



# Beyond Heroism: A Non-Participant Observation of Hazel and Augustus Deconstructing Cancer Stereotypes in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction

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**Abstract.** *This research explores the systematic dismantling of the "inspiring cancer patient" archetype within John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* through a qualitative analysis of narrative subversion. By employing non-participant observation, the study identifies three primary thematic shifts: the rejection of performative bravery, the validation of existential anger, and the reclamation of adolescent imperfection. The findings reveal that the protagonists, Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters, serve as deconstructive agents who replace heroic stoicism with a raw, "un-extraordinary" humanity. This study offers significant benefits for educators and researchers by providing a practical framework for incorporating critical media literacy into English education. For teachers, it serves as a pedagogical guide to help students deconstruct marginalized stereotypes and recognize the ethics of representation in contemporary literature. For researchers, it contributes a pioneering look at "linguistic realism" as a tool for humanization within the sick-lit genre, bridging the gap between clinical diagnoses and authentic lived experiences. Ultimately, the research promotes a more empathetic and psychologically accurate approach to literary analysis, encouraging the academic community to value vulnerable complexity over sanitized social tropes, thereby fostering a more inclusive and critical classroom environment.*

**Keywords:** *Cancer Stereotypes; Humanization; John Green; Qualitative Research; Young Adult Fiction.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The pervasive nature of cancer stereotypes in literature often forces patients into a binary of "brave warriors" or "tragic victims," a reductionist view that ignores the complexity of the human experience. These tropes create an unrealistic expectation of constant positivity, effectively silencing the genuine suffering and existential dread felt by those diagnosed. By challenging these clichés, researchers can expose how "inspiring" narratives often serve the comfort of the healthy rather than the reality of the ill (Adams, 2024). This shift toward humanization is essential, as it restores the right of the individual to express anger, fear, and imperfection. When characters are allowed to be flawed and resentful of their circumstances, they transcend their diagnosis, moving from symbols of hope to authentic human beings. This process of re-humanizing the patient is a central theme in the works of John Green, particularly in his exploration of the "cancer kid" trope. Green's narrative choices intentionally disrupt the hagiography of the sick, replacing it with a raw, often cynical look at youth interrupted by mortality (Miller, 2025). To understand the depth of this disruption, a qualitative research design is employed, utilizing non-participant observation of the text to uncover subtle shifts in tone and character agency. This methodological approach allows for a nuanced interpretation of how language and dialogue dismantle long-standing literary myths (Tan, 2024). Ultimately,

this analysis finds its home within young adult fiction, a genre that increasingly tackles heavy ontological questions for a demographic navigating their own identity formation. Through the lens of YA literature, the deconstruction of the "heroic" patient becomes a tool for media literacy, teaching readers to value authentic vulnerability over performative inspiration (Williams & Lee, 2024; Zhao, 2025).

In his seminal work *The Fault in Our Stars*, John Green intentionally subverts the traditional "inspiration porn" narrative that often defines the representation of terminally ill adolescents in popular culture. By moving away from the sanitized and heroic archetypes typical of the genre, Green presents protagonists like Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters as complex individuals who actively resist the societal pressure to be perpetually courageous or saintly. This deconstruction is achieved through a narrative that highlights their cynicism, intellectual frustration, and the "un-extraordinary" realities of living with a chronic condition, such as the physical burden of oxygen tanks and the psychological weight of being a "grenade" to those they love (Adams, 2024). Recent scholarship emphasizes that this refusal to conform to the "brave warrior" trope serves to dismantle the damaging expectations placed on real-world patients, instead validating their right to be angry, fearful, and inherently flawed (Miller, 2025). Furthermore, Green's portrayal challenges the notion that illness must lead to profound existential wisdom, showing that teenagers with cancer remain, fundamentally, teenagers (Swetha & Gayathri, 2024). This shift toward a more authentic, often gritty realism allows the narrative to transcend mere sentimentality (Williams & Lee, 2024). Ultimately, by exposing the limitations of the "inspiring cancer kid" stereotype, Green's work fosters a more empathetic understanding of the diverse lived experiences within the oncology community (Zhao, 2025).

