

## YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE AND EMOTIONAL REALISM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF JOHN GREEN'S *THE FAULT IN OUR STARS* AND JOJO MOYES'S *ME BEFORE YOU*

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19425627>

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### **Abstract**

Young Adult (YA) literature has emerged as a significant cultural and literary phenomenon that addresses the emotional, psychological, and ethical dilemmas of adolescence and early adulthood. This article explores the poetics and thematic structures of YA literature through a comparative analysis of John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* and Jojo Moyes's *Me Before You*. Although differing in narrative voice and target audience reception, both novels construct emotionally intense narratives centered on illness, love, and existential choice. The study examines how these works negotiate themes of mortality, agency, and emotional maturation, positioning young protagonists within ethically complex situations. Using a comparative literary approach, the article argues that both novels represent a shift in contemporary YA literature toward emotional realism and philosophical depth, where the experience of suffering becomes a catalyst for identity formation and moral awareness.

### **Keywords**

Young Adult literature, emotional realism, illness narrative, adolescence, John Green, Jojo Moyes, comparative literature, identity formation, love and mortality

### **Introduction**

Young Adult (YA) literature has evolved from a marginal literary category into a globally influential field that reflects the psychological and social experiences of young people. The genre is characterized not only by its adolescent protagonists but also by its exploration of identity, emotional growth, and moral ambiguity. In contemporary literary discourse, YA fiction increasingly addresses complex issues such as illness, disability, death, and existential choice, thereby transcending purely didactic or entertainment-oriented narratives.

John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) and Jojo Moyes's *Me Before You* (2012) exemplify this shift toward emotional and philosophical depth in narratives centered on young characters. Both novels foreground protagonists confronting

life-limiting conditions—terminal cancer and severe physical disability—while simultaneously negotiating love, autonomy, and the meaning of existence. Despite differences in genre classification (YA vs. crossover fiction), both texts engage deeply with themes relevant to young adult readers, making them suitable for comparative analysis within the framework of YA literature.

This article aims to examine how these two novels construct emotional realism through narrative voice, characterization, and thematic development, and how they reflect broader transformations in contemporary YA literary poetics.

### **Theoretical Framework: Defining Young Adult Literature**

Young Adult literature traditionally refers to texts written for readers aged approximately 12-18, featuring adolescent protagonists and themes related to identity formation, emotional growth, and social integration. However, modern scholarship emphasizes that YA literature is not limited by readership age but defined by thematic and psychological orientation.

Recent literary studies highlight three defining features of YA literature:

1. Focus on personal identity and self-discovery
2. Exploration of emotional and moral dilemmas
3. Representation of liminal spaces between childhood and adulthood

Both Green and Moyes construct narratives situated in this transitional space, where young protagonists must confront ultimate questions of life and death earlier than expected. Thus, the novels extend YA literature beyond conventional coming-of-age narratives into existential territory.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a comparative literary analysis focusing on thematic parallels, narrative strategies, and character development. The approach is qualitative and interpretive, examining how emotional realism is constructed through:

- Narrative perspective
- Representation of illness and mortality
- Depiction of romantic relationships
- Ethical decision-making

By comparing these elements, the article reveals how both novels contribute to the evolving poetics of YA literature.

### **Emotional Realism and the Narrative of Illness**

#### **Illness as a Catalyst for Maturity**

In *The Fault in Our Stars*, Hazel Grace Lancaster's cancer diagnosis shapes her worldview, creating a paradoxical blend of teenage vulnerability and philosophical maturity. Hazel's narrative voice is reflective, ironic, and self-aware, illustrating

how illness accelerates emotional development. Her relationship with Augustus Waters is framed not merely as romantic but as a shared confrontation with mortality.

Similarly, in *Me Before You*, Will Traynor's quadriplegia becomes the central axis of the narrative. Although the novel is narrated from Louisa Clark's perspective, Will's condition functions as a moral and emotional challenge that forces both characters to reevaluate their understanding of autonomy, dignity, and love. Unlike Hazel and Augustus, whose love is shaped by shared vulnerability, Louisa and Will's relationship emerges from difference and ethical conflict.

