



THE POWER OF ADOLESCENCE IN THE FAULT IN OUR STARS AND MIDDLESEX BY JOHN GREEN AND JEFFREY EUGENIDES

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Abstract

The Fault in Our Stars is written by John Green and *Middlesex* by Jeffery Eugenides who are contemporary American novelists. Remarkably they have contributed to modern American literature by their works. Basically, both are discussing an important issue; disease. The protagonists in *The Fault in Our Stars* are two characters who suffer from cancer and *Middlesex* is telling about a hermaphrodite character. The authors intentionally choose teenagers to discuss the importance and power of being adolescent to cope up with the vital problems such as diseases, life and death. All conflicts are reflected through the adolescent perspectives. They are also prone to consider the problem of identity from their own viewpoints. In this paper, the power of adolescence in fighting against vital issues is argued throughout making an overall analysis

Keywords: Adolescence, Power, Middlesex, Teenagers, Disease, The Fault In Our Stars.

Introduction

The term "Adolescence" could be defined in numerous ways. The American Psychological Association defines it as "the period of time from the onset of puberty until an individual achieves economic independence. What is most important is to consider carefully the needs and capabilities of each adolescent." (Association, 2002, p. 2). Adults and adolescences fundamentally have been always depicted as two different worlds. Adolescence is a critical period in everyone's life, in this age many questions about life, death, identity, and future...est.is growing in mind. In this stage of age, teenagers are immature and lost, they confront difficult challenges in their life. Thus usually the media portrayals of adolescence assert that the problems like violence, school shootings, alcohol-related accident, and drugs abuse always can be a part of adolescence. As well as the issue of suicide between teens is all considerably reflected in newspapers headline. In addition, this concept extended to movie plots and professional literary works too. In general, adolescence portrayed as a negative stage in everyone's life. It is a period full of stress that cannot be afforded or survived easily. In spite of the fact that common impression about adolescence portrayed as a negative attitude, but nowadays the image of adolescence is largely very positive. In fact, most of the adolescents are successful in school, they are connected with their families and communities. As well as they emerge their teens year without experiencing any serious problems. With the attention given to the negative image of adolescence, the positive depiction can be overlooked. Many factors can play a significant role in changing the perception of adolescence to the positive as media, literature, and advertisements. During the adolescence period, the psychological and biological factors have impact on people so that they seem immature and their behavior is unbalanced. Adolescence should be treated according to their requirements and needs in their life. They need to be nurtured, taught, and guided in order to protect them during their journey to adulthood. The adolescence if they raised up in a convenient environmental atmosphere, they will be so productive and creative. Listening adolescence and appreciating their perspective is their primary needs, as well as motivating them and address them to useful directions in order to invest their energy. Specifically, young people are in need to develop their capacity. The main purpose of developing adolescence is not to describe and indicate problems, but it should be in order to prevent those problems to happen and enhancing the positive outcomes under any circumstance. However, efforts are made to shift the old persecuting toward a new one which depends on the new method of treatment to work with adolescence with a view to understanding them better. (Association, 2002, pp. 2-3). In extension, the emotional factor is another aspect that should be taken into consideration as well. During

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adolescence teenagers attempt to analyze the process of realizing the identity and recognizing tendency. In this stage young people have a lack in self-awareness, usually, young people suffer about understanding things clearly, and they find obstacles to name their feelings or describing emotions. Those feeling cannot be labeled accurately unless they are guided and aware consciously. This confusion in emotions and feelings cause other problems because adolescence cannot express their feelings directly so it leads to various problems such as depression, overeating, and using drugs (McNeely & Blanchard, 2009, pp. 31-32).

