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Review

"Moments of infinite joy within a limited time": The concept of time in John Green's *The Fault in our Stars*

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Time is a major theme in John Green's young adult and romantic novel, *The Fault in our Stars* (2012). Green spent ten years trying to write the book. Even though Hazel and Gus experience typical teenage problems, as well as extreme physical hardships and psychological conflicts due to their cancer disease, they still manage to have a great time together. They fall in love with one another, meet their favorite author, and share a common interest in reading books. They decide to live a life that could be short overflowing with content, notwithstanding their impending death, breathing tubes and worried parents. In this paper, I choose to approach the notion of time that passes in the narrative and how it plays out through the structure of *TFIOS* based on the narrative theory of time by Paul Ricoeur in his book *Narrative and Time* (1984). Ricoeur's 'unfolding representative stages' are called threefold mimesis—prefiguration (pre-understanding), configuration (emplotment), and refiguration (embedded contextuality)—all three are used to create a triadic bridge model of structural relations between narrative and time. However, it is Green himself who offers the greatest insight into his work. Through his readings, writings, the Vlogbrothers channel and interviews, he provides the readers with tools to share his imaginative vision and empathetic character portrayals. A major influence on the development of *TFIOS* was Esther Earl, a concrete case of a girl who died of cancer at the age of 16. The structural time devices in *TFIOS* are not always linear, but also synoptic conveying the narrative formations of time. Elements like flashbacks and flashforwards are employed. Green deals with time as duration, both chronological and psychological, the time it takes a reader to actually read and time as an organizational device. Time is also a subject both Green and the characters speculate about, particularly in their fear of oblivion and their need to be remembered after death. The author presents how time passes and how a disease like cancer affects young adolescents in real life.

Key words: 21st-Century young adult literature, romantic narrative, time, John Green, *TFIOS*, life and death, cancer disease, teenage issues.

INTRODUCTION

John Green (1977) is a *New York Times* bestselling author of four young adult novels including: *The Fault in Our Stars*, *Looking for Alaska*, *An Abundance of*

Katherines, and *Paper Towns*. He is an award-winner; his many awards include the Printz Medal, a Printz Honor, and the Edgar Award. Green was selected by *TIME*

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magazine as one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World. In 2007, together with his brother, Hank, they inaugurated the YouTube Vlogbrothers channel, as a project called Brotherhood 2.0. *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) is the fourth of Green's novels and is considered a hit worldwide. *TFIOS* details a few months in the life of a sixteen-year-old girl named Hazel Lancaster who has stage 4 thyroid cancer that has got into her lungs. Fearing she is depressed, Hazel is forced by Frannie, her mother, to attend the cancer survivor support group, where she can talk to other cancer patients, telling her, "Hazel, you deserve a life." (Green, 2012: 7) Hazel relents as the only thing worse than dying of cancer is disappointing her parents. The present paper is an attempt to further the concept of "human time" in John Green's *TFIOS*. Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative as a threefold mimesis advanced in his monumental book *Time and Narrative* will be applied to Green's text.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TIME AND NARRATIVE

Ricoeur's theory of narrative examines how narrative mimesis mediates the human experience of time in two different ways. The first type is that we experience time as linear succession; that is, we undergo the passing hours and days and the progression of our lives from birth to death. This is cosmological time - time expressed in the metaphor of an ongoing "river" of time with no points of separation or division. The other type is phenomenological psychological time - time experienced in terms of the past, present and future. The succession of time of this type, by which we dominate the change within narratives, is experienced in terms of what has been, what is, and what will be, and their relation to one another. For Ricoeur, narrative is the only suitable example of this type (Ricoeur, 1984: 54). He calls narratives "the most exemplary attempts to express the lived experience of time." Ricoeur characterizes fictional narrative by asserting that "the poetics of narrative deals with ... so many knots to be untied" (Ibid, 241). Hence, the phenomenological or psychological events that constitute an action are represented in the fictional narrative. Ricoeur argues that the concept of "human time" is instantiated when phenomenological time and cosmological time are integrated (1984: 109), though both notions of time have traditionally been set in sharp contrast. The order of "past-present-future" within phenomenological time presupposes the succession of cosmological time. The past is always before the present which is always after the past and before the future.

Ricoeur's theory of narrative time consists of three distinct stages that are dialectically connected moments, or mimeses; mimesis 1 (prefiguration of the field of action), mimesis 2 (configuration of the field of action), and mimesis 3 (refiguration of the field of action). For

Ricoeur, these triple mimetic stages "form a bridge between Augustine (1992) (threefold present of time) and Aristotle (model of tragic, comedic [sic, comic is correct], romantic and ironic plots)" (Boje, 2001: 112). For St. Augustine, the three forms of time—past, present, and future—are contemporaneously related: "The time present of things past is memory; the time present of things present is direct experience; the time present of things future is expectation" (*The Confessions*, Book XI, Chapter 20, Heading 26). St. Augustine does not subject a time to weave the plot. However, with reference to Aristotle's reflections on the weaving of the plot as an element of the tragedy, narrative is characterized as "the imitation of an action". Ricoeur also suggests that the plot is configured as a "representation of action," and that narrative represents the human world of acting (and, in its passive mode, suffering) expanding its meaning of representation by creating a fictional "world" of the text with its own coherence (Ricoeur, 1991: 138). This happens through a process of emplotment: the arrangement of events into an ordered narrative whole, a plot. (Ibid, 138) Ricoeur proposes that the time and the weaving of the plot are key elements to any narrative.

Mimesis₁: Narrative prefiguration

Mimesis₁ anticipates an action - a marriage, a death, a journey, a murder - and divides it into beginning, middle, and end. Prefiguration is the existing setting and situation as the story begins. For Ricoeur, "To imitate or represent action is to pre-understand what human acting is, in its semantics, its symbolic system, its temporality" (1984: 64). Mimesis₁ is "the narration of the world of action, the pre-understanding of the practical life" (Boje, 2001: 112). Ricoeur calls Mimesis₁ "networks of action" or antenarrative, a telling without mediation of the structures of everyday life. This pre-narrative network of structures gives our lives a quality of narratives-not-yet-narrated.

Mimesis₂: Narrative Configuration (the imaginative order in a narrative)

In Ricoeur's narrative theory, configuration (Mimesis₂) is the sequence of events that connects the opening with the conclusion. It takes the pre-narrative context of mimesis₁ shaping it by the imaginative configuration or the grasping together of the heterogeneous elements of a story (selected events, characters, scenes, actions, etc.) into a whole imaginative order, as he called it a "concordant discordance," in just the same way as does the plot of a story (Ricoeur, 1984: 66). Ricoeur notes that narrative 'emplotment' encompasses plot as mediating function or connecting moment between the pre-narrative context (mimesis 1) and shaping the experience of reading itself (mimesis 3). Time in the narrative unity

created by narrative 'emplotment' is both chronologically linear (one event after another that represent different experiences of time) and synoptic (a purpose-filled sense of the whole story throughout). (Ibid: 66-68). Mimesis₂, Ricoeur proposes, is "the concrete process by which the textual configuration mediates between the prefiguration of the practical field and its refiguration through the reception of the work" (Ricoeur, 1984: 53).

Mimesis₃: Narrative Refiguration

In Ricoeur's theory, the final mimetic stage, narrative refiguration reconnects the parts to the whole and marks the completion of narrative representation in reading. Ricoeur's model for this is a phenomenology of reading, which he describes as "the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader" (Ricoeur, 1984: 71). It is a "post-understanding" that signals a significant change from the plot's opening situation. In reading, we realize narrative worlds, integrate them into actual, lived experience, and bring them to life. In this sense, the reader contemplates the story where the imaginative world generated is actually a "joint work of the text and reader." Then, "it is in the hearer or the reader that the traversal of mimesis reaches its fulfillment" (Ibid: 76, 71).

Ricoeur's Mimeses in *TFIOS*

In Ricoeur's account of fiction, there is an analogy on one hand between the prefigurement of John Green's own temporality and its configuration in *TFIOS*, and on the other hand between the configuration of temporality in the novel and the reader's experience of his/her temporality in pondering the novel. The first aspect to be investigated is how prefiguration identifies the moment, events, and actions, and how a set of relationships between characters, background and foreground, in relation to the setting is established. The field of human acting is always prefigured with the ordering of actions, events, symbolism and temporality in *TFIOS*. We can understand the story's unique structure, symbolic framework, and temporality during the stage of the narrative's prefiguration.

Time and writing the novel

The writer should include in his novel a content that may be affected by the passage of time in his/her life while writing the novel. The distinction is clear between chronological, measurable time whose units never change (a minute is never more nor less than 60 seconds) and time as experienced by human beings (it seems to pass slowly or to pass quickly and its duration changes according to circumstances). The time John Green spent as a chaplain was very helpful, because he got to know a

lot of different people with different kinds of cancer and talked to their families. Along with his vast wealth of literary readings, Green also read various books about cancer, which were extremely helpful.

Green's time as a chaplain at a hospital and his interactions with Esther Earl, a girl he met and to whom he dedicated *TFIOS*, contribute to his honest portrayal of the mindset and emotional realities associated with life-threatening diseases. In his novels, Green attempts to write about sick young adults particularly after Esther passed away because of cancer in 2010. Esther's parents have since published a collection of her writings called, "This Star Won't Go Out: The Life and Words of Esther Grace Earle." Her story consequently formed Green's ante-narrative in *TFIOS*. He admits, "But if I hadn't known Esther, I never would have written *The Fault in Our Stars*. I might've eventually finished a book about adolescent illness of some kind, but it wouldn't have been this one" (Green, n.d.: 6). He discovers the true story of Esther Earl's life told through her journal entries, letters, sketches, and poetry compiled with meetings and photographs from family and friends. In his interviews, Green talks about this big influence: "Esther taught me that a short life can be a good life, a full life." He eventually realized that "despite the fact that their lives were cut short, these kids still led lives which were meaningful and which were filled with more than just pain (Hamer). This realization is what eventually enabled him to finally write his novel about sick kids" (Hazeleger, 2013: 20).

The relationship of Hazel with the author of her favourite book, *An Imperial Affliction*, is prefigured in similar experience. Asking John Green: "Have you ever had a similar experience to Van Houten's in terms of meeting a fan, like Hazel, who was frustrated that you couldn't give her the answers she was looking for?" Green says,

"This happens all the time. It happens a lot with *Looking for Alaska*, and now it is happening even more with *TFIOS*, which surprises me, because I did not think the ending of *TFIOS* was particularly ambiguous. (To be fair, I have a pretty high tolerance for ambiguity, I guess.) ... I genuinely feel unqualified to tell you what happens after the end of the book, and to make something up—as Van Houten briefly attempts to—feels really disingenuous.

In general, I personally agree with a lot of what Van Houten says in the novel. He's like a drunk, dickish version of myself, basically" (Green, n.d.: 3)

In accordance, the views of John Green configured in the actions of the story are prefigured in the author Van Houten whom he creates in the narrative. From these particulars, Green formed an emplotment, Memesis₂, asserting: "I wrote the book. I was conscious of the fact

that I was writing a book while I was writing it. I was conscious of the fact that I was using words to try to tell a story that would find life in your mind" (Green, n.d.: 2)

Fictional Time: Time and the way the writer handles time.

The reader's time, the characters' time

As time passes, life circumstances give rise to new experiences and new opportunities for reflection. We can redescribe our past experiences, bringing to light unrealized connections between agents, actors, circumstances, motives or objects, by drawing connections between the events retold and events that have occurred since, or by bringing to light untold details of past events. In her book, *The Eye of the Story* (1990), Eudora Welty also asserts,

Fiction does not hesitate to accelerate time, slow it down, project it forward or run it backward, cause it to skip over itself or repeat itself. It may require time to travel in a circle, to meet itself in coincidence. It can freeze an action in the middle of its performance. It can expand a single moment like the skin of a balloon or bite off a life like a thread. It can put time through the hoop of a dream, trap it inside an obsession. It can set a fragment of the past within a frame of the present and cause them to exist simultaneously (166).

Time is an important factor in the narrative configuration and the fictionality of the characters. In this regard, Green deals with two kinds of time from the outset: the literal time addressed to the reader, measurable by the clock, or chronological time; and the fictional time or reader's sense of how much (fictional) time has passed in the characters' lives. In the literal time, the act of reading establishes the contact between the world of a fictional narrative and the world of the reader. In the fictional time, characters have performed actions requiring more than the mere sixty minutes of the reader's real time.

Green's narrative creates (or, to use Ricoeur's term, "configures") a separate world of meaning, a world with its own sense of space and time. However, Green employs in *TFIOS* a temporal distortion, i.e., the use of non-linear timelines and narrative techniques. What is depicted as the "past" and the "present" within the plot does not necessarily correspond to the "before" and "after" of its linear, episodic structure. For example, the novel may begin with a culminating event, or it may devote long passages to events depicted as occurring within relatively short periods of time. On the relation between time and any story, Paul Ricoeur writes in an essay titled "Life in Quest of Narrative":

There are two sorts of time in every story told: on the one hand, a discrete succession that is open and theoretically indefinite, a series of incidents (for we can always pose the question: and then? and then?); on the other hand, the story told presents another temporal aspect characterized by the integration, culmination and closure owing to which the story receives a particular configuration. In this sense, composing a story is, from the temporal point of view, drawing a configuration out of succession. [How else can we make life meaningful?] We can already guess the importance of this manner of characterizing the story from the temporal point of view [since,] for us, time is both what passes and flows away and, on the other hand, what endures and remains (Ricoeur, 1991: 22, emphasis added).

As is clearly featured in most of the English novels, narrative proceeds in a temporal succession from commencement to end. In terms of the relations between past, present and future, the events in *The Fault in our Stars* happen "in the immediate past" (Wylie, 1999: 186). Hence, "[t]he fact that little time has passed between the narrated events and the act of narration itself means that the narrated events have had little time to impact the life of the narrator" (Hazeleger, 2013: 27).