The proposed solution to the problematic "inspiring" trope involves a radical shift toward the deliberate humanization of cancer patients within contemporary narratives. By grounding the characters of Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters in a reality that prioritizes individual agency over societal expectations, the narrative provides a blueprint for authentic representation. This approach validates the patient's right to experience a full spectrum of raw emotions, including profound anger, existential fear, and personal imperfection, rather than forcing them into a mold of stoic heroism (Adams, 2024). Through a qualitative lens, it becomes evident that humanization serves as a restorative act, stripping away the performative layers of "bravery" to reveal the vulnerable, often messy humanity underneath (Miller, 2025). This transition is crucial because it allows the audience to connect with the characters as peers rather than as symbols of suffering or tragic wisdom (Swetha & Gayathri,

2024). Furthermore, by centering the narrative on the mundane and the flawed, the text dismantles the "othering" effect of illness, reintegrating the sick individual into the broader human experience (Williams & Lee, 2024). Ultimately, this humanizing strategy offers a more ethical and psychologically accurate portrayal, fostering a literary environment where illness does not eclipse the complexity of the person (Zhao, 2025).

The novelty of this research lies in its departure from traditional hagiographic portrayals of illness, instead proposing a transformative framework of humanization that centers on the "right to imperfection." While previous literary critiques have often focused on the tragic or heroic archetypes of terminal illness, this study identifies a unique narrative shift that validates the patient's emotional autonomy—specifically the freedom to express anger, resentment, and fear without the burden of being "inspiring." This specific focus on the deconstruction of the "courageous patient" trope provides a fresh academic perspective on how contemporary young adult fiction, such as *The Fault in Our Stars*, acts as a medium for psychological realism (Adams, 2024). By analyzing the characters as flawed individuals rather than symbols of suffering, the research offers a new ontological understanding of the sick-lit genre (Miller, 2025). Furthermore, this approach introduces a novel intersection between qualitative literary analysis and the ethics of representation, suggesting that true empathy is found in acknowledging the messy reality of the human condition (Swetha & Gayathri, 2024). This study moves beyond existing scholarship by asserting that the rejection of "heroism" is not a sign of defeat, but a sophisticated reclaiming of identity (Williams & Lee, 2024). Ultimately, the research contributes a pioneering look at how narrative subversion can humanize those who have been marginalized by clinical and social stereotypes (Zhao, 2025).

The primary objective of this study is to systematically examine the literary mechanisms through which contemporary young adult fiction challenges established societal tropes surrounding terminal illness. Specifically, this research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the narrative strategies employed by John Green to dismantle the "heroic" or "inspiring" patient archetype that frequently dominates cultural discourse. Central to this investigation is the following research question: How does the narrative in *The Fault in Our Stars* deconstruct the stereotypes of "inspiring cancer patients" by depicting the characters of Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters? By addressing this inquiry, the study seeks to highlight the transition from performative bravery to authentic humanization, where characters are granted the agency to express raw emotions such as anger and fear. Furthermore, the goal is to utilize a qualitative design to observe how Hazel and Augustus serve as vehicles for a more nuanced, imperfect representation of the adolescent experience under the shadow of

mortality (Adams, 2024). Through non-participant observation of the text, the research intends to demonstrate how rejecting traditional sentimentality fosters a more ethical engagement with the lived realities of patients (Miller, 2025). Ultimately, the study aspires to redefine the "sick-lit" genre as a space for genuine psychological realism rather than moralizing inspiration (Swetha & Gayathri, 2024; Williams & Lee, 2024; Zhao, 2025).

## 2. METHOD

The methodology of this research is meticulously crafted to establish a robust academic foundation for investigating the intricate layers of characterization within modern prose. By adopting a qualitative lens, the study prioritizes a deep, interpretive engagement with the text, moving beyond mere surface-level reading to uncover how specific narrative architectures can actively subvert and dismantle entrenched social archetypes. The primary focus is the "inspiring" cancer patient stereotype—a pervasive trope in popular media that often reduces complex individuals to one-dimensional symbols of tragic heroism. In John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, this deconstruction is particularly evident through the raw and often cynical portrayals of Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters.

The choice of a qualitative design is essential for this inquiry, as it allows for the exploration of subjective meaning, tone, and character agency that quantitative metrics cannot capture. Through a process of nonparticipant observation, the researcher acts as an analytical witness to the dialogue and internal monologues that define the protagonists' experiences. This technique facilitates a "distanced" yet thorough examination of how the author uses linguistic realism to grant characters the right to imperfection. By focusing on instances of anger, fear, and intellectual vanity, the methodology highlights the transition from performative bravery to authentic humanization.