Moreover, every young person is to make true choices in life and to live properly. They need to be have support from many dimension of their cultures and societies. They need to be surrounded by high-quality education, decent work, in addition, they need positive participation in their communities, human rights protections and access to sexual and reproductive health information and services. These are the fundamental factors that should be available in order to help young people to realize their identity and observe the real world around them. Furthermore, the adolescence should be developed in order to be able to confront obstacles and challenges in their life as well as being able to deal with their responsibility. In everywhere and countries adolescence are facing, economic, social, and legal obstacles that impede their ability, as well as those factors effect on adolescence transformation from adolescence to adulthood in a safe and healthy circumstance. Basically, a good education is an essence to give young people a knowledge in order to improve their skills. To enable them to be more productive and creative in their society, school and education make adolescence more active and hold their mind away from problems hence it stimulate them and turn their concentration straightforward future (The power of 1.8 billion, 2014, pp. 31-32). The issue of adolescence is widely discussed in many literary works because it is a controversial subject and it could be interpreted into different dimensions. Another reason beyond representing materials that related to adolescence is for aware those young people more. Discussing different problems and subjects reflecting an ulterior aspect of adolescence life is a significant contribution in adolescence development. The disease is one of the important issues that has been discussed in the literature in order to reflect the suffering of the patients thus, literature becomes a proper field for representing medical cases through characters that suffer from a particular disease. Texts that have been written about patients and discussing a subject of disease are assisted patients who are reassessing and reconstructing their life-world by modifying the cohabitation between lived and living body (Kottow & H Kottow, 2007, p. 5). Therefore; we light on two popular American novels, both of the books are discussing an important issue which is a disease. Different teenager characters are presented by the novels. All of the characters are suffering from a disease that might be a reason for their death. However the hard condition of disease nevertheless the young characters confront it powerfully. Throughout their journey in order to confront the disease, they are going through a new experience which makes them more aware, mature, and wise. The resistance against disease became a powerful experience to help them discover their identity and destiny. The mixture between different feelings gives the books different touch because they combine the transformation from adolescence to adulthood and the transformation during a certain disease as well. Another differentiating factor is the role of adolescence characters and their attitude about confronting the life in general. So both of the books show adolescence in different portrayals, they emphasize the positive image of young people as well as their strength. The books are discussing the role of family and social environment as the effect of adolescence too, to depict the complete shape of adolescence in order to clarify many significant issues and stimulate similar cases.

Hazel, Augustus, and Call/Callie

Recently John Green is a famous name in American young adult fiction field, *The Fault In Our Stars* is an achievement of his lifetime. The book debuted at the number one of New York Times best-seller list in January 2012. Obviously, the novel is about a teenage girl called Hazel she suffers from terminal lung cancer. She didn't has many dreams and ambitions. She has nothing to aspire in her life, this pessimistic vision of life leads her to a depression. As it mentioned before in this paper depression is one of the common cases that confront adolescence. Mostly the reasons behind depressions are due to lack of communication, loss of identity, and loneliness, so the protagonist in the novel is suffering from a disease that makes her live in an isolation from everything. Even more, she loses her desire for life, because affording the disease was not easy for her, particularly in the age of teens the matter becomes more complicated to be absorbed, so the protagonist's character is composed of all those features. Therefore; confronting all those obstacles was not easy neither to her nor her family. Later on, she meets Augustus who had suffered from cancer before. Again the book presents a new teenage character with a different case. Hazel and Augustus share many things in common as well as there is different between them about their perspectives in life. Then unexpected coincidence takes them to Amsterdam and this journey reveals and changes many things for them. They



have met by a sudden twist of fate thus they explore a new vision of thinking about life and death (Green, FamousAuthors.org, 2012, p. 1). In counterpart, *Middlesex* talks about a Greek family who immigrated to America in order to find peace and live far away from warfare. The story opens with a narrator who narrates the story of a family from 3 decades before. The narrator is the protagonist Cal/Callie she starts telling her story from the moment of her birth she states " I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smog less Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974" (Eugenides, 2002, p. 3). This statement is the entrance of a complex story that presents hybridity, loss of identity, and conflict of gender. From very initial pages the protagonist tells the reader her/his personal crisis. S/he revealed her/his biological problem that complicated his/her life. Call/Callie born as a baby girl until she reached fourteen years old she discovered that she is suffering from a rare disease called a hermaphrodite. Revealing this fact was not easy neither to her nor her family, and taking a decision was much more difficult. The protagonist is a teenager in this critical period which is full of questions and doubts, she discovers that she doesn't belong to a certain gender directly. She is not male or female and she is both too. this loss of identity and gender leads her to go back through the history of her family in order to discover the reason of her case as well as to realize her/his identity. The story touches everyone who has suffered from self-definition and identity crisis at some point in their life. Moreover, the story is not about intersex person's struggle, it is about individual struggling on the level of gender, identity, and self-definition. Jeffery presents the importance of taking chooses in this life, as well as it shows the power of the protagonist. In a way or another, the author shows the protagonist as the most powerful character in the novel. Despite of her/his health condition, the writer shows Cal/Callie as a powerful character and wise. The sound of Cal/Callie tells the story from past and s/he shifts to present as well as s/he indicates to future. Through this transformation, the readers observe the maturity in Cal/Callie's personality. Cal tells the story when he is an adult female nevertheless in many points the readers can see the sense of little teenage girls that still exist in his personality (Renneflott, 2011, pp. 1-2). On the other hand, the combination and hybridity are presented in the story generally, and in the protagonist's personality in particular. This mixture reflects the problem in determining identity also it shows how the person should be powerful in order to be able to deal with such a complicated situation. Despite the continuing dilemma that confronts Cal/Callie and all ambiguities in her/his life, s/he insists on owning a different identity, s/he tries to find a real identity that could reflect her/his inner soul. Having an identity that obviously explains her/his tendency and thoughts. Jeffery shows this power of self-definition in very powerful words by Cal/Callie's speech:

Emotions, in my experience, aren't covered by single words. I don't believe in "sadness", "joy", or "regret". Maybe the best proof that the language is patriarchal is that it oversimplifies feeling. I'd like to have my disposal complicated hybrid emotions, Germanic train-car constructions like, say, "the happiness that attends disaster." Or: "the disappointment of sleeping with one's fantasy." I'd like to show how "intimations of mortality brought on by aging family members" connects with "the hatred of mirrors that begins with middle age." I'd like to have a word for "the sadness inspired by failing restaurants" as well as for "the excitement of getting a room with a mini-bar." I've never had the right words to describe my life, and now that I've entered my story, I need them more than ever. I can't just sit back and watch from a distance anymore. From here on in, everything I'll tell you is colored by the subjective experience of being part of events. Here's where my story splits, divides, undergoes meiosis. Already the world feels heavier, now I'm a part of it. I'm talking about bandages and sopped cotton, the smell of mildew in movie theaters, and of all the lousy cats and their stinking litter boxes, of rain on city streets when the dust comes up and the Old Italian men take their folding chairs inside. Up until now it hasn't been my world. Not my America. But here we are, at last. (Eugenides, 2002, p. 217)

The transformation from adolescence to adulthood

The journey from adolescence to adulthood is almost tough and complicated, thus the transformation between those two stages is not easy. For Cal/Callie the transition was not only about age periods it was about gender transformation as well. Through this experience, the most difficult part is determining your own identity, recognizing what you want exactly. The quotation above describes how the protagonist is looking for finding a unique identity unique individuality in order to be your own figure. Cal explains his/her abstract from all existence features that might effect on her/his choose about determining his/her destiny. The variation of culture, identity, and gender effect on readers too, because the protagonist takes the reader into the deep of the subject. In every stage of his/her life, the author shows the capacity of



Cal/Callie's personality, which is a positive portrayal of adolescence. In another scene in the book the protagonist explains the biological condition behind his/her problem as a hermaphrodite person:

Sing now, O Muse, of the recessive mutation on my fifth chromosome! Sing how it bloomed two and a half centuries ago on the slopes of Mount Olympus, while the goats bleated and the olives dropped. Sing how it passed down through nine generations, gathering invisibly within the polluted pool of the Stephanie's family. And sing how Providence, in the guise of a massacre, sent the gene flying again; how it blew like a seed across the sea to America, where it drifted through our industrial rains until it fell to earth in the fertile soil of my mother's own Midwestern womb. (Eugenides, 2002, p. 4)