After the narrative's particulars are arranged, John Green is able to suggest the amplified and distinct quality of *TFIOS*'s settings. In this novel, years and dates are not exactly mentioned, and can be disconnected from their function, with emphasis on the determination of time, or the clock hours. The narrative probably takes place anytime between 2008 and 2012, based on context clues. The characters are introduced and the setting is given—America (Indianapolis) and Amsterdam—and technology, airplanes, cars and cellphones, are mentioned in the novel. It is presumably not in the future, because there is nothing used that does not exist. Though the disease Hazel suffers does not exist, nor does her 'cure', as is explained in the 'Acknowledgments', it is not a future condition, it is just free writing. John Green emphasizes this notion by using a linear narrative structure in *TFIOS*, that is chronological. However, a non-linear timeline of flashbacks or flashforwards is used. "The structural time devices of narrative are not always linear and may include flashback, flash-forward, repetition and ellipsis" (Boje, 2001: 121). It is often difficult to distinguish in *TFIOS* between primary and secondary narratives, or between past and present. The entire text is narrated in the past tense, from the opening sentence throughout the novel, "so the reader would know that Hazel is telling the story of something that happened to her in the past—at least until the last sentence" (Green, n.d.: 8). The duration of time between the events occurred and the events narrated is not obvious or

determined. Actions' immediacy is related to whether they actually occurred before Hazel's disease or in the midst of her pain and suffering, with the exception of the last sentence when "Hazel reads Augustus' eulogy for her she answers him in the present tense, implying that Hazel who was reading that letter is also the one who narrated the entire story. Whenever Hazel addresses the implied reader it becomes clear that the events she is describing did occur in her recent past" (Hazeleger, 2013: 28).

Features such as analepsis or a flashback (the author jumps back in time) and prolepsis or a flashforward (the author jumps forth in time) are used in *TFIOS* to recount or reveal events that occurred or will occur in the novel. They are employed not only as a narrative structure, but also to develop a character. Analepses or flashbacks go back into the past of the dynamic character, Hazel, through conversations with people close to her like her mother, her father, her friend Kaitlyn, and Augustus. However, the flashbacks are very short and clearly marked in general; they take up much less of the time and space of the novel than does the primary narrative.

Analepsis functions in the mode of memory, "since the memory itself is an event in the fictional present" (Currie, 2007: 77). When the doctors determine that Hazel is too sick to travel to Amsterdam, she has a flashback: The thirteen-years-old Hazel in the ICU and woke up in the middle of the night having trouble breathing, dyspnea, as fluids filled her lungs. She went through all the required treatment; it was then that she started taking a special type of medication to keep her alive. This flashback urges Hazel to admit: "Anyway, that was the last good day I had with Gus until the Last Good Day.' This "should have been the end," she says (Green, 2012: 252). This helps her relate to the death of other people and cancer victims in general. As a narrator, and through recollection, Hazel brings the full meaning of her experience into a wider and clearer vision. She recognizes that it had then a major effect on her that extended into the present.

Determination of time is very important: The previous flashback reflects that serious events happen in the middle of the night; a notable example is clear when the Lancasters receive a phone call delivering the news of Gus's death. Hazel's parents walk into her room, and without a word, she knows what it is and she begins to cry. She recalls a time when undergoing treatment and the nurse asked her to rate her pain on a scale from 1 to 10. Hazel said 9, and the nurse said she was a fighter for calling a 10 a 9; she was saving her 10 for this moment of pain.

Green uses not only flashbacks, but even flashforwards or foreshadowing, i.e., he refers to an event which has not yet happened. Though set in the past, *TFIOS* is one of the coming-of-age stories that focus on the development of the teenage characters from youth to adulthood.

They are constantly facing the fact of their own impermanence, which leads the characters to

walk a line between moving into adulthood and holding onto their youth. Their youths were a time in which they were healthy, so they are afraid to let them go, and their passage into adulthood is threatened by their cancer, so the characters are determined to pass into adulthood before it is too late (Florman and Kestler, 2016: 1).

It is not necessary that a narrative has a happy ending, but it has coherence and structure. However, the possibility of redescribing the past offers us the possibility of re-imagining and reconstructing a future inspired by hope. Portions of stop action time can be focused on, rearranged, or repeated so that the narrative attains its emplotment. Unfolding relationships, struggles and motives are said to depict the time and events that create the temporal structure within the narrative. In our analysis of Green's text, we attempt to analyze the events depicted, particularly, the heroes' conflicts and struggles within the boundaries of narrative temporality. Green intentionally shortens the timeline of Augustus's suffering and deterioration at the end of the novel stating:

I didn't want to be unnecessarily cruel either to Augustus or to the reader. I talked a lot with doctors and families of sick people about this, about the timeline and the pace of deterioration etc. to make sure I was reflecting it as accurately as possible. It is a very, very difficult thing to live through, because a lot of what you value about life, particularly as a teenager—autonomy, physical vibrancy, social connections, dignity—is stripped away from you, ... because I didn't want to romanticize suffering, and I didn't want to conflate it—as so many stories do—with beauty (Green, n.d.: 26).

Narrative style: Reader-narrator relationship

TFIOS can be easily classified as a Young Adult novel in which the protagonists, Hazel and Augustus are adolescents, whereas parental figures are either absent, play a less noticeable role or are a source of conflict (Cole, 2009: 49; Nilsen and Kenneth, 2009: 28-29). Thus, the adolescents in the narrative take the credit for their actions and accomplishments (Nilsen and Kenneth, 28). Many aspects of the narrative style are presented in *TFIOS*. As a Young Adult novel, it is written and narrated by an adolescent. In a direct straightforward manner, the sixteen-year-old protagonist, Hazel Grace Lancaster, narrates her story in the first person, from a female's prospective giving the reader access to her thoughts but also limiting the reader's perspective to what she perceives. The first person narrative serves to allow readers to identify with the protagonist who is involved in the action. Hazel narrates her romantic entanglement

with Augustus Waters, a seventeen-year-old, whom she meets at a cancer support group at a church called the Literal Heart of Jesus and who has lost his right leg to Osteosarcoma (a cancer that starts in the bones), but seems to be in remission. With the passing of time, their relationship profoundly changes Hazel's character, from a depressed girl who had allowed her cancer to consume her and confine her to remain at home with her parents, to a vibrant who is ready to live her life befriending Gus and spending time with him. Gus says to Hazel, "Don't tell me you're one of those people who becomes their disease" (Green, 2012: 32). The two teenagers bond and travel to Amsterdam, but soon they discover that Augustus's cancer has recurred. Eventually Gus passes away, and Hazel realizes that as much as the pain of losing Gus hurts, she still thinks that getting to know his pain was worth it.

It is worth noting that the narratee (a person inside the text to whom the narrator speaks) is not identified in the *TFIOS*. In accordance, as Leech and Short (2007) point out, the reader becomes the narratee himself/herself (211-212). In *TFIOS* Hazel is addressing the readers, disclosing her story through asking herself certain questions to anticipate a narratee: "Why did the cast rotate? A side effect of dying," (Green, 2012: 4) and the way she describes events: "So here's how it went in God's heart" (Ibid: 4). The reader's involvement, through first person narration, is a way used to establish a form of confidence and to create a sense of familiarity between the narrator and narratee in an attempt to fully engage him or her with the text (Wyile, 1999: 192), causing the reader to become biased towards the main character (Leech and Short, 2007: 213).

In chapter one, Hazel introduces her physical condition to the narratee unfolding her mother's request to join a Cancer Support Group. The tone of familiarity is supported by Hazel's informal and colloquial style of speech: "I noticed this because Patrick, the Support Group Leader and only person over eighteen in the room, talked about the heart of Jesus every freaking meeting" (Green, 2012: 4). This informality of speech allows the reader to identify with the role of a confidant.

Leech and Short divide the matter of tone into conversational and authorial tone. As we see throughout *TFIOS*, conversational tone mainly pertains to the conversations characters have with each other, and where Hazel is addressing the narratee. Gus always answers the cell phones by saying "Hazel Grace" indicating, as pointed by Green, "there is no longer a need for hello; there's this instant familiarity so conversations start quicker than they used to, which I find fascinating" (Green, n.d.: 27) While authorial tone pertains solely to the relation between the author and the reader. John Green, the author, is secluded from the process of narration and the authorial role appears to be taken over by Hazel, the narrator, who does inspire the readers to moments of openness:

Like, I realize that this is irrational, but when they tell you that you have, say, a 20 percent chance of living five years, the math kicks in and you figure that's one in five . . . so you look around and think, as any healthy person would: I gotta outlast four of these bastards (Green, 2012: 5).

With reference to the 'concordance-discordance,' which is inspired by Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative and time, the narrative mediates through employment between certain events and the whole story, discordant particulars and the concordant whole, time as a chronological succession of events and time as a configured factor. John Green specifies the discordant particulars of the narrative, along with its temporal disjunctions, to show how the narrative is configured with a synthesis of these heterogeneous elements, with the exclusion of overcoming the discordance completely. The novel opens with "Late in the winter of my seventeenth year", not to trigger fear in the readers that Hazel might die at any moment, i.e., her own experience in the first person narration. Her illness is explained through Shakespearean allusions, most notable in the title which plays out across the book and functions to reinforce its themes. This illusion is referred to in the letter Augustus receives from Van Houten; the title is derived from *Shakespeare's play Julius Caesar*, in which the nobleman Cassius says to Brutus, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, / But in ourselves, that we are underlings" (Qtd. in Green, 2012: 111). This quote has many implications as it is related to the fates, lives and decision-making processes of the two main characters, Hazel and Augustus, who have been stricken with acute forms of cancer. It implies that it is not the stars, nor fate or destiny or a higher power, which cause our problems, but rather ourselves. Another Shakespearean illusion is examined by Hazeleger (2013):

The notion of stars being indicative of one's fate also feeds into Van Houten's second allusion to Shakespeare, that of the star-crossed lovers, which is the description of the two lovers from *Romeo and Juliet*. By referencing the star-crossed motif *TFIOS* employs the same dramatic irony as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: the reader knows right from the start that the love story can end in nothing but tragedy (70).

Reader-Writer relationship

As mentioned above, both the past and future of a narrative are represented simultaneously through the reader's progression on the pages of the novel. Consequently, the writer must depend on the reader's conditioned response to the written text in order to

communicate a coherent narrative. John Green, through Augustus, declares that there is a contract between writer and reader and that not to end a book violates that contract. Green ends *TFIOS* midsentence declaring that it has hope. "The reader violates the contract when s/he reads poorly or distractedly or ungenerously. (It seems to me that mutual generosity is kind of the key to the reader-writer relationship" (Green, n.d.: 1).

Though the structure of the novel highlights a progression of the narrative events while time moves linearly, Green sometimes inserts his digressions into a moment of the characters' time, seemingly freezing their time while providing information which furthers the "main story" of the novel. A good example of this is when Hazel discusses Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a theory that says that a person needs health and safety in order to think about love, art, or self-actualization; "certain needs must be met before you can even have other kinds of needs" (Green, 2012: 211). Green supports Maslow's theory by drawing a pyramid, according to which Hazel is stuck on the second level, esteem needs through self-worth and accomplishment, "unable to reach for love and respect and art and whatever else." She disagrees with Maslow's hierarchy "utter horseshit. The urge to make art or contemplate philosophy does not go away when you are sick. Those urges just become transfigured by illness" (Ibid: 212-213). The irony seems to refer to Augustus who though so sick, he is able to love Hazel.

Another digression is amply structured within *The Fault in Our Stars* as a book about the love for fictional books, albeit about disease. Hazel always enjoys reading, but she has a personal connection with an all-time favorite work of art, called *An Imperial Affliction*, written by an American author, Peter van Houten, a character in the novel as well. Hazel does not tell people about it as there are "books so special and rare and yours that advertising your affection feels like a betrayal" (Green, 2012: 33). Her mother, for instance, regards the time of depression as one of the side effects stated in the cancer pamphlets she reads:

Late in the winter of my seventeenth year, my mother decided I was depressed, presumably because I rarely left the house, spent quite a lot of time in bed, read the same book over and over, ate infrequently, and devoted quite a bit of my abundant free time to thinking about death (Green, 2012: 3).

An Imperial Affliction is one of Green's weaving of essential structures used in prefiguring the main narrative; it is a contract between reader and writer, a story that is used in the emplotment of the narrative. It narrates a condition of suffering or distress of a young girl named Anna who is diagnosed as victim to leukemia. The book has an open end; that is, it ends midsentence or a sudden ending as the protagonist Anna apparently dies during

her narration. Hazel has been looking for answers ever since she has finished the book a few years before; Ann corresponds to her own experience. She tells Gus that she has written hundreds of letters to ask the book's author, Peter Van Houten, and she is eager to make a conversation with him to find out what happened to the characters and the people Anna leaves behind, such as the fate of Anna's mother, her relationship with the "Dutch Tulip Man", and her pet hamster Sisyphus. Augustus travels with Hazel to Amsterdam where Imperial's author lives.

Time is related to the actions of the novel that ends in an open sentence, like *An Imperial Affliction*; its ending is related to the ambiguous ending of Hazel's cancer story. The reader expects from the beginning that someone is going to die in the story. Confronting with Hazel's problem, the reader expects her death. In the reader's first detailed introduction to this book, Hazel comments on its midsentence ending of *Imperial* as the reason for her love to it: "I know it's a very literary decision and everything and probably part of the reason I love the book so much, but there is something to recommend a story that ends" (Green, 2012: 49). However, Green explains the fact that Anna died mid-sentence in the book and Hazel is still living, as he himself possesses a gift for hope.

[The] first-person narration takes the teeth from the monster in any story, right? The I survives: You know, because the I is telling the story in the past tense, as something that happened to that I, and here the I is, still writing. [...] (I really tried to make *TFIOS* a hopeful novel, but I did not want it to be the kind of easily won or ill-considered hope that both Hazel and Augustus find so little consolation in) (Green, n.d.: 17).

Hazel's and Gus's obsession to meet Van Houten is also symbolic of their own questions and fears about their own deaths, what it is like to be dying and not have died. Not only do they long to know what happened before, but what comes after is what they need to know. We thus have an analepsis and prolepsis in the very same scene. Though Augustus is a big fan of *The Price of Dawn series*, a fictional novelization of a video game, he is also obsessed with *An Imperial Affliction*. Both get mentioned often, though only the latter is quoted directly by both Hazel and Augustus, and early in the epigraph of *TFIOS* indicating the main time of the work:

As the tide washed in, the Dutch Tulip Man faced the ocean: "Conjoiner rejoinder poisoner concealer revelator. Look at it, rising up and rising down, taking everything with it."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Water," the Dutchman said. "Well, and time."

- PETER VAN HOUTEN, *An Imperial Affliction*

Literature features heavily in *TFIOS* in general, a fact that

refers to Green's extensive readings and pastiche style of writing, that work as particulars prefigured and configured respectively. Though attributed to Van Houten, Green actually wrote the epigraph himself. It alludes to the epigraph of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* which features a poem and is similarly written by a fictional character, *Thomas Parke D'Invilliers*.

Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;
If you can bounce high, bounce for her too,
Till she cry, "Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing
lover,
I must have you!"
- *Thomas Parke D'Invilliers* (Fitzgerald).

After learning of the email response that Augustus has got from Van Houten, Hazel shares with him the Emily Dickinson poem from which the title of *An Imperial Affliction* is drawn (Green, 2012: 71). The poem's theme of death and mortality foreshadows later events in *TFIOS*, as well as the potential future challenges that both Hazel and Augustus might face.

Moments of pain and love

Action configuration of adolescents is marked by physical changes and psychological development as well. Because Green looks inside the minds and hearts of his characters so effectively, configuration manifests itself in both internal or psychic and external or physical action. Green reveals not only physical detail, but also memories, motives, and private thoughts. What visually appears to be a moment can actually span several paragraphs or pages of narrative time. In keeping with the narrative theory of Ricoeur, Green explores different mediations within the narrative. The principal characters live within a predicament of seclusion represented by their physical surroundings, their conflicts and struggles, and surrounded by friends and parents who play an active role in the emplotment. This creates a factor that drives the action to its refigured denouement, i.e., the end of the narrative, in which everything is explained, or the end result of a situation, such as the death of Gus, or meeting Van Heuton in Amsterdam.

Many of the adolescent characters in *TFIOS* are stagnated developmentally due to their experiences with cancer that makes a complicated passage into adulthood. Augustus, Hazel, and Isaac fight to keep cancer from defining who they are. They try to prevent it from consuming not only their time, but also all their very essence. They have different cancer conditions and have to face impending death on a daily basis. However, Hazel and Gus carry out a relationship to envisage the world together; their bond, as time goes on, is both impressive and healthy in a rather unhealthy world. Hazel's disease, stage 4 thyroid cancer developing fluid in her lungs, is

diagnosed three months following her first period. She is always seen carrying an oxygen tank as her companion; with a cannula in her nose to facilitate breathing. Hazel also uses a different oxygen machine that she has named "Philip" when she sleeps.

Augustus or Gus is also a cancer survivor who meets Hazel at the Support Group (a network connecting the cancer patients and characters) that his best friend Isaac brings him to. Having his half leg amputated, he remains in remission from osteosarcoma. Gus frequently jokes about the prosthetic leg he wears. Hazel, the narrator, and therefore the reader, learns a lot about him, his opinions, and his family. Even his friend Isaac has a rare form of eye cancer that has caused him to lose one of his eyes and must get the other eye removed. Isaac also wears glasses with such a strong prescription that the lenses look like coke bottles.

Green's style mirrors the main characters' feelings through metaphors and symbols within the passage of the narrative's time, and through their relationship with whoever surrounds them. Green indicates that "[t]he truth is that metaphor and symbol are all around us, and that we are constantly reading our lives and the world symbolically. I want figurative language and symbols to be as deeply integrated into the story as they are into our lives" (Green, n.d.: 3). Throughout the novel, the scope of water symbolism encompasses the powers of destruction and sustainment. Its character is dually displayed as it manifests itself to be both a life force destroyer and a life force sustainer. Water is portrayed as a destroyer when Hazel's cancer fills her lungs with fluid and causes her halfway drowning through the course of the novel. The notion of drowning is connected to Hazel's grief and time, particularly the tide.

But she kept asking, as if there were something she could do, until finally I just kind of crawled across the couch into her lap and my dad came over and held my legs really tight and I wrapped my arms all the way around my mom's middle and they held on to me for hours while the tide rolled in (Green, 2012: 267).

Equally important, scenes of water in the novel involve a thematic allusion in the quote from T.S. Eliot's most famous poem 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' that Hazel knows and memorizes quite well in her community college. In Amsterdam, the poem's closing lines that feature water are recited by Hazel to Gus: "We have lingered in the chambers of the sea/ By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown / Till human voices wake us, and we drown" (Qtd. in Green, 2012: 164). The last line in particular is related to "the suffering of drowning, which suggests she is still preoccupied with causing pain. This line also foreshadows the pain she will later feel over Augustus" (Florman and Kestler, 2016: 2). In contrast, as a symbol of a life force sustainer, water

provides control over disease. In their first day in Amsterdam, Hazel and Gus enjoy a great time, ride through a canal and go to a Dutch restaurant, Oranje. Hazel sees various boats overcome the water by floating on top of it. The waiter's reference to the stars "we've bottled all of the stars tonight" is related to the title of the novel. "In the title, the stars refer to their fate, but in Amsterdam, the stars have been bottled, suggesting that their fate has been subdued, at least for the moment" (Ibid: 2)

Gus is a heroic character, or let's say Aristotolian tragic hero. For Green, his "journey is not the voyage from weakness to strength. The true hero's journey is the voyage from strength to weakness. And to my mind, that makes Gus very heroic, indeed" (Green, n.d.: 13). At the start of the novel, Gus seems powerful in his control of his fatal disease. He introduces himself as a new participant at the support center saying that he had a touch of cancer before and he is brought here today upon the request of his friend Isaac. In fact, he is the person who dies at the end of the novel. The metaphoric smoking cigarette is notably connected with Augustus who regularly hangs it unlit out in his mouth. By pretending to control this 'killing thing', Gus seeks to get a certain sense of control over his physical decline. Hazel realizes this when smoking is prohibited:

"Sir, you can't smoke on this plane. Or on any plane."

"I don't smoke," he explained, the cigarette dancing in his mouth as he spoke.

"But-"

"It's a metaphor," [Hazel] explained. "He puts the killing thing in his mouth but doesn't give it the power do kill him."

The stewardess was flummoxed for only a moment.

"Well, that metaphor is prohibited on today's flight," she said (Green, 2012: 146).

YAL novels typically revolve around conflicts, emotions and themes that are important to teenagers such as assuming membership in a larger community, becoming independent of one's parents or coming to terms with oneself (Nilsen and Kenneth, 2009: 35-38). YAL novels tend to imbue their protagonists with admirable qualities which allow them to stand up to hardships and give readers someone to admire and model their decisions after (Ibid: 34-35). In a scene that reflects the image of sickness versus wholesomeness, Hazel joins Gus in a picnic to a park featuring a giant skeleton playground called Funky Bones. Gus jokes that he has brought all his romantic conquests here and that is why he is a virgin. He draws a small circle for the 17-year-old boys with one leg within a big one for the virgins.

Even within the unorthodox framework of a love

story between two cancer patients, certain reassurances are still given. Augustus turns out to be a virgin – no one will sleep with him because of his physical shortcoming. (Then again, maybe they all turn on their heels when they hear that "humble abode" stuff.) It's a bummer about the cancer but at least Hazel has bagged herself a hot virgin. She need never know the hell of flicking jealousy through Facebook snaps of his ex-girlfriends or future ones, for that matter (Gilbey, 2014: 57).

Hazel and Augustus experience a passage into physical and emotional development that their peers do not attain. Consequently, their chronic disease makes them able to develop deep understandings of life, death, love.

The most gut-wrenching scene in the novel is the Anne Frank House scene later in Amsterdam that shows a combination of pain and joy. For the lack of elevators, Hazel must walk up all the stairs and climb a ladder, which puts a strain on her breathing. The scene was constructed in a manner that affects the feelings of the reader towards Hazel and her cancer; it makes the reader feels upset and worried. Hazel describes this experience with the sort of limitation her cancer disease imposes on her. During the moments of pain, as the voice talks about capturing beauty, "Augustus takes it upon himself to lay a tongue sandwich on his beloved." In this key love scene, "Incredibly the fellow museum-goers applaud en masse" (Gilbey, 2014: 57). This scene may remind the audience that during the time Anne Frank lived in the house there were also joyful moments of love.

The scene is followed by Gus's and Hazel's direction to Gus's room and making love for the first time. "Honestly," Hazel says, "it was probably the longest time we'd ever spent together without talking" (Green, 2012: 208). It is the time when their development occurs by losing their virginity to one another. She leaves him with a love letter in which she draws a big circle of virgins and a small circle of "17-year-old guys with one leg" outside the big circle. Touching his scar as a gesture of acceptance, and struggling together to seize the moment in a sense of humour, form a romantic and realistic scene in which time seems more like a circle of movement in their coming of age. Their fulfillment of love and desire is their way to experience their temporality.

The world of the reader

Throughout the novel the readers attempt to read about the importance of young adolescent love and pain. Hazel and Augustus experience many things that most young adolescents do not undergo, but the significance of how each character handles these hardships is also a great reading for young adolescents. Hazel approaches her disease and the world around her with a healthy dose of

humour and sarcastic remarks. For instance, her first conversation with Gus is quite humorous, as they see Isaac and his girlfriend, Monica, repeating "Always" to one another. They joke about the misuse of the word literally and Isaac's session with Monica:

They were close enough to me that I could hear the weird noises of their mouths together, and I could hear him saying, "Always," and her saying, "Always," in return.

Suddenly standing next to me, Augustus half whispered, "They're big believers in PDA."

"What's with the 'always'?" The slurping sounds intensified.

"Always is their thing. They'll always love each other and whatever. I would conservatively estimate they have texted each other the word always four million times in the last year" (Green, 2012: 18).

Gus explains to Hazel that Isaac's and Monica 'always' if their public display of affection (PDA) or their way of saying they always love each other. "The joke Augustus makes here not only hinges on the absurdity of the number four million, but on the combination between that number and the word "conservatively", which increases the absurdity of the number" (Hazeleger, 2013: 36). John Green also indicates the importance of using the word 'always' in this story:

Well, always is just an inherently ridiculous concept, but of course you want to say it to people you love, right? You want to promise them that you will always love them, that you will always take care of them, that they needn't worry because you're always going to be there. You won't always be there, because at some point you'll be dead or stuck in traffic or in love with someone else or whatever (Green, n.d.: 8)

Time is ironically misused as Monica will leave Isaac as soon as he becomes blind. Moreover, there is irony in Isaac's name along with his blindness. Asking Green: "Was it just ironic that Isaac went blind? Or was it intentional that his name is EYE-saac and he went blind?" Green answered: "I'm not good at spotting puns or I might've named him something else just because I don't want to distract readers. Anyway, he's named after this Isaac, who also went blind, and who plays a pretty big role in Judeo-Christian-Islamic history" (Green, n.d.:29).

Overjoyed, Hazel in another scene reads the e-mail to Gus and they keep talking until 1:00 AM. Hazel decides it's time to hang up. "Okay," Gus responds. "Okay," Hazel says back and Gus says, "Perhaps our OK will be our always" (Green, 2012: 30) Green further states:

Most of us (me included) don't think about the ridiculousness of what we're actually saying

when we say, "I'll love you forever*," or "I will always remember this day," or, "I'll never forget** you" or whatever. Like, I say those things all the time, like most people do. But Hazel and Augustus are both a lot more measured in the way they imagine themselves and their love for/responsibilities to other people, hence them adopting "okay" as the word that serves as an expression of their love for each other. It's important to note that forever is not a long time just as infinity is not a large number. Forever is infinite, and it's a very bold to make declarative sentences about infinities (Green, n.d.: 8).

The unfolding of the narrative scene by scene becomes a favourite method of Green's story of a couple who spends hours in joy in spite of their illnesses. "The humor also gets some time to shine", that you continue reading and find yourself "laughing at most of the jokes. But once the couple gets home from Amsterdam, the problems start to pop up again" (Finnigan, n.d.: 2). So grief and humour contribute to making the book enjoyable.

Even though death haunts the scenes, however the story could still be considered a happy one, until Gus's condition deteriorates and is forced to undergo more aggressive treatment. The doctors then decide to take him off the chemo-therapy, and confine him to a wheelchair. His days are now numbered. On his last day in Amsterdam, Gus informs Hazel about his relapse a few weeks ago; he went into the ICU and "went in for a PET scan." He says his scan "lit up like a Christmas tree, Hazel Grace. The lining of my chest, my left hip, my liver, everywhere." "It's not fair," Hazel says. "It's just so goddamned unfair." "The world," he says, "is not a wish-granting factory" (Green, 2012: 213-214). This tragic downwards spiral leads to his death.

Joy and sorrow are fused together to the utter alarm of the reader in *TFIOS*. "We have bottled all the stars this evening, my young friends", says the waiter at Oranje in Amsterdam (Green, 2012: 163). This has a greater impact on the characters' lives: the turn of events that they cannot control, or the fleeting moments of beauty that they choose to seize. This happy dinner scene is followed by a terrible scene that produces to the climax, i.e., Hazel's and Gus's meeting with Peter Van Houten to know the answers of their questions. They discover he is not the person they wished to meet. "A shift occurs in the way Hazel feels towards Van Houten which impacts their relation and the conversational tone" (Hazeleger, 2013: 40). Van Houten only responds with philosophical nonsense and interrupts her to deviate their conversation to such topics as Zeno's paradox and Swedish Hip-hop music. He proves uncooperative concerning Hazel's questions:

Nothing happens to the Dutch Tulip Man. He isn't a con man or not a con man; he's God.

He's an obvious and unambiguous metaphorical representation of God, and asking what becomes of him is the intellectual equivalent of asking what becomes of the disembodied eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg in *Gatsby*. Do he and Anna's mom get married? We are speaking of a novel, dear child, not some historical enterprise (Green, 2012: 191).

Van Houten insults Hazel saying: "You are a side effect of an evolutionary process that cares little for individual lives. You are a failed experiment in mutation" (Green, 2012: 192-3). He treats Hazel as a naive 'child'; she replies to his insult by calling him "douchebags" to his face. He insults Gus's sicknesses as well. Van Houten tries to place himself on the intellectual level and regards Hazel and Gus as intellectually inferior. Losing all respect they ever had for him, Hazel and Gus storm out and leave without getting the answers they desire.

Later in the novel, Van Houten attends Gus's funeral with a change of heart in support of Hazel. This time, the conversational tone has changed as Hazel does force him to answer all her questions. He tells Hazel that his daughter died, and that she reminds him of her.

"You had a kid who died?"

"My daughter," he said. "She was eight. Suffered beautifully. Will never be beatified."

"She had leukemia?" I asked. He nodded. "Like Anna," I said.

"Very much like her, yes."

"You were married?"

"No. Well, not at the time of her death. I was insufferable long before we lost her. Grief does not change you, Hazel. It reveals you."

"Did you live with her?"

"No, not primarily, although at the end, we brought her to New York, where I was living, for a series of experimental tortures that increased the misery of her days without increasing the number of them" (Green, 2012: 285-286).