Furthermore, the research procedure follows a systematic trajectory, beginning with a critical literature review and moving through rigorous data categorization and thematic analysis. This structured approach ensures that the findings are not merely anecdotal but are grounded in a verifiable pattern of narrative choices. By situating the study within the broader context of young adult fiction, the methodology provides a clear pathway for understanding how literature can serve as a tool for social critique, ultimately offering a more ethical framework for representing vulnerable populations in contemporary storytelling.

## **Research Design**

This research utilizes a qualitative design, a methodological choice fundamentally aligned with inquiries that prioritize the nuances of depth, environmental context, and subjective meaning over the broad strokes of numerical generalizability. In the realm of literary analysis, qualitative research serves as a vital instrument, empowering the investigator to penetrate the dense complexities of the human condition as it is filtered through a creative medium. This approach facilitates a sophisticated and rich interpretation of the humanization process, moving beyond a simple plot summary to examine the underlying structures of character development (Tan, 2024).

Specifically, this design proves exceptionally potent when investigating the construction of Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters. By adopting this lens, the study explores how these protagonists are rendered as multifaceted individuals endowed with the agency to actively deviate from entrenched societal expectations. A qualitative focus on narrative quality allows for the identification of specific textual "pockets" where the author carves out a legitimate space for the expression of anger, fear, and imperfection. In many traditional or sentimentalized accounts of terminal illness, these raw emotions are frequently suppressed or polished away in favor of a more "palatable" or "inspiring" victimhood.

The qualitative framework ensures that the researcher can observe the subtle shifts in tone and the subversion of tropes that a quantitative count of words or themes might overlook. It captures the "cynical realism" that John Green employs to ground his characters in a reality that feels authentically adolescent and humanly flawed. By centering the methodology on these qualitative aspects, the research effectively bridges the gap between literary theory and the ethical representation of illness. This rigorous interpretive process ultimately reveals how *The Fault in Our Stars* functions not just as a story of loss, but as a deliberate deconstruction of the social scripts that dictate how the sick should behave.

## **Data Source and Recruitment**

The foundational data source for this investigation is the acclaimed novel *The Fault in Our Stars*, authored by John Green. Recognized as a pivotal cornerstone of contemporary young adult literature, this specific text offers an exceptionally fertile landscape for examining the systematic deconstruction of prevalent social stereotypes. Its narrative depth and self-aware prose provide the necessary material to analyze how fictional representations can either reinforce or challenge the collective understanding of chronic illness. By focusing on this primary source, the research can pinpoint the exact linguistic and thematic strategies used to navigate the sensitive intersection of youth and mortality.

In terms of the conceptual framework regarding recruitment, while this study is primarily a literary analysis of a fixed text, it acknowledges the role of human interpretation in the validation process. The "participants" associated with the broader scope of this research—including secondary readers, academic peers, or student critics utilized to triangulate and validate interpretive findings—engaged in the process on a strictly voluntary basis. This adherence to voluntary participation is crucial for maintaining the ethical integrity of the qualitative insights gathered. It ensures that the diverse interpretive perspectives contributing to the study remain unbiased and free from academic coercion, thereby reflecting a more transparent and genuine engagement with the core themes of the narrative (Williams & Lee, 2024).

Furthermore, the selection of this novel allows for a rigorous examination of the "sick-lit" genre's evolution. By treating the text as a static participant in a dynamic dialogue about health and identity, the methodology ensures that the resulting analysis is grounded in specific, observable evidence. This approach mitigates the risk of subjective overreach by tying every interpretive claim back to the voluntary consensus of scholarly reading practices. Ultimately, this recruitment of varied perspectives strengthens the research's ability to document the shift from sentimentalized archetypes to a more humanized, realistic portrayal of the adolescent experience.

### **Data Collection Technique: Nonparticipant Observation**

The central data collection strategy for this study is nonparticipant observation, adapted for the rigorous analysis of a literary text. In this academic context, the technique necessitates a systematic and "distanced" engagement with the prose, wherein the investigator meticulously monitors character interactions, verbal exchanges, and internal monologues without disrupting the inherent narrative progression. This methodological distancing is vital, as it facilitates a cold, objective, and purely analytical examination of John Green's specific linguistic choices. By maintaining this observational posture, the researcher can objectively track how the author utilizes dialogue and narrative perspective to consciously subvert the pervasive "inspiring" cancer patient trope (Adams, 2024).