Both novels thus employ illness not as a sentimental device but as a structural mechanism for character transformation and existential reflection.

### **Love, Mortality, and Existential Choice**

#### **Romantic Relationships as Philosophical Dialogue**

Romantic love in both novels transcends conventional sentimental tropes. In Green's novel, love becomes a dialogue about infinity, memory, and the meaning of a finite life. Augustus's fear of oblivion contrasts with Hazel's acceptance of limited existence, creating a philosophical tension that deepens their relationship.

In Moyes's narrative, love is intertwined with the question of personal agency. Will's decision regarding assisted death introduces a controversial ethical dimension, transforming the romantic plot into a moral debate about autonomy and quality of life. Louisa's emotional journey illustrates the transformative power of love that does not necessarily culminate in a traditional happy ending.

Thus, both texts redefine romantic narratives within YA literature by presenting love as a medium through which characters confront existential dilemmas rather than escape them.

#### **Identity Formation and Moral Awareness**

A crucial element of YA literature is the formation of personal identity. Hazel and Louisa undergo significant internal transformations shaped by their encounters with suffering and loss.

Hazel's identity evolves from a self-protective, detached perspective to a more open acceptance of emotional attachment, even in the face of inevitable grief. Her narrative suggests that meaningful connections justify vulnerability despite the certainty of loss.

Louisa's development, on the other hand, is marked by a movement from passive existence to active self-realization. Through her relationship with Will, she becomes aware of her own limitations, aspirations, and moral responsibilities. Will's decision ultimately compels her to reconstruct her identity beyond the boundaries of her previous life.

In both cases, identity is not presented as a stable state but as a dynamic process shaped by emotional experience and ethical confrontation.

### **Narrative Voice and Reader Engagement**

Another distinguishing feature of the two novels lies in their narrative strategies. Green employs a first-person narrative that directly immerses the reader in Hazel's introspective consciousness. This technique enhances emotional immediacy and authenticity, key elements of emotional realism.

Moyes, conversely, uses a primarily first-person narration from Louisa's perspective with occasional shifts in viewpoint. This multi-perspectival approach broadens the ethical scope of the narrative, allowing readers to consider diverse emotional and moral positions regarding Will's decision.

Despite these differences, both authors create intimate narrative spaces that encourage empathy and reflection, reinforcing the psychological depth characteristic of contemporary YA literature.

### **The Transformation of YA Literary Poetics**

The comparative analysis demonstrates that *The Fault in Our Stars* and *Me Before You* represent a transformation in YA literary poetics. Traditional YA fiction often centered on social integration and personal growth within everyday contexts. In contrast, these novels foreground extreme life circumstances—terminal illness and irreversible disability—thereby intensifying the emotional and philosophical stakes of adolescent experience.

This shift signals the emergence of a new model of YA literature defined by:

- Emotional realism rather than idealized adolescence
- Ethical complexity rather than moral simplicity
- Existential reflection rather than purely developmental narratives

Such transformations indicate that YA literature increasingly functions as a space for serious philosophical inquiry, addressing universal human concerns through the perspective of young protagonists.

### **Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* and Jojo Moyes's *Me Before You* contribute significantly to the evolution of Young Adult literature by foregrounding emotional realism and existential depth. Through narratives centered on illness, love, and moral choice, both novels expand the thematic and philosophical boundaries of the genre.

While Green's novel emphasizes shared vulnerability and the acceptance of finite existence, Moyes's work interrogates autonomy and the ethics of life-ending decisions. Despite their differences, both texts portray adolescence as a period not

merely of growth but of profound moral awareness shaped by encounters with suffering and loss.

Ultimately, these novels illustrate how contemporary YA literature transcends age-specific categorization to address universal human experiences, reaffirming its relevance within modern literary discourse.

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