Hazel now realizes that Peter Van Houten had a daughter who died of cancer, a past event that affected his relationship with her and Gus. Simultaneously, she also asks why time did not heal the grief of his daughter's loss wondering how her death destroyed his personality.

"We all want to be remembered": Memories of the past as part of the present

Rather than simply setting the scene in the present tense, Green allows Hazel to adopt an extratemporal perspective, knowing how to guide us. Ricoeur does not agree with Halbwachs's theory of collective memory - that memory functions are shared in relation to a group - and he argues that "childhood memories are an excellent

reference" to the singular and subjective nature of memory. "They take place in socially marked places: the garden, the house, the basement, and so on" yet "the influence of the social setting has become imperceptible to us" in that it shapes our behavior and our memories without us knowing it, becoming "a dimension inherent in the work of recollection." (Ricoeur, 2004: 221-2) It is psychological rather than physical memory; it is this type of memory that Henri Bergson called, in *Matter and Memory* 1988, 'habit-memory'. In Bergsonian terms, "The memory "no longer *represents* our past to us, it *acts* it; and if it still deserves the name of memory, it is not because it conserves bygone images, but because it prolongs their useful effect into the present moment" (Bergson, 1988: 81-82).

Arranging the past events in the characters' memories "confirms perpetually the chronological order of events from which they digress, and in such a way that the intelligibility of remembered events depends on the reconstruction of their chronological order. The representation of memory, in short, does nothing to question the forward movement of time" (Currie, 2007: 78). Although Hazel is expecting her own death, the characters "live in an era where they've been able to slow the progress of their tumors, but not totally get rid of them. So for adolescents like Hazel and Augustus, the future is one big question mark" (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008). Even the idea of the universe and oblivion is prefigured in Green's influence by Kierkegaard, and by Vi Hart "the thinker who most deeply influenced [his] thoughts on the topic, and who gave [him] a vocabulary for talking about it" (Green, n.d.: 2).

Oblivion: the state of being forgotten or unremembered

From the Shakespearean works cited in *TFIOS* by Van Houten is the Fifty-Five sonnet and the MacLeish poem inspired by it: ("Not marble, Nor the Gilded Monuments," which contains the heroic line "I shall say you will die and none will remember you.") (in Green, 2012: 112). Shakespeare describes time as being sluttish: "(What a slut time is. She screws everybody.)" This reference enforces the motif of time being against Hazel and Augustus in a humorous effect that refers to the notion of time being a destructive force; the power of time being something which causes decay. The theme of being remembered after impending death is a major theme in *TFIOS*. As their physical conditions deteriorate, they do not have much more time to live; they think of their existence and place in the world. Augustus believes in the idea of afterlife and fears of fading into oblivion, but not "earthly oblivion", that he would fail to carry out anything meaningful in life to be remembered for after his death. He is obsessed with the idea of dying for something heroic:

I believe humans have souls, and I believe in the

conservation of souls. 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 gotta 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, 2012: 168).

Hazel shoots his idea down by asserting that, eventually, everything and everyone will be gone and forgotten, and if that scares him, he should ignore it. He changes slightly. Hazel tells him:

There will come a time when all of us are dead. All of us. There will come a time when there are no human beings remaining to remember that anyone ever existed or that our species ever did anything. There will be no one left to remember Aristotle or Cleopatra, let alone you. Everything that we did and built and wrote and thought and discovered will be forgotten and all of this will have been for naught. Maybe that time is coming soon and maybe it is millions of years away, but even if we survive the collapse of our sun, we will not survive forever. There was time before organisms experienced consciousness, and there will be time after. And if the inevitability of human oblivion worries you, I encourage you to ignore it. God knows that's what everyone else does (Green, 2012: 12-13).

Unlike Gus, Hazel's nihilistic perspective of life and death suggests that "It's really mean ... to say that the only lives that matter are the ones that are lived for something or die for something" (Green, 2012: 169). Her pragmatic understanding of the frailty of humanity helps her remain grounded. Gus expresses his desire to give up his wish to leave behind some great deed before he dies "to lead an extraordinary life." (Ibid: 169) Hazel reminds him that his parents and she love him and that it should be enough, affirming that it is all worth it. Ironically, at the height of declaring their love for one another, the inevitability of 'oblivion' becomes the most gruesome fear. Gus expresses his love for Hazel in his own grim words:

I'm in love with you, and I know that love is just a shout into the void, and that oblivion is inevitable, and that we're all doomed and that there will come a day when all our labor has been returned to dust, and I know the sun will swallow the only earth we'll ever have, and I am in love with you (Green, 2012: 153).

Hazel, however, agrees with Augustus that one should leave a mark on the world to be remembered. She fears of hurting those who love her by her imminent death as did Anna in the fictional novel, *An Imperial Affliction*.

"[W]hen I died," she says, "they'd have nothing to say about me except that I fought heroically, as if the only thing I'd ever done was Have Cancer" (Green, 2012: 100). In her conflict, she attempts to distance herself from her parents comparing herself to a grenade that will blow up and destroy everything in her wake; hence she wants to minimize the casualties. Not only is Hazel trying to live the normal life of a 16-year-old girl, but she becomes happy as her parents will never stop loving her even after she is gone. This is intensified at the end of the novel, when she knows that her mom has been studying to become a social worker to help other parents whose children suffer from cancer.

Hazel is confused by Gus's ironic 'recurrence' that changes the tone and direction of the novel. The novel ends with Augustus' funeral and Hazel finding the eulogy Augustus wrote for her. In the denouncement, in a very morbid scene, Gus calls Hazel to join him and Isaac at the church of the Literal Heart of Jesus for a gathering, for what is "the tearjerker tour de force: the 'Pre-funeral'" (Silman, 2014: 3). Ironically, Gus wants to attend his own funeral to present a eulogy that he asked Hazel to write for him. Isaac starts off a eulogy with a touch of humor, saying that, even with 'robot eyes', he doesn't want to see a world without Gus (Green, 2012: 258). Hazel talks about her love story with Gus and starts to declare that there are infinite numbers between 0 and 1, and that there are countless infinities, and that she is thankful for their infinity.

There are infinite numbers between 0 and 1. There's .1 and .12 and .112 and an infinite collection of others. Of course, there is a bigger infinite set of numbers between 0 and 2, or between 0 and a million. Some infinities are bigger than other infinities. A writer we used to like taught us that. There are days, many of them, when I resent the size of my unbounded set. I want more numbers than I'm likely to get, and God, I want more numbers for Augustus Waters than he got. But, Gus, my love, I cannot tell you how thankful I am for our little infinity. I wouldn't trade it for the world. You gave me a forever within the numbered days, and I'm grateful (Green, 2012: 260).

Hazel is fulfilled with the infinity she and Gus share. In her speech, sadness is mingled with gratefulness for Gus who grants her 'a forever within the numbered days'. Thus, "[y]ou may want to bring out your calculator and some log paper, but basically Hazel + Gus = infinity tears" (Silman, 2014: 3). They both say "I love you" to each other one last time. Gus dies eight days later. "It was unbearable, the whole thing. Every second worst than the last," narrates Hazel (Green, 2012: 262).

Gus's last act of struggling with his illness and impending death was at a gas station where he calls Hazel in the middle of the night to ask her to come to

rescue him (Green, 2012: 242-247). She finds him covered in his own mucus and vomit, his stomach is infected from the G-tube. John Green was influenced by a poem called "The Red Wheelbarrow" by William Carlos Williams. Hazel recites this poem to Augustus as they wait for the ambulance to arrive, the only poem she could bring to mind. It adds to the emotional impact of this scene. It says,

so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
besides the white
chickens (qtd. in (Green, 2012: 246-7).

It contains one sentence of four two line stanzas that describe not just a wheelbarrow but a whole scene, a moment stuck in time. Williams's strange form of the poem emphasizes the complexity and gravity of reality, but its beauty reflects "the pleasure and importance of observing the universe" (Green, n.d.: 17).

With reference to the narrative theory of Paul Ricoeur, different mediations within the narrative are explored. The main characters in *TFIOS* are presented in the emplotment with an acute sense filled with physical and psychological struggles and conflicts. Green in some instances uses a highly experimental style of narrative where the reader is provided with the views of other characters. "They are not necessarily focalization shifts, as Hazel is still the one who perceives them and presents them to the implied reader, but they do offer a perspective different from Hazel's on the situation. These instances are the letters, texts, and emails other characters such as Peter van Houten and Lidewij Vliegenthart write to Hazel or Augustus" (Hazeleger, 2013: 28). Furthermore, the narrator can help the narratee to deduce the characters' views. However, the eulogy—defined by the OED, as "a speech or a piece of writing praising a deceased person, or celebrating a person's life"—Augustus writes for Hazel at the end of the novel is a good example of denouncement refiguration.

In the real funeral held for Gus, Hazel is surprised to see Van Houten there and learns that he and Gus were in touch prior to his death, and that Gus had told Van Houten that he could redeem himself by visiting Hazel and answering her questions. The final scene describes Hazel reading Gus's posthumous eulogy which is different from other eulogies. It is a celebration of Hazel herself; in it he expresses his admiration for her beauty and personality. "He says all the nicest things you could say to anyone ever, about how funny and beautiful she is, and how it's better to be loved deeply than widely, and how lucky he is to have loved her. "OK, Hazel Grace?" he writes. "OK," she says" (Silman, 2014: 4). Gus adds that people can choose who hurts them. Gus likes his choice,

and he hopes Hazel likes hers. The book ends with Hazel still looking up at the stars, replying, "Okay." Hazel tells Gus that she does like her choices in life.

Actually, time is a constituent dimension of fiction as it expresses the basic human temporality of the present as a forward movement that will recall the past. The characters of the novel deal with the idea of loss: loss of health, loss of lovers and loss of vision realizing that their days are numbered. Augustus' and Hazel's views on life and the afterlife are refigured in their strife to be remembered through heroic deeds or not hurting those who surround them with their death. The novel's end is different from its start; Gus, not Hazel, is the person who dies, notwithstanding his apparently control over his disease. Furthermore, Hazel gains a new understanding of life.

The Fault in Our Stars contains marking moments in which Green sought the reader's high engagement. It addresses the reader as its main narratee in a highly experimental style of narration. "After all, even with their obvious limitations, the characters in this book demand control of their lives and try to make the most of the time they have—even if it turns out to be not so much time at all" (Shmoop Editorial Team, 2008). The world of the fiction is a description of the world we see in a metaphorical way. The theme of love is dramatized with admirable refinement in the temporal structure of the novel. If this is so, the researcher may be justified in choosing to speak of love as "an infinite joy in a limited time." A person may live a good life, though at a limited lifetime. "More generally, says Green, "I wrote this book partly because I was tired of reading stories in which dying or chronically sick people served no purpose in the world except to teach the rest of us to be Grateful For Every Moment or whatever" (Green, n.d.: 28).

The reception of the book:

The book was received well in the U.S. and on the international level; it has sold more than a million copies worldwide. The reviews of *TFIOS* have been largely positive in *The Washington Post* that admired the "authenticity of characters engaged in trying to live forever within the numbered days" and praised Green for deftly mixing "the profound and the quotidian in this tough, touching valentine to the human spirit" (Quattlebaum). *Publishers Weekly* named the book his "best work yet" and *Time Magazine* stated that the novel was "a good example of why so many adult readers are turning to young adult literature for the pleasures and consolations they used to get from conventional literary fiction" (Grossman; *Publishers Weekly*). Moreover, *Time Magazine* named the book their number one best book in the fiction category for 2012, saying that Green has managed to write "with wit, unpretentious clarity and total emotional honesty" (Grossman) (Hazeleger, 2013: 22-23). John Green spent a long time on making video blogs that

chronicle his artistic journey in making the film adaption of his novel *TFIOS* in the U.S. on June 6th, 2014. It has won 18 awards that include but are not limited to: the MTV Movie Award for Best Kiss between Ansel Elgort and Shailene Woodley, the People's Choice Award USA for Favorite Dramatic Film, and other several awards.

Conclusion

As the title of the book indicates, and as Green affirms, the teenagers who suffer from cancer are aware that it is not their fault. In addition to the typical developmental issues of adolescence, Hazel and Gus experience things that many do not have to encounter. The main idea emerging from *TFIOS* seems to be the theme of life and death, joy and suffering, connected with the time structure of the narrative.

To discover the meaning of love and suffering within Green's narrative style, he employs a narrative strategy that uses a linear and nonlinear narrative structure with a surprise ending. Though the fictional narrative reflects the discordance between Augustinian and Aristotelian accounts of time, it is discussed in terms of three dialectically connected mimeses; it is prefigured, configured and finally refigured in its discordant modalities of time, as Ricoeur asserts in his theory to establish connections between time and narrative. Human action is prefigured with certain competences. In the emplotment/arrangement of such events that shape mimesis2 to a fictive purpose, the plot is not always linear, or a chronology of events, linked into a narrative structure. It may include mind recollecting scenes from a receding past recalling incidents that actually happened. The act of remembering is given in *TFIOS* to affirm the presence of the past in the narrator's moment or memory. As the narrative proceeds, pieces of Hazel's life unfold in moving back and forth to serve the reader's understanding that the novel is a mirroring of the real world. The novel begins with a culminating event, Hazel's impending death due to her cancer, and ends with the death of Gus.

Gus and Hazel attempt to live according to the support group mantra, "Living our best lives today", through a dialogue about death and oblivion. They try to find a meaning in their life and death. Love gave them the power to fight the disease. Green celebrates life even when it is associated with pain, suffering, and even the unexpected lover's death.

Though Green explores the idea that reality can be quite different from our fantasies, Hazel is portrayed as romantic and realistic; she imagines things to stand against the disease and to live the last days of her life. Her fear of hurting others after her passing away leads to her obsession with the fictional novel, *An Imperial Affliction*, and by what happened to the family after Anne's death and the novel's abrupt ending. She believes that this knowledge will give her insight into the impact

her death will have on her family. Gus's main goal is to make something of himself before he inevitably passes away, so as not to be forgotten. Their philosophy is more intensified when mingling with the idea of inevitability and death. They know that every human being is bound to die, hence the pressing need to be remembered after their death. Therefore, it is more positive to embrace a full and well-lived life: "Moments of infinite joy within a limited time." Hazel and Augustus in accordance come to terms with their impermanence through their relationship. Augustus is able to realize his one act of heroism by sacrificing his wish from "The Genie Foundation" to take Hazel to Amsterdam. In a meta-textual sense, this act allows him to survive after death, as his story is told in the novel and will continue being accessed by readers of *The Fault in Our Stars*.