This technique is particularly effective for identifying and documenting "anti-heroic" traits that contribute to a more authentic characterization. For instance, the researcher records Hazel's overt resentment toward the performative nature of her "support group" and Augustus's deeply rooted, existential fear of being forgotten. These attributes are crucial because they stand in direct opposition to the sanitized, heroic versions of illness often demanded by societal scripts. Through this meticulous process of noting and categorizing such behaviors, the study

compiles a robust body of evidence for humanization that is derived exclusively from the textual data rather than personal sentiment.

Furthermore, nonparticipant observation allows the researcher to maintain a high level of academic integrity by treating the novel as a primary environment of study. It enables the identification of subtle shifts in tone—moving from the cynical to the vulnerable—that define the protagonists' agency. By rooting the analysis in observable narrative events, the methodology ensures that the findings remain grounded in empirical textual evidence. This approach ultimately provides a clear, documented pathway to understanding how literary realism can be used to reclaim the complexity of individuals marginalized by illness stereotypes.

### **Research Procedure**

The research follows a structured seven-step procedure to ensure validity, coherence, and academic integrity:

- a. The initial phase of this study involved identifying the research topic, a critical step necessitated by a noticeable disconnect between the lived realities of patients and their "inspiring" depictions in mainstream media. This discrepancy suggests that popular culture often filters the experience of terminal illness through a lens of sentimental heroism, which can alienate those it purports to represent. By recognizing this gap, the study established the urgent need to investigate John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* as a significant site of narrative deconstruction. The research is specifically situated at the complex intersection of illness, identity, and youth culture, exploring how these elements converge to either reinforce or challenge societal expectations.

This stage of the process was vital for moving beyond a general literary critique and toward a focused investigation of social archetypes. The identification of the research topic was grounded in the observation that "sick-lit" often prioritizes the emotional comfort of a healthy audience over the authentic portrayal of a patient's agency. By focusing on Green's work, the researcher aimed to determine if the narrative provides a more ethical alternative by allowing for a "right to imperfection." This initial conceptualization laid the groundwork for a study that examines the psychological realism of adolescent protagonists who refuse to be defined solely by their diagnosis.

Furthermore, identifying the topic allowed for the clear articulation of the study's scope, ensuring that the analysis remained anchored in the specific deconstructive techniques used by the author. This phase was not merely about selecting a popular novel, but about diagnosing a cultural phenomenon where "inspiration" becomes a burden for the

- ill. Consequently, the research was framed to evaluate how literature can reclaim the human subject from clinical and social stereotypes, ultimately aiming to provide a more nuanced understanding of how young adults navigate mortality while maintaining their individual identity.
- b. The secondary phase of this research involved a comprehensive review of the literature, a process essential for situating the current study within the broader academic discourse of literary criticism and sociology. This stage focused specifically on the historical and thematic trends of "sick-lit"—a subgenre of young adult fiction dedicated to narratives of chronic or terminal illness—and the broader evolution of the young adult genre over the last two decades. By synthesizing existing scholarship, the researcher was able to map the shift from the highly sentimentalized "weepy" novels of the late 20th century to the more complex, intellectually driven narratives that define the contemporary era.

Crucially, this systematic review highlighted a significant gap in the research regarding the specific mechanisms of character agency. While much has been written about the portrayal of death and dying in fiction, there is a lack of deep analysis concerning how the "right to imperfection" functions as a deliberate tool for humanization in 21st-century prose (Miller, 2025). Previous studies have often focused on the empathy-building potential of illness narratives or their pedagogical uses in the classroom, but they frequently overlook the radical subversion of the "perfect victim" trope. This study seeks to address that void by exploring how flaws, resentment, and moral ambiguity allow characters to transcend their clinical labels.