Cal/Callie describes how the genetic problem complicated her/his life, it shows another aspect of the protagonist's personality. It shows the image of an adolescence in very positive way. S/he is aware of historical and biological facts. When s/he realized her/his problem, wisely s/he deals with it. In extension, he/she confront the problem and s/he made a choice that s/he wants. Jeffery succeeds in drawing a positive depiction of an adolescence character. The character survived with many difficult issues that confront him/her. As an adolescence person, there is an essential question that asked by every young people during teens which are "who I am?" this question leads Cal/Callie to explore her/his family saga. The answer to that question will continue to evolve over a person's lifetime, forms the basis of personal identity, or one's sense of self. Moreover biological changes in the adolescent brain give teenagers the tools to start building a personal identity, and as it mentioned before in this paper the identity cannot be limited on one level, basically, there is two sense of personal identity for adolescence, they are self-concept and self-esteem. The self-concept is how a person's perceptions about his or her talents, qualities, goals, and life experiences. As well as it includes the religious concept or political beliefs. Especially for adolescence those two factors play a significant role in building the self-concept of adolescents. In addition, this concept could be influenced by cultural and ethnic traditions. Whereas the self-esteem is how people feel about their self-concept—that is, do they satisfy about who they are? Self-esteem is affected by approval from parents and other adults, the level of support received from friends and family and personal success. Ups and downs in self-esteem are normal during adolescence, particularly in the early teenage years (around middle school). Self-esteem becomes more stable as teens grow older (McNeely & Blanchard, 2009, p. 61). Likewise, the fault in our stars is a reflection of teenagers suffering particularly in confronting the disease. It tells about two patients who needs a lot of power to face cancer. Cancer considered as most dangerous diseases ever. The characters examine different transformation from adolescence to adulthood because of their health condition. The disease makes them more aware of everything in their life. John Green presented two characters with a cancer disease. Hazel and Augustus, they have many common things together as well as many different things from each other. Their thoughts about life sound different. There is a contrast between them, Hazel a 26 years old girl who suffers from terminal lung cancer, she lives her life in isolation because she wants to keep away from people in order to not hurt them because she knows she will die, therefore; she wants to stay alone. Despitethis, she is optimistic somehow she knows that she must deal with her cancer and pursue the life. Whereas Augustus is a seventeen years old boy, he also suffering from cancer, as a result, his leg removed. In spite of all the obstacles Augustus still optimistic and he falls in love with Hazel. (Sholihah, 2016, p. 6). Augustus tries to make a remarkable thing before his death because he is an ambitious person and he wants to achieve a valuable thing before his death in order to be immortal. Augustus states "The Oblivion fear is something else, fear that I won't be able to give anything in; exchange for my life. If you don't live a life in service of a greater good, you've got to at least die a death in service of a greater good, you know? And I fear that I won't get either a life or a death that means anything." (Green, *The Fault in our Stars*, 2012, p. 41). His sense of being available and immortal is a reflection of his strength and ambitions in spite of his cancer. On another hand this maturity and power are observed in Hazel's character too, fighting with cancer over many years makes her stronger rather than to be destroyed. Hazel said, "I tried to tell myself that it could be worse, that the world was not a wish-granting factory that I was living with cancer not dying of it, that I mustn't let it kill me before it kills me" (p. 41). Representing that powerful word by a teenage character makes it more meaningful. A self-motivation and insistence of life give Hazel the capacity for fighting the disease. Thus the two characters are seeking to make their life easier and relieve their pain by hope and love. The disease is a dangerous and difficult case that cannot be afforded by everyone, so showing characters that fighting the disease during their teenage period. It is a solid example of adolescence power, a depiction of individual power that makes human able to confront many difficult and complex issues in the life.



Conclusion

Literature has a significant role in presenting different issues that affect society's awareness. The method of discussing these kind of subjects is a great contribution to make it clearer and familiar to people. The American contemporary literature tends to discuss many new subjects, and controversial topics. In order to put up an idea in the discussion, every author has its own method in discussing general topics, and presents it through the characters in their literary works. This paper makes a comparison between two contemporary American novelists John Green and Jeffrey Eugenides, the comparison is between their two novels: *The Fault in Our Stars* and *Middlesex* those books have been chosen because of the similarity between them. The main theme in both of the books is disease, three characters have been taken into consideration in this paper to depict the power of adolescence through those characters, in *Middlesex*, many important topics are discussed, and it presents many characters. The focus is on Cal/Callie the protagonist of the novel who suffers from a biological problem that causes him/her to be a hermaphrodite person. The protagonist discovered this problem at the age of fourteen. The author presents a strong adolescence character who takes a journey through the history to find out the family saga, in order to determine his gender and individual identity. Cal/Callie is a depiction of a strong and successful adolescence that succeed in determining his identity. On the other hand, the paper concentrates on two protagonists in *the fault in our stars*. Hazel a teenage girl who suffers from lung cancer during the story she presents lots of powerful idea about life, death, and love. In spite of all the pains and suffering Hazel pretends to be strong and hopeful, she believes that everyone will die eventually so she doesn't want to be psychologically dead before her physical death. The last character is Augustus he is also suffering from cancer and his leg is removed because of it. Augustus is an ambitious person, and he wants to make a difference in his life before his death. The hard condition makes those teenage characters more ambitious. It was the factor to stimulate them much more. Usually, the depiction about adolescence is a negative one that portrays them as immature species; the common idea about adolescence is because of their unsteady mind they are not able to take right decisions. Oppositely the novels prove the power of adolescence in different aspects of life. In addition, the books show the suffering of teenagers through their transformation from adolescence to adulthood. They show the obstacles and the ambiguous part about the adolescences' internal and external conflicts. Besides the matter of adolescence, the books are discussing further subjects about important issues in the life.

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