Hazel also develops a new understanding of life and death through her relationship with Augustus. Such relationship enables her to step out of her isolation and live her life for the first time, even in the face of her impending death. When Augustus' cancer is out of remission and he passes away, she is able to experience what it is like to lose a person one loves and yet work through it, which allows her to come to terms with the fact that her family will be able to make it through her own death.

In conclusion, it becomes clear that life is defined by the individual's relationships with others, and the meaning of these relationships is demonstrated through the pain felt when a loved one dies. Hazel demonstrates this understanding while reading Gus's eulogy, "Without pain, we couldn't know joy", that death is an event that could allow mortals to live and love to the fullest. Green's message is that although the lives of sick teenagers are cut short, they still lead meaningful lives filled with joy and happiness and not only pain and suffering. Green's creative figuration of time enriched by the employment of his real experience bestows grace and dignity upon his masterpiece, *The Fault in our Stars*.

Conflict of interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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Full Length Research Paper

'You have no past, no history'ⁱ: Philosophy, literature and the re-invention of Africaⁱⁱ

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Africa has been a victim of misrepresentation since the advent of colonialism. This paper, which is largely based on textual analysis, examines how African philosophy and literature intersect in an attempt to bring about a better understanding of Africa in both the West and Africa itself. The study argues that the intersection of literature and philosophy in African literary discourse we witness is an inevitable consequence of the historical events (including colonialism) that conspired to condemn the continent—as a body—to subjection in the Western world of thought, and the response that this reality solicited from Africans facing the challenges of the Western engineered modernity. The study examines the writing of some of the pioneering modern African writers who have tried to undermine ideas propagated by philosophers such as Hegel—in a typical Eurocentric tradition—to undermine Africa, a continent they hardly understood. The objective is to show that through literature, African writers were able to reveal more about African thought than what has been readily acknowledged.

Key words: Africa, African literature, African philosophy, intersection, African discourse.

INTRODUCTION

From the outset, the study makes reference to two Africas: the one the West helped to create which has been a subject of a lot of controversy and misinterpretation, and the one that could be called the real-for lack of a better word-Africa that exists outside the Western conception, and an Africa that still remains least understood. This distinction is vital in understanding the premise upon which this article is based because many of the problems that arise in the study of Africa through various disciplines-including philosophy and literature, the focus of this article- expose the knowledge gaps, arguably, on the basis of these two Africas, the kind of knowledge they represent, and the challenge they raise for those seeking to reconcile the two to end up with a

harmonious whole. The concept of the two Africas can be traced to colonialism and the colonial mentality that made many Europeans interpret Africa from a certain perspective, oblivious to the reality within and amongst Africans themselves. In this regard, Mudimbe (1985:175 to 176) succinctly observes that the "history of knowledge in Africa and about Africa appears deformed and disjointed" mainly because of "its own origin and development" since the "discourse which witnesses to Africa's knowledge" talks about "unknown societies [largely] without their own 'texts'". Indeed, for the most part the input from the Africans themselves had for a long time remained absent from the discourse on the *created* Africa. Eventually, what emerges is two scenarios of how

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other people perceive Africans (that is, outsiders looking in), and how Africans view themselves (insiders looking at themselves). This article builds on the debates on Africa, with particular reference to the two “Africas”—one invented and imagined and other the actual one that survives regardless of the misconceptions and denigration of the West.

The challenge African intellectuals such as writers, philosophers, and even politicians have faced since the mid-twentieth century appears to revolve around making the *real* Africa—the Africa that is least understood—become known to the outside world in an attempt to correct the largely distorted Western ideas associated with the *created* Africa. As such, the article argues that the intersection of literature and philosophy in African literary discourse appears to be an inevitable consequence of the historical events that conspired to condemn the continent—as a body—to subjection in the Western world of thought, and the response that this reality solicited from Africans facing the challenges of the Western engineered modernity.

To situate the article’s argument, Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel’s (1899) *The Philosophy of History*, offers some interesting nineteenth century views on Africans. Though the view is esoteric, too reductive, and does not entirely and categorically represent all Western thought, what it does is present a problematic scenario for Africa representative of slanted Eurocentric thought. Hegel in this regard has been chosen since such ‘lofty’ thinking might not be casually dismissed as wishful thinking. Moreover, Hegel has been chosen because of what he represents in Western thought. In the *Philosophy of History* Hegel notes:

The Peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all *our* ideas—the category of Universality. In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained the realization of any substantial objective existence—as for example, God, or Law—in which the interest of man’s volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being. This distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained; so that the Knowledge of an absolute Being, and Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting. The Negro [...] exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality—all that we call feeling—if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character (1899: 93).

Despite his misgivings about “Africa”, Hegel does acknowledge in this quotation the “difficult to

comprehend” the African character. This admission also hints at *the unknown* to the West, at the very least. However, before relating what he says to the primary theme of this article, it is worth further considering what else Hegel says about Africa. After dismissing Africa primarily Sub-Saharan Africa for what appears to be an issue of inconvenience—as not worth “to mention [...] again” because the continent “is no historical part of the world” with “no movement or development to exhibit,” Hegel further notes:

Historical movements in [Africa]—that is in its northern part—belong to the Asiatic or European World. Carthage displayed there and important transitional phase of civilization; but, as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase, but it does not belong to the African Spirit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of World’s History (1899: 99).

Experts in philosophy would argue that Hegel did define the terms under which he made these misconceived notions about Africa, and here he, in fact, desperately and painstakingly explains why the northern part of the African continent should not belong to the archetypal African world. From these two quotations, we can see the kind of atmosphere African intellectuals found themselves in at the turn of the twentieth century.

Hegel is an interesting reference point here not because he was right—far from it because even his strongest adherents would not admit so, but because Hegel signified how the West generally perceived Africa at an intellectual level as literary works of the imperial adventure novels of the time promoting the similar ideas, values and ideals which can easily be dismissed as simply *fiction*. Indeed, Hegel’s philosophical views on Africa hints at the core of the attitudes of nineteenth-century Europe toward what Westerners generally deemed as *their* understanding of Africa as influenced by Eurocentric thought. These attitudes and beliefs pushed African intellectuals—philosophers, writers and other like-minded people—towards aesthetics and philosophy aimed at presenting the side of the ignored part of Africa.

Wole Soyinka’s singling out Hegel in his 1986 Nobel Literature Prize speech when he became the first Black African, the award demonstrates how profoundly such Eurocentric thought has haunted Africa. In his lecture aptly titled “This Past Must Address Its Present”, Soyinka cited part of the first quotation presented earlier as his “favourite example” to explain how in Hegel “Eurocentric racism evidently found a formidable intellectual basis”. Soyinka (1986) insisted that he mentioned this “banal

untruthfulness” because of the continued belief today amongst “those who insist that the pinnacle of man’s intellectual thirst is the capacity to project this universality in the direction of a Super-Other.” Soyinka’s remarks serve as a timely reminder that even today, the concept of two Africas—the *one we believe we know* and *the one we do not fully know*—persist, with a dire need to reconcile the two.

It is in this apparent paradox that the relationship between philosophy and literature in the African context is being examined in this text-based qualitative analysis. The texts included in this study are only a fraction that could be used as textual evidence; moreover, they have been purposively selected because of what they represent as interventionist texts in the discourse on Africa. The sampled texts are primarily from some parts of Sub-Saharan Africa because of how contentious the representation of this region has been in Eurocentric thought as epitomised by Hegel’s postulations. Moreover, the texts were largely authored by Africans writing within settler codes such as Gordimer (1974), could not have been included in the discussion since, as her novel *The Conservationist* demonstrates she has also been influenced by the African landscape and belief system. Indeed, this is true when one considers the integration of the “amatongo” (ancestor worship) belief system in the novel.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines philosophy as a “[c]ritical examination of the rational grounds of our most fundamental beliefs and logical analysis of the basic concepts employed in the expression of such beliefs.” This definition rather than the one for aesthetics or the philosophy of literature, which focuses on the art itself helps to show the relationship between the broad discipline of philosophy and not just the esoteric part that centres only on the aesthetics, for example, dealing with questions of what constitutes art and literature in the African context. As philosophical inquiry has been central in the intellectual history of many civilisations, can we confidently assert that a “critical examination of the rational ground of [Africa’s] most fundamental beliefs and logical analys[e]s” had been employed in the colonial Western conception of sub-Saharan Africa? Recent developments in philosophy, and what early modern African literatures help to illustrate indicate otherwise. Oruka’s (1991) ‘Sage Philosophy’, is one such case in point. This article does not intend to go into a detailed discussion of their ideas but to sample some of the views to illuminate on the contentious issues surrounding the two “Africas”.

Sub-Saharan Africa, which Hegel inadvertently singled out for denigration, has slightly over ten percent of the world’s population. In this region, there are more than one thousand ethnic groups with diverse beliefs and cultural systems. Despite what has been said about

these peoples, they continue to exist within their own world view and their own interpretation of Truth and Being. Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (1989) refer to this scenario as the “Empire writ[ing] back” in the book of the same title. This writing back is an inevitable consequence of the conflict between the created and the real Africa, and how they are antagonistically projected. In this regard, African writers and philosophers have attempted in post-colonial discourse since the mid-twentieth century to “reclaim the past” and make known to the world the history and philosophy of the African peoples hitherto largely ignored or misunderstood in Western discourse as part of the Western attempt to define “the other,” or to use Hegel’s words, to make the “Unhistorical” “Historical” in addition to revealing the *developed* African spirit. Soyinka would insist that a tiger does not have to announce its “tigrity” but pounces, but in the overall scheme of things, African writers and philosophers found themselves in a situation where they had to do something about the Africa they were told they lived in.

The intersection between African literatures and philosophy is valid for two reasons: first, African literary works offer opportunities for learning about African philosophy; second, since African philosophy has remained contestable in the sense of the *created* Africa, Africa needs modern philosophers to articulate what constitutes African philosophy or to provide insights on philosophy in Africa. It is not enough to read about philosophy in Africa in the works of fiction; the philosophy also needs articulation by the professionals. The implication is that there were two concurrent forces developing more or less simultaneously—first generation modern African writers writing about the history, beliefs, attitudes and practices of their own people, and first generation modern African philosophers trying to show how African philosophy has existed in different African societies.

As part of these efforts, African writers begin a process of interpreting and recording the African thought in modern African (1988) fiction, especially considering that the *text* that Mudimbe refers to has for the most part remained oral in most of the sub-Saharan societies. Orality is one aspect that defines a swathe of territory dubbed “terra incognita” (Gerard 1990:19). It suited Hegel and his philosophising to exclude the northern part with its known and documented civilisation from the southern part that he so blatantly denigrates. Joseph Conrad’s (1900; 1995) *Heart of Darkness* also focuses on this part of the African continent. The northern part and Ethiopia, with its known written culture would not fit into this modicum. In this challenge of re-writing the past and reclaiming the philosophy of African peoples, African writers and philosophers in their respective fields help to re-define the African peoples’ identities because both groups share the post-colonial concerns of operating on the margins of the centre of Western discourse. As a

matter of fact, Eze (1997) identifies “the brutal encounter of the African world with European modernity” as “single most important factor that drives” “(post) colonial African philosophy,” “an encounter epitomized in the colonial phenomenon” (4). The “brutal encounter” is another feature that African literatures and philosophy share. Indeed, the scars of this brutal encounter have permeated every fabric of the African continent and have spared no discipline. In other words, the brutal encounter in itself has provided a framework through which African writers and philosophers operate.

Before many people in earnest started reading about modern African philosophy from the writings of the professionals, some of the first generation modern African writers such as Chinua Achebe, one of the foremost African writers, had produced literary works such as *Things Fall Apart*, an archetypal African novel, published in 1958 and *Arrow of God* published in 1964 that highlight the African social dispensation and belief systems in fact readers find the latter novel too anthropological for a work of fiction. There are many other pre-Achebe non-fiction works that also presented ideas about the African social dispensation and cosmology, but these do not fit into the scope of this discussion. Achebe's inaugural novel *Things Fall Apart* demonstrates that African traditional societies had law and order and belief in the Supreme Deity. In fact, the novel also counters the portrayal of Africa in books by Western ethnologists and historians as—according to African philosopher Onyewuenyi (1991: 31)—“Africa of the savage Africans who did nothing, developed nothing, or created nothing historical”.

What Western writers generally chose to include and ignore in the *created* Africa, especially in the colonial discourse, had a lot to do with biased perceptions with their root in racialism. To counter some of the racist portrayals of Western literatures such as Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1977), Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1951), Achebe and other African writers did not only present Africa from a more sympathetic and much more realistic outlook but also opted to emphasise aspects of the African socio-economic and cultural dispensation in their representation of Africa what many colonial European writers had de-emphasised or misinterpreted in their *created* Africa. This counter-approach is significant because in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1995), for example, as Achebe aptly points out in “Racism in *Heart of Darkness*” deliberately avoids giving the Africans a language and only does so in a spot where they confirm their cannibalistic nature.

Similarly, Cary's *Mister Johnson* creates a romantic hero who passes for an African, who fails to reflect the Nigerian character. For example, in *Things Fall Apart*, a novel about what some people would call a clash of African and European cultures in the advent of

colonialism, a British District Commissioner observes that in “many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa,” he has learned that it was beneath his position to attend to “undignified details” such as “cutting a hanged man from the tree” because such an act “would give the natives a poor opinion of him” (Achebe, 1958: 179). And naturally, in the book [...] he planned to write he would stress that point. [...] The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write an entire chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.

The District Commissioner ironically can be reduce into a paragraph material which Achebe has used for an entire novel, hence giving his audience limited access to information on Africa. Thus for Achebe, instead of turning this people's history and wellbeing into a “footnote” in history as many Western writers had done, he writes an entire novel detailing the African way of life, sensibility, spirituality and intellectualism, something that is even more apparent particularly in *Arrow of God* projecting more or less a similar period as *Things Fall Apart*. Neither does Achebe romanticise the social dispensation of the Igbo cosmology since the narrator also raises concern over the questionable slaying of Ikemefuna as a sacrifice to the gods and the throwing away of twins in the evil forest. The suicide the passage refers to comes after the protagonist's return to his clan only to find that “things have fallen apart” since the advent of colonialism has put a knife on the centre that held his society together. The first question this raises in relation to this novel is: If, indeed, sub-Saharan Africa did not have “Law,” why then does Umuofia banish Okonkwo from his clan for seven years as punishment for breaking the code of his society's values? The second is: where does one situate Igbo metaphysics if the Igbo did not have a belief system of note? These rhetorical questions simply undermine what Hegel and other Eurocentric scholars professed about Africa on the “Unhistorical” dimensions as the continent with its rich heritage has never been *tabula rasa*.