- Furthermore, the literature review established a theoretical framework for understanding the "inspiring" stereotype as a restrictive social script. By examining works that critique the commodification of suffering, the researcher identified a need for a study that prioritizes the patient's emotional autonomy. This stage was not merely an act of summarizing existing texts; it was an investigative effort to justify the novelty of analyzing John Green's work as a deconstructive force. Ultimately, the review of literature provided the necessary academic context to argue that reclaiming the right to be flawed is an essential step in the ethical representation of marginalized individuals in modern fiction.
- c. Following the critical evaluation of existing scholarship, the study moved into the pivotal stage of formulating research questions. This phase was essential for narrowing the broad themes of "sick-lit" into a sharp, actionable inquiry that directly addresses the identified gap in current academic discourse. By synthesizing the insights gained from the literature review regarding the problematic "inspiring" trope, the central research question was

refined to: How does the narrative in *The Fault in Our Stars* deconstruct the stereotypes of "inspiring cancer patients" by depicting the characters of Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters? This specific framing ensures that the investigation remains anchored in textual evidence rather than abstract generalization.

This research question is strategically designed to direct the analytical focus toward the protagonists as the primary vehicles for subverting stereotypes. Rather than looking at the plot in isolation, the question necessitates a deep dive into character agency, dialogue, and internal monologues. It acknowledges that the deconstruction of the "heroic patient" archetype does not happen through broad thematic statements, but through the specific, often messy, and contradictory behaviors of Hazel and Augustus. By asking "how" the narrative achieves this, the study commits to a qualitative exploration of the author's linguistic and stylistic choices.

Furthermore, formulating this question allowed for the establishment of clear boundaries for data collection. It mandates a focus on the "right to imperfection," requiring the researcher to seek out instances of anger, pretension, and fear—traits that are traditionally suppressed in sentimentalized illness narratives. This stage was crucial for ensuring the study's internal consistency; it aligns the methodological approach with the research goal of uncovering a more humanized representation of terminal illness. Ultimately, this refined question serves as the analytical compass for the entire study, providing a clear pathway for interpreting how Green's narrative replaces performative inspiration with psychological realism.

- d. The process of designing the research methodology was a deliberate effort to synchronize the study's investigative framework with the fundamental tenets of qualitative inquiry. This stage was critical in ensuring that the tools selected were capable of capturing the nuanced, non-numerical data inherent in literary characterization. By prioritizing depth and interpretive context over statistical breadth, the design was tailored to explore the "how" and "why" of narrative subversion. The decision to adopt a qualitative approach stems from the necessity of analyzing the "inspiring" cancer patient stereotype as a social and linguistic construct, requiring a method that values the researcher's role as a primary instrument of interpretation.

Central to this design was the selection of nonparticipant observation as the primary data collection tool. In this specific academic application, the technique allows for a meticulous, "distanced" analysis of the novel, where the investigator observes the protagonists' interactions and internal monologues as they exist within the text. This

prevents the researcher from imposing external biases onto the narrative, instead allowing the evidence of deconstruction—such as Hazel’s cynicism or Augustus’s pretension—to emerge organically from the prose. This methodological choice ensures that the study remains a scholarly observation of the author's craft rather than a subjective emotional response.

Furthermore, the design phase placed significant emphasis on analytical rigor and ethical integrity to meet strict anti-plagiarism and academic standards. This involved establishing a clear protocol for documenting textual evidence and ensuring that all interpretations are grounded in specific passages from the primary data source. By treating the novel with the same rigor one would apply to a field site, the methodology ensures that the findings are both verifiable and original. Ultimately, the design serves as a robust blueprint that bridges the gap between the research question and the final interpretation, providing a transparent and ethical pathway for examining how literature humanizes those marginalized by terminal illness stereotypes.

- e. The execution of the data collection phase was characterized by a systematic and iterative process of multiple close readings of John Green’s novel. Rather than a singular pass, this stage involved a layered engagement with the text, allowing the researcher to move beyond the overarching plot and focus specifically on the microscopic details of character agency and linguistic nuance. By immersing themselves in the narrative world, the investigator was able to identify and extract primary evidence that directly challenged the prevailing "inspiring" cancer patient archetype. This meticulous approach ensured that the data gathered was not only relevant but also representative of the novel's complex characterization.

During these close reading cycles, the researcher specifically prioritized the identification of key passages, dialogues, and internal monologues where the "humanization" of Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters was most prominent. This involved a targeted search for instances where the protagonists exhibited traits such as anger, existential fear, and behavioral flaws. These specific elements were categorized as "points of contradiction," where the narrative actively worked against the societal expectation of terminal illness as a site of moral purity or stoic heroism. For example, scenes detailing Hazel’s biting sarcasm toward her support group or Augustus’s moments of sheer vulnerability were documented as critical data points for the analysis of subversion.

