ceases to exist anymore. He further states if one dies coward will be remembered as coward and so Augustus wants to be remembered as a hero. On the other hand, Hazel tries to make him understand that we all will die. To be remembered by the world after death they should do something heroic that leaves mark on minds of people who would be left behind in this world.

### Conclusion

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After studying and analyzing the novel *The Fault in our Stars* authored by John Green under the existentialism theoretical framework I came to the conclusion that major theme of the novel is existentialism. It more focuses on the basic elements of existentialism which are *Dasein*, *Dread* and *Death* that are the main objectives of the study to be found out by the researcher.

Martin Heidegger's explanation of *Dasein* lets the reader to comprehend that basic concept of I which is related to self and ego. The novel provides example that arouse some doubts in the minds of characters about their survival because they have least chances to live. With reference to the protagonists- Hazel and Augustus- in the novel *The Fault in Our Stars* the researcher has concluded their individual approach towards the main purpose of their existence being patients of deadly disease. Although they themselves as well as their families have worries regarding their physical health still Hazel and Augustus have positive attitude while they are in a love relationship. It is very much obvious that unlike other love story their story isn't any normal and easy one and that's why Hazel states it's an epic relationship. The study explores the

optimistic perspective of both the characters while they knew they have short life time they are not waiting for their death to approach them and spend miserable lives rather they focus on the real purpose of their existence. And ultimately find out the reality in loving each other.

*Dread* is also used in terms of "Existential angst". It is the basic concept of fear of the worst circumstances an individual may face. Martin Heidegger's philosophy of *Dread* states that when we are making some decision which are not common in practice it gives way to many doubts and fears in our minds. An individual might feel reluctant in making such decisions due to some unknown fear. As in case of Hazel and Augustus, Hazel and her mother fears that Hazel will face a lot of pain and torment as a cancer patient and Augustus in some sort of oblivion and anxiety. So in a nut shell it is concluded that while making some odd decisions the phenomenon of *Dread* always repel an individual from making those decisions. Also it does not let them to practice independently. Its a negative feeling that affects an

individuals ability to decide freely and independently.

The final philosophy that is discussed in the novel is that of *Death*. Sartre explains the philosophy of death as death brings an end to everything. It is death with whose arrival the rest seize to exist. Death brings an end to existence. With special reference to the main characters of the narrative- Hazel and Augustus- this phenomenon is dealt skillfully by John Green. After dealing with *Dasein* and *Dread* now the protagonists deal with the anxiety of approaching *Death*. In a struggle against Augustus's anxiety due to his fear of oblivion Hazel suggests that they should do something remarkable that the world remembers when they die. They wish to be in the memories of their beloved families as bright examples because they love their families and vice versa. And the solution they came across is their love relationship. They made such a precious love bond that everyone adored and fancied. They didn't let *Dasein*, *Dread* and *Death* to hinder in their love relationship despite the fact that they will not be able to carry on for long because of their decaying physical health.

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