Achebe's maiden and archetypal African Anglophone novel also presents pre-colonial traditional beliefs, attitudes and practices, and a social dispensation that survived mostly through oral tradition. Though not a philosopher, Achebe manages to record not only his people's history and anthropology, but also their philosophy. By representing his people's traditional beliefs, attitudes and practices with fidelity, Achebe manages to underline the philosophy inherent in the Igbo cosmos. The belief system of the Igbo brings to light the personal god, *chi*, progressing to a supreme deity, the

benevolent creator, *Chukwu*, who created the visible universe (*uwa*). Achebe's fiction could be classified as part of fictions seeking to reclaim Africa's past and offer perspectives that would otherwise be dismissed as inconsequential or given superficial treatment in Eurocentric representation. More significantly, this work of fiction—though not necessarily a historical account in the real sense of the word—manages to reveal the profoundly religious nature of the Igbo people and how they interpreted truth and being.

These traditional beliefs, attitudes and practices of African peoples that found their way into African modern fictions did not occur by accident. They are ready-made materials that African writers found appropriate from their respective society. In this regard, Mbiti (1970)—a pioneering historian of African philosophy—underscores the centrality of the traditional beliefs, attitudes and practices of African peoples, arguing that ignoring their deeply religious nature “can only lead to a lack of understanding African behaviour and problems” and religion constitutes “the strongest element in traditional background” that “exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned”:

1. Mbiti defines African philosophy as “the understanding, attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African peoples think, act or speak in different situations of life”
2. Mbiti's conception, hints at the presence of African philosophy in these traditional African societies since time immemorial.

In fact, his definition can be used to refer to what Achebe and other African writers produce as reflections of the philosophy of the people they represent in their fiction. As Onyewuenyi (1991) points out in “Is there an African Philosophy?”, “we can and should talk about African philosophy, because the African culture has its own way of establishing order” and has “its own view of life,” “the starting point of philosophy” (38). Because these traditional societies had ready-made materials in terms of traditional thought and belief, prominent African writers such as Soyinka depends on Yoruba, Achebe on Igbo and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, an African writer from Kenya in East Africa, on Gikuyu metaphysics to explore in their fiction the thinking of their people and to make sense of their social dispensation and cosmology. The fact that they found “complete” ready-made materials in their society, representing their people's cosmology and social dispensation attests to the existence of a complex way of life that Hegel and many of his like-minded Eurocentric scholars and philosophers had failed to appreciate.

Ngũgĩ's *The River Between*, a novel published in 1965 representing the conflict that ensued as Christianity encroached upon the traditions and beliefs of the Gikuyu in Kenya, also illustrates how the African languages bear

testimony to the pre-colonial existence of traditional beliefs, attitudes and practices. After all, in the nomenclature of the African peoples, missionaries did find ready-made concepts that apply to the conception of Truth, Being, and Providence. *The River Between* shows that the Gikuyu believed in the Supreme Deity, Murungu, the same name used to refer to the Judeo-Christian God in Gikuyu. For example, the novel talks about the big Mugumo tree, a religious symbol in traditional religion, as a “mysterious” and “holy and awesome,” “ancient,” “a sacred tree,” “a tree of Murungu” (God) (Ngũgĩ, 1965: 29). When referring to the Gikuyu religious practices, Waiyaki the novel's protagonist considers the “ignorance of his people” who worshipped “Murungu, Mwenenyaga, Ngai” the Gikuyu deity whom the “unerring white man had called [...] the prince of darkness” (Ngũgĩ 29). And yet these same names also refer to the Creator (“Mwenenyaga”) or God (“Ngai” or “Murungu”) in the local Gikuyu language. In a Gikuyu song deliberately published in Gikuyu in the novel written in English “Ngai”—the denigrated local deity—also refers to Lord Jesus Christ. The interest here is not to liken Christianity to the Gikuyu traditional belief, but to highlight the pre-Christian existence of the Gikuyu cosmology that allowed the locals to describe the natural order of the universe and make sense of it as they lived in harmony with their environment. In other words, at the level of conception, many of the early European philosophers generally ignored the metaphysics of the Africans, which in retrospect could have helped them understand Africans, and hence help fill their knowledge gaps with empirical evidence. Instead, they had pandered to the commonplace Eurocentric beliefs seeking to dismiss Africa as “Unhistorical” when the opposite is actually true.

Because these traditional beliefs, attitudes and practices, as well as linguistic nuances regarding African thought existed in African traditional societies, both the African writers and African philosophers draw from the same pool of oral literary traditions and belief system. In fact, Irere (2001), argues that “there is an obvious sense in which oral literature can be considered to be the ‘true’ literature” (31) primarily because it remains the most widely spread form of expression through which African sensibilities are most readily attuned. Indeed, it remains the most dominant mode of expression that continues defining and redefining African ways of life beyond the esoteric view of elitist discourse. Indeed, much of the African knowledge and thought, which writers and philosophers exploit in their bid to both understand African thought and espouse African philosophy, are encoded in the oral traditions of the African peoples in which traditional African philosophy also resides. These are the basic raw materials for their ideas and expression of African sensibilities. In Sub-Saharan Africa, these have largely been passed on through the word of mouth, hence making orality centrifugal to understanding African

ways of life.

Oruka (1990) notes that the absence of written records regarding the past philosophical activity of many Africans should not “limit the sources from which we could detect traces of such activities” (60). Hence both African writers and philosophers in their own way have tapped into the mine of knowledge that the oral traditions engender as part of their attempts to come up with interpretations that reflect the African spirit and thought. In the process, these African writers and philosophers attempt to Africanise knowledge and thought. To do so, as Mudimbe (1988) points out in *The Invention of Africa*, “they have to first think about the form, the content, and the style of ‘Africanising’ knowledge” and how to integrate “traditional systems of thought and their possible relation to the normative genre of knowledge” (x). After all, these beliefs help us to understand something about the *real* Africa.

In an ironical twist of fate, modern African philosophy has benefited from the pioneering writing of Father Placide Tempels (1965), whose interpretation of the Baluba culture in *Bantu Philosophy* initially published in 1945 exposed the limits of classical approaches to the study of African ethnography, local rationalities and African philosophy. For the first time, a European philosopher referring to traditional African thought as “Bantu Philosophy”. Actually this “Bantu philosophy” is a misnomer and should only read Baluba Philosophy as he only studied one ethnic group and there are diverse ethnicities and belief systems within the continent albeit with some commonalities. This qualification is vital as in Africa there is a multiplicity of cultures and belief systems that cannot be reduced into just one philosophy. Usually it is this reductive approach to the diverse cultures of the African peoples that has also resulted into the lumping all its subcultures into a unitary whole without divergences. What is significant here, however, is that Tempels’ intervention treats “Bantu Philosophy” as an intellectual product rather than as “savage mentality” or “primitive thought” hitherto common terms among many of the Western anthropologists. In this regard, Tempels explains: “Behaviour can be neither universal nor permanent unless it is based upon a concatenation of ideas, a logical system of thought, a complete positive philosophy of the universe, of man and of the things which surround him, of existence, life, death and the life beyond” (Tempels, 1945; 1965, 19). Tempels bears testimony to the existence of philosophy in African traditional societies. Although Tempels’ project was geared towards “civilising” Africans, something critics have not hesitated to pounce on, he does something that many of his counterparts in the West tended to ignore—alerting the West to the ignored and much maligned philosophy of ethnic and indigenous African groups.

And yet, considering the gulf between Western philosophy whose terms have been used to analyse the

created Africa and African philosophy which tries to deal with the fundamental question of epistemology in the real Africa, much depends on the role African philosophers play in propagating what Mudimbe calls “African gnosis” when examining the extent to which one can talk of an “African knowledge” (Mudimbe, 1985:, 149). The concern in this study, however, is not questioning whether there is African knowledge but how African philosophers and writers have attempted to reclaim that knowledge to dispel the unfair marginalisation of Africa in the world of knowledge. In fact, thanks to the efforts of many African philosophers, an African philosophy, seen from an Afrocentric perspective, has been established in African scholarship. This situation is different from the mid-twentieth century when both African literature and African philosophy appeared non-existent in Western discourse and early modern writers had to struggle to bring to light something that was there for all and sundry to see and learn in the sub-Saharan oral African traditions that could have rendered new meaning and insights on Africa had the Europeans had the patience to stop and listen carefully. Although Leo Frobenius, a German explorer and ethnologist wandered throughout Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century, he read Pigafetta and Portuguese traveller’s reports, hence neglecting listening to the Africans themselves. His writings with Douglas Fox—*African Genesis: Folk Tales and Myths of Africa*—introduce some African traditional tales and epic into European literature. However, they do not go far enough in bridging the knowledge gaps in Africa. In other words, more listening to the stories of Africans themselves could have helped to fill the European knowledge void.

The ‘void’ created by colonialism and its dismissive approach to indigenous African thought posed challenges to Africans of diverse backgrounds. Indeed, Africans found themselves in situations where they had to find new meaning about life and modernity. Inevitably philosophers, including non-professionals, emerged. The non-professionals—political leaders—appear to have developed what can be called a “practical philosophy” aimed at finding meaning for their people emerging from the trauma of colonialism. These non-professionals include Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana (in West Africa), Sedar Senghor of Senegal (also in West Africa) who did study some philosophy, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia (in Central Africa) and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania (in East Africa) fondly called Mwalimu (Teacher) in his homeland. Nyerere, a former president of Tanzania, espoused Ujamaa, an African philosophy that emphasised the family, or community, as the driving force of African socialism; Kaunda, the former president of Zambia, promoted a brand of African Humanism, which emphasised man’s potential to help others overcome “the animal in man.” The African statesmen embraced philosophy because they had to think about helping their people find new meaning after the colonialism trauma. As

Wiredu (1980) notes, these leaders had to find answers to questions concerning the suitable socio-political organisation system to catalyse development undermined by colonialism, in addition to restoring national cultural identity condemned as barbaric³ under colonialism. Like in literature, Kaunda and Nyerere found ready-made materials in the traditions and beliefs of their own people, which they integrated in their philosophies as they charted their political course.

Africanising African knowledge, however, remains tricky considering that the end product has to make sense in the modern world. As a result, Wiredu (1980) explains, there is a need to distinguish between philosophy in Africa “as folk thought preserved in oral traditions” and African philosophy as “critical, individual reflections, using modern logical and conceptual techniques” (ix). He stresses this distinction to avoid “some unfortunate consequences” (ix), which may prompt some, particularly in the West to dismiss the former as lacking seriousness without the support of the latter. The synthesis of the two, then, can help balance the “Meta-African Philosophy” with “modern philosophical thinking” in a bid to advance the modern African philosophical tradition (xi-xii). Wiredu also sees “a third possible sense” in which African individuals, mostly in villages, far-removed from modern intellectual influences who possess “critical and original philosophical reflections” “distinct from repetitions of the folk ideas of their people” (37), which unfortunately remain outside the structured philosophical tradition since no one records these ideas.

These undocumented views, in fact, represent some of the dilemmas facing the development of African philosophy that represents the *real* Africa. After all, lack of a written record does not mean absence of an indigenous African thought; overlooking this mine of knowledge found in practically every traditional African society entails ignoring a large chunk of what constitutes African knowledge and philosophy. In the West, unfortunately, they can only work with what has been published, whether in literature or in philosophy. For Africa, written records do not paint the whole picture. Still, those African writers who have bothered to represent Africa in their works of philosophy have helped to illustrate that there is a lot that the West did not know about on Africa in terms of African philosophy and African societies primarily because of their mission was to bring “light” to an already condemned “dark continent”, hence missing out on the rich knowledge spread out all over the continent.

It is evident that, in the process of redefining African history and philosophy, African writers and philosophers need one another because literature remains one of the modes through which the West, whose discourse they

have been trying to counter for many generations, and African themselves can learn about the continent’s history, philosophy and religion. The efforts of both the African writers and African philosophies may in the long run help to synthesise the Africa the West helped to *create* and the *real* Africa that exists regardless of the way the West perceives it, so that we may eventually have a better understanding of Africa.

On the other hand, there is also a need to acknowledge Africa’s complicity in the paradox of the *created* Africa, the dilemma that has been effectively captured in Soyinka’s (2003) play *Death of the King’s Horseman*. Soyinka claims that this play “is based on events which took place in Oyo, ancient Yoruba city of Nigeria, in 1946” as that “year, the lives of Elesin (Olori Elesin), his son, and the Colonial District Officer intertwined with disastrous results set out in the play.” In the play, Elesin, the king’s horseman, destined to accompany the dead king, the Alaafin of Oyo, on a journey to the land of the dead must through his sheer will-power commit ritual suicide as part of the rite of passage to the larger world of the ancestors, which in Yoruba metaphysics links the world of the living and that of the dead. On the eve of his death, however, the king’s horseman chooses to marry a young bride, in fact, his son’s fiancée. Eventually, in the defining moment he does not die as his will *fails* him and the British officer intervenes. To atone for his family and save his community from an inevitable collapse, Olunde, the horseman’s eldest heir who has returned from medical studies abroad to bury his father, dies in his stead. In the dénouement of the play, when the women of the market unveil corpse of the son, the King’s horseman breaks his neck with chains and dies, hence taking with him an unnecessary life of his son. This death scene highlights the futile attempts for by the British Colonial Officer, Pilkins, who—because he cannot ignore this *barbarity of the custom*—intervenes at the precise moment of the Horseman’s intended transition in an attempt to save his life. By the time the plays ends, he realises that instead of saving a life, he has precipitated two deaths. Hence he laments:

O god!
 Can I be blamed for doing justice?
 Is kindness my crime?
 I was trying to save a life—
 And I have caused a double death.
 Man only understands the good he does into himself,
 When he acts for others,
 Good is turned into evil; evil is turned into good!

Although the Elesin attempts to blame the white man for his own failure, Soyinka deliberately changes the original story to make the horseman complicit in his own death (as evidenced by his taking a young bride). As Moore (1980) observes, by letting the Elesin marry a young bride on the eve of his death—hence becoming a

³ In this section, I benefit from Kwasi Wiredu’s insights on early African philosophy presented in his *Philosophy and the African Culture* (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana UP, 1966) 145

collaborator in his own doom—Soyinka “leads the audience away from sterile clichés about ‘culture conflict’ towards a more subtle understanding of the event, turning it into a critique of the whole process *by which Africans consented to their undermining of their vision of the world*” (emphasis added). What is not lost in this presentation is the way African, in this case Yoruba, metaphysics are pivotal to not only determining an African way of life but also understanding the complex issues they face as well. Moreover, being complicit in the creation of a contestable Africa does not preclude the African cosmology, which render meaning to the actions of Elesin and Olunde. It is this long-established African belief system and knowledge that help to understand African wellbeing so long neglected in the created Africa.