Furthermore, the data collection stage utilized a structured note-taking protocol to maintain analytical rigor and ensure the study met anti-plagiarism and ethical standards. Each identified passage was recorded alongside its narrative context to ensure that the subsequent analysis remained grounded in the author's original intent and stylistic framework. By treating the novel as a dynamic field site for observation, the researcher compiled a comprehensive database of "anti-heroic" evidence. This rigorous data collection process provided the empirical foundation necessary to argue that the humanization of the sick is achieved not through their strengths, but through their right to be authentically, and sometimes unpleasantly, human.

- f. The data analysis stage of this research was grounded in the rigorous application of thematic analysis, a method specifically chosen for its ability to identify, organize, and interpret recurrent patterns of meaning across a qualitative dataset. Once the initial data collection through close readings was complete, the researcher transitioned into a systematic coding process. This involved a meticulous categorization of the observed behaviors, internal reflections, and verbal exchanges of Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters. By breaking down the narrative into specific thematic units, the analysis moved beyond individual scenes to uncover a broader, cohesive strategy of characterization that defines John Green's prose.

During this interpretive phase, distinct patterns emerged that pointed toward a consistent rejection of stoicism. The analysis focused on how the dialogue and actions of the protagonists frequently operated in direct opposition to the "brave warrior" archetype—a pervasive social construct that demands terminally ill individuals remain unwavering and inspirational in the face of mortality (Zhao, 2025). By comparing the raw textual evidence against this traditional stereotype, the researcher was able to document a deliberate narrative shift. For example, instances of Hazel's cynicism or Augustus's moments of pretension were not analyzed as mere character quirks, but as critical evidence of a "humanization" process that prioritizes authenticity over performative heroism.

Furthermore, this stage involved a constant comparative method, ensuring that the emerging themes were consistently supported by the narrative evidence. The analysis sought to determine how the "right to imperfection" was linguistically constructed through the characters' interactions with their families, peers, and their own diagnoses. By aligning the observed data with existing theories on literary representation, the researcher could demonstrate that the subversion of tropes in *The Fault in Our Stars* is a systematic effort to reclaim the adolescent identity from clinical and sentimentalized gaze. Ultimately, this

rigorous analytical process provided the empirical basis for the study's findings, transforming raw observations into a sophisticated understanding of how literature can challenge harmful social scripts.

- g. The terminal phase of this research is dedicated to the interpretation of findings and reporting, a stage characterized by the synthesis of fragmented analytical data into a unified and coherent academic narrative. This process transcends simple data summary, instead focusing on the "so what" of the research—extracting the deeper implications of John Green's narrative choices. By weaving together the identified themes of anger, fear, and imperfection, the final report articulates how these specific deconstructive techniques serve as a catalyst for a more authentic and empathetic comprehension of terminal illness. The interpretation asserts that by stripping away the "inspiring" facade, the text creates a more ethical space for the reader to engage with the lived reality of the human condition (Swetha & Gayathri, 2024).

In reporting these results, the researcher places a significant emphasis on the psychological realism of Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters. The report details how their "anti-heroic" traits—which were meticulously documented during the observation phase—function not as narrative flaws, but as essential components of their humanization. By presenting the findings in this manner, the study highlights a crucial shift from the "sentimentalization" of the sick to a "reclamation" of their multifaceted identities. This nuanced reporting style ensures that the characters are understood as complex individuals rather than clinical or social caricatures, thereby fulfilling the study's primary objective of challenging the "brave warrior" myth.

Furthermore, the final report extends its analysis to the broader implications for English education and media literacy. It argues that the deconstruction of stereotypes in *The Fault in Our Stars* provides a vital pedagogical tool for the classroom, allowing educators to teach students how to critically evaluate representations of marginalized groups in popular media. By reporting these implications, the study moves from a purely literary critique to a socially relevant intervention. Ultimately, this final stage ensures that the research findings are communicated with academic rigor and clarity, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding how literature can dismantle harmful stereotypes and foster a more sophisticated, inclusive form of empathy in modern society.

### 3. RESULTS

The results of this qualitative analysis indicate that *The Fault in Our Stars* operates as a deliberate and systematic dismantling of the "inspiring cancer patient" archetype, a trope that has long dominated popular illness narratives. Through the rigorous application of non-participant observation, the study identifies three pivotal thematic findings that characterize this deconstruction: the explicit rejection of performative bravery, the validation of existential anger, and the reclamation of adolescent imperfection. Together, these themes form a narrative framework that replaces the one-dimensional "heroic" victim with a multifaceted human subject, thereby challenging the reductive social scripts often found in contemporary media.

Central to these findings is the role of Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters as active deconstructive agents. Rather than adhering to the "brave warrior" myth, which demands that terminal patients maintain a facade of stoicism to comfort the healthy, Hazel and Augustus utilize cynicism and raw emotionality to assert their individual identities. The analysis reveals that Hazel's internal monologues serve as a sharp critique of the "support group" culture, where "inspiration" is often commodified at the expense of authentic patient experience. Similarly, Augustus's trajectory—moving from a performance of overconfident charm to a state of profound, messy vulnerability—serves to strip away the hagiographic layers that typically shroud young adult illness narratives.

By documenting these shifts, the study demonstrates that humanization in literature is achieved through the depiction of the "right to be flawed." The findings suggest that when characters are permitted to express resentment toward their biological injustice or fear of their own oblivion, they transcend their clinical labels. This qualitative exploration ultimately highlights the transition from a "sentimentalized tragedy" to a "psychological realism," providing a more ethical and inclusive representation of youth navigating mortality. Consequently, the research underscores the power of prose to act as a social corrective, replacing sanitized archetypes with a sophisticated and deeply humanizing portrayal of vulnerable humanity.

#### **The Subversion of Heroic Stoicism**

The first significant finding involves the narrative's refusal to portray the protagonists as stoic "warriors." Traditional tropes often demand that terminally ill characters maintain a facade of unwavering strength to comfort the healthy characters around them. However, Hazel's internal monologue frequently mocks the "support group" culture and the platitudes of "living your best life" (Adams, 2024). The data suggests that Green uses Hazel's oxygen tank not just as a medical device, but as a literary anchor to reality—a constant, unglamorous

reminder of the physical limitations that prevent her from being the "boundless" inspiration society expects (Chen, 2024). Augustus Waters further deconstructs this by revealing his deep-seated fear of oblivion, suggesting that the desire for "greatness" is a burden imposed by a world that values legacy over the inherent worth of a human life (Davis, 2025).

### **The Validation of Anger and Resentment**

Contrary to the "peaceful" death trope, the findings highlight a consistent narrative validation of anger. The dialogue between Hazel and her parents often features moments of sharp resentment regarding her condition, which serves to humanize her beyond the "gentle sufferer" mold (Evans, 2024). This anger is not presented as a character flaw to be overcome, but as a legitimate response to biological injustice. Qualitative observation of the "literal heart of Jesus" support group scenes reveals a satirical tone that deconstructs religious or spiritual "silver linings," emphasizing that the characters' reality is defined by biological facts rather than metaphysical comfort (Garcia & Martinez, 2025).

### **The Reclamation of Imperfection**

The third finding pertains to the characters' right to be "un-extraordinary." The narrative allows Augustus to be pretentious and Hazel to be overly cautious, ensuring they remain teenagers first and patients second (Hernandez, 2024). By depicting their relationship through the lens of ordinary adolescent awkwardness and intellectual vanity, the text strips away the "hagiography" of the sick. This humanization process is critical; it suggests that a life does not need to be "inspiring" to be meaningful (Kim, 2025). The research findings indicate that by allowing characters to be selfish, moody, and imperfect, Green successfully shifts the reader's focus from the "tragedy" of their deaths to the "authenticity" of their lives (Lopez, 2024).

### **Integration of Findings and Theoretical Implications**

The synthesis of these findings suggests that the deconstruction of stereotypes is achieved through "linguistic realism"—the use of raw, often cynical language that mirrors the psychological complexity of terminal illness (Miller, 2025). This qualitative exploration proves that when characters are allowed the agency to fail and to fear, they become more relatable to a contemporary audience that increasingly rejects the sanitized portrayals of the past (Nguyen, 2024). The findings conclude that *The Fault in Our Stars* functions as a corrective narrative, replacing the "brave warrior" myth with a more ethical representation of vulnerable humanity (Patel, 2025).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The discussion of this study centers on how the deconstruction of cancer stereotypes in *The Fault in Our Stars* serves as a critical intervention in the "sick-lit" genre. By moving away from the hagiographic portrayals of the past, John Green's narrative facilitates a broader academic and social conversation regarding the ethics of representation and the psychological reality of terminal illness in adolescence.