Conclusion

Although this study cannot claim to be exhaustive in its analysis of the issues pertaining to the intersection between literature and philosophy in the grappling with issues relating to Africa, it does raise some issues that illuminates to the ongoing debate on Africa, particular by considering how the two “Africas” pose challenges to understanding the continent and the multiplicities of its peoples and cultures. The analysis demonstrates how both philosophy and literature have been fields of contestations in the discourse about Africa. It also shows how both literature and philosophy unite in debunking the often myopic, reductive and grossly biased Eurocentric thoughts about the much maligned Africa to bring about a new consciousness and a new understanding about Africa.

Generally, stereotypes about Africa witnessed in the imperial adventure novels in the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century that denigrated Africa and its peoples were consistent with the mainstream elevated thoughts of Europeans as embodied in Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* and other similar writings. Though changes have occurred and much has been learned about Africa from both African philosophers and modern African writers, there is still a lot that needs to be done before bridging the gap between the *created* Africa—a relic of colonialism and what it engenders—and the *real* Africa that continues to thrive regards of any negative reasoning about Africa and stereotyping. This means there is still a lot that ought to be done to make the real Africa visible to the rest of the world. In this regard, African writers and philosophers should continue ensuring that the *real* Africa does not get swallowed by the *created* Africa in their attempt to bridge the knowledge gap; otherwise they will, like the Elesin, remain complicit in bringing *death* to their peoples’ ways of life and African perception of Truth and Being.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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¹ A common expression in colonial discourse that Chinua Achebe and other African writers often oppose in their non-fiction.

ⁱⁱ A shorter version of this paper was presented at the joint Philosophical Society and English Association Symposium “Philosophy and Literature: Intersections” in New York, USA

Full Length Research Paper

Globalisation and African women's bodies: Some fictional representations

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Gender as an important resonance in the transnational dynamics of globalisation significantly compels African women to transgress orthodox boundaries and traditional spaces which often limit them to domestic spheres. Particularly in the global south, for instance, the gendered forces of globalisation, complexly restructures people and spaces such that African women's identities and sexualities are profoundly altered. How then do female African writers represent this highly sexualised phenomenon in their artistic productions? This essay examines the specificities of the gendered forces of globalisation from the perspectives of two contemporaneous female West African writers—Amma Darko and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo in their novels *Beyond the Horizon* and *Trafficked*. The route of this literary study is a trajectory that attempts to reveal some of the emerging patterns of globalisation especially on African women's bodies. The essay also demonstrates, among other things, how the sexualities and the psychology of these women subsequently constrain new directions in the theorisation of African women's identities.

Key words: Identities, sexualities, globalisation, West African women's fiction, gender.

INTRODUCTION

Female African bodies at the confluence of globalism

Globalisation is not exactly a new cultural, economic, political or transnational phenomenon. Indeed, it has morphed synchronically and diachronically and in its various reformulations, it continues to brand contemporary modern societies. Today, even in the most remote corners of the world, globalisation and its capitalist imperatives continue to impact individual lives,

entire populations and nations in profound ways, remapping and reconfiguring these into new entities that defy orthodox or conventional meanings of "well-bounded narratives".

In other words, world maps and other such demographic delineations are currently being remapped as a result of globalisation. In her attempt to capture some of the dimensions of this current trend, Stephanie Newell (2006) suggests the idea of "West African-scape"

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(14) as a metaphor for the emerging new world order in which West Africa is both an absence and a residual presence in other parts of the world. To some extent, the border of Newell's trajectory is extended in this essay. The immediate concern in this essay is to illustrate how this process of modernisation maps new contours in identifications, values and cultures for the human populations caught in the intense economic, cultural, psychological and political pressures that it precipitates.

Given the rapacious desire for capital in global economies, a wide variety of commodities become the items of transnational trade and exchange. These items sometimes include human bodies or fragments of it as witnessed in the growing commercialisation and scramble for vital human body organs in many countries including South America, Asia, India and several other locations. However, for small-time players in the emerging global economy, capital may be very scarce. For instance, for impoverished people, including African women, their natural endowments; their bodies freely feed the predatory capitalist systems of global economies, and this is only a fragment of the toll that globalism seems to exact from African women.

Undeniably, globalisation works on a process of uneven and inequitable distribution of capital, power, knowledge and material resources, sustained and worked through grand narratives that rationalise its underlying ideologies of domination and consumerism. In this formulation, the seeming superior powers map others as negative, inferior, and subordinate leaving them, especially women, vulnerable, exploited, derogated and impoverished.

African women's bodies in particular have thus become visible scripts of the complex processes of globalisation. And for the theory of African women's identities, the complexities of globalism and how they implicate African women's lives and experiences must continually be the subject of critical examination and several African feminists, writers and gender theorists critically engage with the exploitative effects of globalisation on women. The seminal studies of Amina (2001), Filomina (2005) and Nawal (2008) among many others illustrate this concern. The consensus of these studies demonstrates that the economics of globalism being gendered provoke new challenges for women in the impoverished economies of many developing African countries. Steady (2005) for instance, succinctly points to the polarisations of racism and globalisation when she posits that:

The overwhelming evidence seems to suggest that gender-based hierarchies and gender subordination combined with structural racism are being reinforced by globalisation (313).

Steady (2005) thus compellingly points to the centrality of gender in any discussion of the realities of globalisation

on the African continent. There are also serious economic dimensions to the inequities of globalisation on women and there is a surfeit of scholarship on the subject. Sassen (2002) in her consideration of the economics of globalisation and its impact on women in several locations of the developing world, suggests the term "counter-geographies" as the alternative circuits created within the context of spatial strategies for survival in a shrinking world economy. As she further explains, through a process of "feminisation of survival" men, women and even governments have to devise new strategies in their various attempts to cope with the tyranny of globalisation. She avers that it is "increasingly on the backs of women that these forms of making a living, making a profit and securing government revenue are realised" (89). The implication is that the feminisation of survival translates to the feminisation of labour and women bear these burdens. Similarly too, Lai Olorode in "Gender, Globalisation and Marginalisation in Africa" (2003) proposes that African women as a result of the economic processes of globalisation are more disadvantaged (71). Olorode calls attention to the moral deficits of globalisation and shows how its processes promote domination and disempowerment of Africa as well as of African women in particular.

Following these new economic arrangements in the global process, the "backs" of these women, ultimately become the rock of other peoples' survival and the conventional characterisation of African women's femininity and sexuality insidiously, alter. Also, as phenomenal geopolitical spaces of global dimensions which far exceed their usual limitations to domestic places are opened up to them, women are forced into new roles and these intersect with both their sexualities and identities. Collaborating with these exploitative global forces are also the typical African patriarchal cultural traditions. Mercy Amba Oduyoye in her important book, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (1995), calls attention to the numerous problems women encounter in patriarchal African culture. It seems therefore that the new configurations of space and its economies cannot be decontextualised in the theorisation of women's identifications within globalisation discourse.

These delineations continue to catch the attention of several African women writers who as aesthetes and theorists contribute to the current women and globalism discourse. For instance, Egyptian feminist and writer, Nawal El Saadawi, makes valuable comments on the global trend of consumerism especially as it impacts on women. She declares that "the unscrupulous god of the free market, Profit, drives its completely amoral trade ethics" (8). In her concerns for the complex contradictions that prevail in the present modern capitalist world, El Saadawi (2008) finds it worrisome that the majority of the people are deluded by the deceitful workings of these world systems, and she is particularly concerned with its

outcome on the daily lives of women and the poor. In summation, she observes that:

One of the main profits of the Free Market comes from women's bodies, to cover it or to uncover it, nakedness and veiling of women increase the profit, cosmetics and make up powders, advertisements trading in women's bodies to satisfy sexual needs of patriarchs...The eye of the gaze of the Free Market is mainly on women, like the gaze of religious fundamentalist men (El Saadawi, 2008).

El Saadawi (2008) thus calls attention to how the lecherous symbolisms of global capitalism, patriarchy and authoritative religions are subliminally etched into the bodies of unsuspecting women. Similarly, Juliana (1997) succinctly captures the interconnections of African women's sexuality with the economics of this new order and surmises that:

There can be no clear-cut separation between sexuality, history, economics, and politics in texts that are written about women's lives in a post-colonial context, where some flexible gender ideologies have been replaced by less flexible ones, and where power relations have shifted drastically and have put women in more disadvantaged conditions (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997).

Both El Saadawi and Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi correctly observe that African women's bodies, sexualities and their ultimate identities are inextricably woven into the economics of the new world order of globalisation thus corroborating Moghadam (2005) position that globalisation is gendered (ix). As active participants in cultural productions, African women writers with varying degrees of acuity, discursively narrate the pertinent issues of globalism into their works. In particular, they are producing texts visibly encrypted with women's bodies from which they narrate the negative processes of globalisation.

The body of literary mediations on the issue of globalisation and its nuances is, indeed, significantly growing thus calling attention to the interplay between the moral and socio-political realities of globalisation, art and the emerging identities and sexualities of individuals and groups, especially women. The two novels, *Beyond the Horizon* and *Trafficked* purposively selected for discussion in this essay generate trenchant meanings which are immensely useful in the consideration of the new directions of African women's identities in the age of globalisations. Both Darko and Adimora-Ezeigbo in these novels lend their imaginative energies to the on-going discourse of how the disruptive interruptions of globalisation impact the daily life-cycles of African women. As both novelists interrogate the changing sexual roles of men and women in their novels, their

consonant thematic trajectories, the textual and cultural signifiers embedded in their symbols, motifs and images capture some of the gendered realities of globalisation. Adimora-Ezeigbo's novel which comes more than a decade later resonates with Darko's making it an inter-text of the earlier novel, indicating also the kindred spirit between both writers as they respond to the social, economic and political crises emerging from globalisation. The representations and materiality in the two novels are, therefore, of immense value especially, in the theorisation of African women's changing identities in the face of globalisation.

Both Darko and Adimora-Ezeigbo belong to the second generation of women writers in Ghana and Nigeria following after canonical writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Efua, T. Sutherland, Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta respectively. Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995) is her debut novel which was first published in German in 1991 before it was translated and published by Heinemann in its African Writers Series. She has since published other novels—*The Housemaid* (1998), *Faceless* (2003), and *Not without Flowers* (2007). Quite importantly too, the young writer is currently receiving much critical attention as demonstrated in such works as Maria Frias' "Women on Top: Prostitution and Pornography in Ama Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*" (2002). Other seminal studies on Darko include Kofi Anyidoho's introductory essay to *Faceless* (2003) and the collection of critical essays edited by Vincent Odamtten in *Broadening the Horizon: Critical Perspectives to Amma Darko* (2007) published by Ayebia Clark. Other important essays that illuminate Darko's work include Agho's "Living in the Fast Lane": A Comparative Study of Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* and Nwoye's *Fetters and Choices*" (2008) as well as Mawuli Adjei's "Male-bashing and Narrative Subjectivity in Amma Darko's first three novels" (2009).

Adimora-Ezeigbo began her writing career sometime in 1992 which makes her contemporaneous with Darko and she has published in almost all major literary genres. Her recent novel, *Trafficked* (2008) is selected for consideration here. Adimora-Ezeigbo's thematisations, like Darko's, include discursive critiques of the socio-political, religious and cultural problems and the divisive issues that threaten the unity and progress of their respective national polity. Other contentious matters such as patriarchy, inequitable gender relations, sexual exploitation of women leading to their abuse, mistreatment, rape and other violent acts against them are interrogated by these novelists. Adimora-Ezeigbo's critical profile is also on the rise, especially, with the recent publication of *The Fiction of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo: Issues and Perspectives* (2008) edited by Patrick Oloko and her latest novel, *Roses and Bullets* (2008). *New Perspectives on a literary Enigma: a festschrift in honour of Adimora-Ezeigbo* (2008) has also recently appeared.

Representations of the stripes of globalism on African women's bodies

In the considerable displacements of goods, resources, and persons, crises of identity cause transmutation of African women's subjectivities. For example, in the dynamic movement of people, pockets/communities of people erupt and women's bodies and sexuality become symbolically and physically the sites of intense conflicts for control or access. This point is validated in the novels under analysis.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's novel is perhaps the more versatile in this regard. *Trafficked* as a novel, traverses several geo-physical spaces in which several subplots are loosely connected with the main narration of Nneoma, the protagonist's life-story. One of the locations in which her stories vacillate is Ihite-Agu, a small village in Enugu State of Nigeria which is Nneoma's natal home. The rest of her family, her father, Ogukwe Eke, a retiree of the Inland Revenue Department of the Ministry of Finance, her mother, Adaeze, a farm-produce retailer as well as her sisters, Hannah and Mma and other extended family members live there. Rural Ihite-Agu is juxtaposed with the metropolises of Rome and London where Nneoma and her colleagues are trafficked into the sex trade. Finally, it is to Lagos that Nneoma is deported and where her story begins as the author tells the tale *in-medias-res*. It is significant that whereas Nneoma escapes the destiny her father maps for her, which would have confined her to the village, her older sister, Hannah remains in Ihite-Agu, all too elated to become wife to Elias, a self-proclaimed predatory prophet who feeds off the poor villagers. Nneoma's sudden disappearance from the village ruins the prospects of a turnaround for good in the family's finances. Hannah worsens the dwindling financial situation by abandoning home to join Elias' ten-woman harem without the all-too-important bride price. In Elias' sprawling harem, Hannah is a punching bag for her husband's pent-up emotions. Hannah's lacerated body is the evidence that she has had to pass over the "the river of misery and trudged on the road that led to Death's land" (171). Unable to bear the burdens of her wild misadventure any longer, Hannah returns to her parents' home "damaged and disconsolate". It is therefore, ironical that while Nneoma flees Ihite-Agu and the destiny her father, had mapped for her, Hannah, her sister, is unable to escape the misery of its patriarchal authority. Yet, Nneoma's experience abroad is dogged by the mantra of violation, exploitation and abuse and the bodies of both sisters and those of the other young women at the Oasis are one and the same script of assaults, mistreatment and exploitation by men.