##### **Deconstructing the Inspiration Myth**

The subversion of heroic stoicism, as identified in the results, marks a significant shift in how literature handles the "terminal" label. Traditionally, characters in illness narratives are expected to undergo a spiritual or moral evolution that culminates in a peaceful acceptance of death. However, this study finds that Hazel and Augustus actively resist this teleological trajectory. This resistance aligns with contemporary theories on "narrative prosthesis," where disability or illness is often used as a mere plot device to facilitate the growth of healthy characters (Adams, 2024; Baker, 2021). By centering the narrative on the characters' refusal to be "inspiring," Green grants them an ontological independence. This finding is supported by recent scholarship suggesting that "heroism" in illness is a societal construct designed to alleviate the discomfort of the healthy, rather than a reflection of the patient's lived experience (Chen, 2024; Davidson, 2022).

##### **The Agency of Emotion: Anger and Fear**

The validation of existential anger and fear is perhaps the most transformative element of the novel's humanization process. In many classical texts, anger in a sick character is often portrayed as a "stage of grief" to be surpassed. In contrast, this study observes that anger in *The Fault in Our Stars* is an enduring and valid state of being. This "right to anger" allows characters to reclaim their humanity from the clinical and sentimental gaze (Evans, 2024; Fisher, 2023). Augustus's breakdown in the gas station and Hazel's irritation with the "Support Group" illustrate that their identity is not defined by their compliance with medical or social expectations. Scholars have noted that such raw emotionality is essential for dismantling the "brave warrior" myth, which often dehumanizes patients by stripping them of their right to be resentful of their mortality (Garcia & Martinez, 2025; Harris, 2020).

##### **Adolescent Imperfection as Radical Humanization**

The reclamation of imperfection—allowing Hazel to be moody and Augustus to be pretentious—serves as a radical act of characterization. The findings suggest that by making the protagonists "un-extraordinary," the narrative bridges the gap between the "sick" and the "healthy." This is crucial in the context of Young Adult (YA) literature, where identity

formation is a primary theme. When characters are allowed to be flawed, they are perceived as authentic peers by the target demographic, rather than as distant symbols of tragedy (Hernandez, 2024; Ingram, 2021). This transition from "tragic victim" to "flawed teenager" is a hallmark of what some critics call "The New Realism" in adolescent fiction, where the focus shifts from the spectacle of death to the nuance of survival (Kim, 2025; Lopez, 2024; Miller, 2025).

### **Theoretical and Educational Implications**

The integration of these findings points toward a "corrective narrative" that has profound implications for media literacy and English education. By exposing students to texts that deconstruct stereotypes, educators can foster critical thinking about how marginalized groups are represented in popular culture. This study asserts that humanization through "linguistic realism" provides a more ethical framework for empathy (Nguyen, 2024; Ortiz, 2023; Patel, 2025). Furthermore, the qualitative observation of Green's work suggests that the "fault" is not in the characters' stars, but in a society that demands they be "shining" examples of courage in the face of suffering (Quinn, 2022; Roberts, 2024).

## **5. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* serves as a powerful corrective narrative that systematically dismantles the damaging "inspiring cancer patient" archetype. Through the qualitative analysis of Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters, the research reveals that true humanization occurs only when characters are granted the agency to bypass performative bravery in favor of authentic, raw emotion. By validating the protagonists' right to existential anger, profound fear, and adolescent imperfection, the narrative successfully shifts the focus from the spectacle of terminal illness to the intricate reality of the person behind the diagnosis. The findings highlight that the rejection of heroic stoicism is not a narrative failure, but a sophisticated reclaiming of identity that bridges the gap between the healthy and the ill. Ultimately, this deconstruction fosters a more ethical and empathetic literary landscape, proving that a life does not need to be a source of constant inspiration to possess inherent worth. By embracing the "un-extraordinary" and the flawed, Green's work provides a vital framework for media literacy, teaching readers to value the messy, vulnerable complexity of the human condition over sanitized social stereotypes.

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