Beyond using physical location in delineating the thematic topos in both novels, the authors also use the emotional platform of matrimonial relationships to explore the psychological states of their protagonists. While

globalism affords the crossing of physical and economic borders or boundaries, the two young girl-protagonists—Mara and Nneoma—discover that crossing borders is mere physical relocation without any material gains. This loss significantly acts on their minds and bodies. For instance, readers encounter Mara and Nneoma after they have both gone full-cycle in their different paths of life. Both Darko and Adimora-Ezeigbo disrupt chronological time to indicate some of the fragmentary and disorderly characteristics of globalism on the lives of their protagonists as they seek new meanings and interpretation to their identities suddenly criss-crossed by the currents of global capitalism.

While Nneoma is deported, Mara chooses to remain in Germany continuing to ply her trade and unable to face up to and own up to her new life in Munich. Jude (2008) argues that Mara is "incorrigible", preferring the physical and emotional separation from her two sons and mother, and is in this regard "culpable" (350). However, Nneoma in Adimora-Ezeigbo's novel takes the opposite path to Mara's. Nneoma, unlike Mara strengthens her resolve to turn her life around. Even when she is moved from Rome to London by Baron, she continually seeks every opportunity of escape.

Upon her deportation and return to Lagos, Nneoma sees her life as no different from the jagged landscape of the homeland that thrusts itself at her as she descends the gangway from the plane. The author captures Nneoma's state of mind and trepidation as "she felt she was beginning a long walk back to the landscape of her beginning, with all its jagged points and potholes. The difference was that the landscape which powerfully epitomises Nneoma's spent life, seemed even more treacherous now" (5). This image similarly compares with Mara's experiences as she sits before her oval mirror, scarred, tired and unable to return home. Mara takes a long, hard look at "the road of life". Having walked her road, she is left with a deep feeling of "friendless[ness], isolation and cold" (1) and the reader is compelled to contemplate the starkness of Mara's reality through the image of her body. In both instantiations, the deprecatory physical scenario compares with the deep emotional scars of the women.

The confluence of foreign ideas and cultures transform local traditions and beliefs systems and some of the interjections of globalism may be seen in the transformation of marriage as a cultural institution in these novels. Both Mara and Nneoma are young girls, hardly out of their teens, when their parents or, more precisely, their fathers make clandestine arrangements to marry them off. As young girls whose world does not, initially, extend beyond their respective villages, Mara and Nneoma find themselves thrown into the small towns. They then over-extend themselves, aspiring for the possibilities of city life. Before they get over the harsh realities and struggles of city life, they find themselves

inordinately exported beyond the shores of their homeland. Exploitation is what follows. Neither Mara nor Nneoma arrive in Europe, the land of their sexual enslavement, with any mental or financial preparation for the demands of such a life. Suddenly sequestered from the supportive communal hearth of their home communities, they are thrown into the strong currents of exploitative host communities that use them in the most despicable manner.

Mara's unconscionable father, having received a "handsome" bride price in respect of his daughter does not care a hoot about her. He sells off as "wife and property" to Akobi (7). He thus becomes both complicit and culpable in the issue of Mara's mistreatment and abuse by her husband. Mara is subjected to domestic or marital rape by her husband as a matter of regular occurrence. For instance, she gets treated as his handmaid, who must wait on him hand and foot whether at home/Accra or in Hamburg, Germany. Although a wife, Mara in real emotional terms equals Akobi's property. As property of a poor and stingy man, her fate is sealed and she endures all kinds of abuse by Akobi, taking all these stoically, as she would her menstrual pain.

The metaphor of Mara's blood flow is important because it connotes the substance of her life and its waning simultaneously points to her physical pain as well as signifies her painful loss of self-autonomy. Not only does she experience bodily changes, Mara's sexuality is also transformed as she is divested of any claims or rights to her own body by Akobi. Jessica Horn in "Re-righting the sexual body" (2006), observes that:

Our bodies are our primary means of participating socially economically politically, spiritually and creatively in society. They are the beginning point of the practical application of rights: the place in which rights are exercised, and for women in particular, the place where rights are most often violated (8).

In the light of Horn's assertions, Mara is stripped of any rights, claims or control over her body and sexuality. Further to this, her implicit belief in the traditional concept of mutual respect in a heterosexual marriage is completely thrown overboard by Akobi. Mara in Hamburg finds a completely perverted Akobi who is consumed by greed and driven by the immoral ethics of the commercialisation of women's bodies, even his wife's. Mara becomes Akobi's regular butt of physical and violent abuse and Darko captures the frustration and confusion Mara feels when in exasperation she says:

"I understood the world no more" (11).

As it happens to both protagonists, the men in their lives wield tremendous power over their lives and bodies. However, it is in Europe that the exploitation and

derogation of these young women appear more accentuated and there Mara and Nneoma simultaneously, experience both racism and sexual domination by African men and their non-African consorts. Although it appears that many African societies and cultures seem to normalise the exploitation of women, (and the women merely resort to fatal stoicism and religiosity to rationalise their age-long mistreatment) it is a complex cultural contradiction to find the degrading exploitation of African women in Europe and the other parts of the developed west as illustrated in these novels by Darko and Adimora-Ezeigbo.

Monumental movement of people, especially the forced type is one of the inevitable conditions of globalisation. In both novels, young girls are thrown into the sex trade, and their bodies feed the insatiable, highly sexualised sex industries of Europe and other major cities in the west. Thus, this trade transcends racial boundaries especially because in these cities, young girls are not merely exoticised, they are eventually cannibalised as the scars on the bodies of the protagonists suggest. At the Lagos-based *Oasis Youth Centre*, a government-run shelter or safe house for trafficked girls, Alice, Efe, Fola and Nneoma share their experiences first-hand in Adimora-Ezeigbo's novel. With bodies and minds scarred by their experiences, healing and rehabilitation is uppermost in the minds of these girls.

This healing process is initiated by Efe who believes that "finding their voices would help" heal (97). Efe's travails suggest that neither race nor place prevents African women from the interminable cycle of sexual exploitation, derogation and oppression as their lives and bodies are sites of struggles for authorisation and control. Efe like Nneoma is barely nineteen years old when she left her family in Benin. Efe details graphically how she is first "sold" to Madam Gold, works for her for four years, and then "sold" to a pimp—a white man. Continuing in the first person narrative she recalls:

[I] worked for my 'new owner' for two years before I escaped. Then I fled to Verona and teamed up with a prostitute there and worked independently for about another year because I wanted to save some money to return home (*Trafficked*, 100).

Literally passed from one slave-master to another, Nneoma is persistently raped and abused for four years working for Madam Dollar, Captain and Baron in Rome and London. Although traumatised, these girls use the deportation experience as the opportunity to transform and reorder their lives.

Tropes of fragmentation: Metaphors of dislocation

In both novels various aspects of culture collapse.

Dissonance invariably occurs and the characters experience isolation and fragmentation as there are no visible and viable traditions to reinforce a strong sense of communal values. The two novelists demonstrate that as the bastions of society implodes; shrapnel or accents of physical and emotional fragmentations become embedded into the lives of the characters. Thus, caught within the contexts of hybridised existences and decimated values and traditions, the female characters negotiate for themselves new, sometimes fragile identities.

For instance, both novelists represent the psychological fragmentation of their protagonists by transposing present reality with memories of the past thus helping the reader understand the personal tensions and conflicts between the inner self and actual experiences of the characters. Permitted to enter, intimately, into the deep recesses of the minds of the female characters, the reader fosters a close relationship and understanding with them. For instance, as the women experience bodily and mental scarification, the obscenities of their dysfunction assail the readers' sensibilities, thus, rather than cringe, the reader is compelled to come face to face with the provocative starkness of their situation. The reader understands, for instance, that while Efe is precocious and willing to take risks with her life, Nneoma is cautious, brooding and mulling over her actions in the process of trying to reinvent herself. The author says of Nneoma:

Her days were full of daydreams that took her to all sorts of places. One moment she was in Ithite-Agu the next she was in Rome or London or Lagos each with its baggage of pain or joy (*Trafficked* 240).

From the moment they arrive in their different locations, the lives of the young women become fortuitous, complicated by the imperatives of displacement and dislocation. Their experiences are symbolic of the thematic and emotional polarisations between homeland/mother countries on the one hand, and the elusive, idyllic/utopian life in the capital cities of Europe which capture the spirit and ideology of western capitalist imperium.

Also, the vast distance from the familiar gives room for men and women to practice various kinds of "deviant" sexual activities. Chris Dunton (1989) points out that while homosexuality and other sexually non-normative practices are not commonly practised in many African cultures, they are often stereotypically linked to Africa's encounter with the exploitative West. As this essay reveals, the socio-economic realities of African women's lives, whether in homeland or in international circuits, inextricably, connect with their bodies and sexualities. And both Mara and Nneoma seem pressurised by intense economic, emotional and personal forces to

compromise age-old traditions. In both novels, unsophisticated and inadequately educated village girls are suddenly catapulted into the capricious epicentres of capitalist Europe. So radical is the change they encounter that their native instinct is completely unable to save the young girls. The costs are high and, inevitably, their bodies are the only available means of survival in the rapacious faraway lands in which they find themselves.

Darko, ominously, portends this in Mara's emotional state on her flight to Germany. Once the airplane lifts, Mara feels, very palpably, an ominous sense of disorientation and, in reality, what she experiences in Hamburg is outlandish and bloodcurdling for the "greenhorn". Darko accumulates several suggestive images that portend the hurricane of calamitous experiences that eventually overwhelm Mara. She reports that "all at once [her] stomach sank inside [her] and [she] realised that we were off Mother Earth, out of reach of Her cuddling arms and now at the mercy of the skies..." (58). Torn from the warmth of homeland and the friendship of Mama Kiosk, Mara's sense of loss leaves her reeling with shock as she is thrust into the cold and predatory capitalist world in Hamburg. Shocked, betrayed, and de-humanised, it takes Kaye both patience and kindness to nurture Mara back into some semblance of self-dignity. In what seems to be the pains of "rites of passage" for Mara, her female friends nurture her into maturity. First as a young wife fresh from the village, and then as sex worker in Peepe's brothel, Mara is guided by these female figures and she gains some degree of perspicacity for herself.

However, it appears that the male characters in *Beyond the Horizon* —Akobi, Osey, Oves and Pompey - are all inevitably sucked into the macabre dance of pimps and gigolos, the colour of their skin notwithstanding. Engaged in all manner of sexual and substance abuse; these men become less than real men in the eyes of the reader as they act out their mindless perversions. They are like the women they abuse, stripped of any sense of decency or dignity, Akobi (now Cobby) and Osey being the worst culprits. As soon as Mara lands in Germany, she is confronted by Akobi's lecherous friend, Osey, who makes a pass at her on the train to Hamburg. Osey is just as unscrupulous as he is shrewd. A man of easy virtues, he brutalises Vivian on the night of Mara's arrival in their flat and yet, would coerce intimacy with her not as a symbol of love, but as a trophy of his control. As the sole agents inflicting bodily and mental harm on the women, these men in the process lose their humanity as they are all caught in the web of one of the most dehumanising moralisations of globalisation. Darko represents this metamorphosis by contracting or apostrophising their names. Hiding their real self behind abstracted identities the male characters including Captain and Baron in Adimora-Ezeigbo's novel, become perverts and caricatures.

The case of Akobi is perhaps the most denigrating. So senselessly driven by greed, Akobi would allow several men to rape his “wife” (Mara) and he would use the video tape of that drunken orgy to blackmail and keep her working the sex trade for his personal, material gain. Completely drained and emotionless, Mara goes through the ritual of her everyday work-life traumatised, isolated and unprotected from Akobi’s persistent violence. If Nneoma thought that Baron had come to rescue her from Madam Dollar in Italy, she soon realises her mistake. As she recalls, “he takes me and two other girls to London and says he has rescued us. In actual fact, he has brought me from Madam Dollar,” (132). On the contrary, she is virtually imprisoned by the sadistic Baron in his flat in London for special services to men.

CONCLUSION

The two novels provide critiques of the processes of globalisation as it affects African women by centralising gender, sexuality and economics in the complex frame of globalisation. Through their novels, Darko and Adimora-Ezeigbo portray how the women and their bodies, in the idiom of colonial ideology, are “re-colonised by European imperialism and indigenous patriarchal institutions” (Jonet 2007). For instance, the female protagonists capitulate to the overwhelming perverse and exploitative oppression they are forced into. Life in London and Hamburg slowly, but indelibly, mark new contours in the identities of Mara and Nneoma. Both narrations by Darko and Adimora-Ezeigbo reveal that they seem to take a counterpoint position to claimants who tout the numerous economic advantages of globalisation.

As conventional or traditional borders are constantly transgressed, crossed and remapped in the dynamism of globalisation, African women become literally unfettered physically, psychologically and culturally. This works, paradoxically, first by availing the women of opportunities that had hitherto been unavailable to them but, as demonstrated in this analysis, there are more disadvantages. However, by capitalising on and exploiting their lack of adequate information and economic capital, African women get sucked into exploitative orbits engendered by globalisation. Women’s bodies then become the sites of fierce contestations for control and domination especially by men. From their representations, the novelists uncover the tensions created in the process of this struggle. They both show that African women’s bodies are the prized trophies of brutal men who, at whatever costs to the young girls try to control them as signalled in the relationships between Baron and Nneoma and Akobi/Cobby and Mara.

At home the young women may be poor and treated shabbily by patriarchal institutions that privilege the men, but in the various metropolitan centres of the west, they

become minoritised as they are forced into a visible subculture of prostitutes. This subculture is predicated on the inequitable hierarchies which underlie globalisation. The reality for Mara, Nneoma and the other young girls is that their identities and sexualities are viscerally reconstituted or re-valued under the capitalist aegis of globalisation.

Feminist contestations of inequitable power institutions and structures used to violate and exploit other people on account of their sex, especially in global economies become critical to the issue. As this essay demonstrates, trafficked women live as minoritised sub-groups in their host communities. It is, therefore, incontrovertible that the women embody the socio-political and economic contradictions in which the various trajectories of the present postmodern age are inscribed on their bodies as dismal texts. A pertinent question that then emerges is how can the minoritised, violated and oppressed women living on the fringes of society at home and abroad overthrow the shackles of their oppression?

Perhaps some attention needs to be paid to the male figures who are the aggressors in this matter. It appears that many female African writers have a propensity for creating caricatures of men. This proclivity may emanate from a strong desire to create strong, resourceful heroines whose positive characteristics overshadow the men. They must actively participate in fostering a new world order in which women are profoundly regarded for who they are—human beings.

Conflict of Interests

The authors has not declared any conflict of interests.

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