

Narcissistic Pastiche: Towards Exploring the Concept of “Cras es noster” Through Nostalgic Postmodernism in John Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars*

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the concept of “cras es noster” through revealing John Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars* as a postmodern narcissistic pastiche. The study demonstrates how Green deviates postmodern literary traditions to offer viable solutions to contemporary writing impasses. Therefore, it examines the characters as embodiments of postmodern writers facing writing obstacles, especially the lack of avant-garde techniques which could be employed in fictional writings to revive the dwindling spirit of narrative potential needed to enhance the future of fiction as a whole. The study offers an in-depth analysis of the novel as a postmodern pastiche of Renaissance’s canonical penchant fascination with literary innovation. In this regard, it polarizes the Latin concept “cras es noster” within a postmodern context for the sake of departing into ingenious writing forms. These forms unconventionally reflect the authorial nostalgic hope to reinforce the sense of creativity in postmodern literature inspired by the past grand works, especially the Shakespearean grand style. The authorial propensity for establishing such aesthetic form is accomplished by narcissistic narrative perspective, which implicitly refers to the presence of the authorial voice in the plot. The study’s methodology is a qualitative textual-contextual interpretation of the selected novel’s postmodern themes and techniques. Thus, there are two main findings of the study. First, it explores Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars* as a postmodern pastiche of Shakespeare’s grand style. Second, it unravels the concept of “cras es noster” as being present in the novel via its narcissistic emphasis on writing great works to reinforce the future of fictional writings.

Keywords: cras es noster, narcissism, narrative, nostalgia, pastiche, postmodernism

1. Introduction

Postmodernism has been looking at literature from various critical perspectives. It merges fictional forms with their predecessors to synthesize new literary modes capable of coping with the reviving narrative fiction and protecting it from artistic decline. Postmodernism designates the departure towards exploring unprecedented concepts that might replenish the traditional literary modes and, simultaneously, it looks into fiction through inducible narrative descriptions. Consequently, it has presented its critical ideals and principles as authentic designation of fictional grand narrative, which maintains the aesthetic spirit of literature and its relative view of reality. As such, pastiche is one definitive postmodern sub-genre that has historical overtones conveyed by authorial expertise harnessed for proper employment of literary techniques to approach reality within the text’s fictional demarcations. Pastiche is a detailed historical reference to previous canonical works; and it alludes to them through praising their technical or thematic peculiarities implicitly. It imitates the textuality, style, stereotypes, and images of previous works to give them a vivid and complimenting voice, but in terms of historical implication “as a temporal phenomenon, a critique of an unsatisfactory present” (Austin, 2022, p. 5). Susan Austin (2022), here, connects the temporal dimension of postmodern pastiche with the concept of nostalgia i.e., pastiche holds nostalgic yearning for the past great literary works; yet, it has a different commentary on the contemporary reality via fictional modes which “contain a pastiche of elements, narratives, images, characters, and values” (p. 5). These elements are the core structure of postmodern pastiche by which authors could utilize their literary techniques and occasional themes to project their objective insights on social and cultural state of affairs.

Postmodern pastiche, therefore, entails the nostalgic fascination with grand literary forms and their influence on contemporary narrative fiction. It refers to the connotative attributes of thematic traits expressed in avant-garde formal techniques; whereby authors delineate the contiguous relationship between fiction and reality vis-à-vis shedding light on serious matters. In this regard, pastiche, when it is employed in its postmodern context, renders authors free space to tackle various issues by relying on great literary works to obliterate any contemporary impasse threatening the progressive development of humanity “in order to deal with current anxieties” (Cooper, 2022, p. 114). By the same token, Martin Cooper (2022) ascribes postmodern pastiche to popular culture by recollecting innovative works in the past as well as bolstering their exquisite styles and technical elements. Furthermore, Richard Couzins (2022) argues that postmodern pastiche serves as an appropriate literary vehicle utilized by authors to consciously elucidate miscellaneous registers representing realistic themes: “the postmodern use of pastiche opens new ways to consider different registers of voice when an artist plays a role using their voice in their work” (p. 101). In this sense, Couzins (2022) pinpoints the diverse literary registers delivered in the text by postmodern pastiche. These registers are extra-linguistic as they incarnate the plurality of voices contrived by dint of narrative demonstration of particular themes related to culture, society, and literature. As a result, postmodernism could discursively recall verbatim quite similar previous textual fragments written by trans-discursive authors. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine John Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars* as a postmodern narcissistic pastiche.

2. Literature Review

John Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars* has been discussed from different critical perspectives. Fouad Mousa and Salih Adeeb (2021) explore the theme of optimism through tracing the novel’s precise treatment of the relationship between its protagonists who seek for optimism as an escape from their deadly disease. Mousa and Adeeb (2021) argue that optimism is very significant to save the protagonists from psychic deterioration which might result in their death since they face harsh time inflicted upon them by cancer. They ascribe such optimism to the authorial portrayal of the protagonist’s fluctuations of life. They accentuate the psychological factor as the survival haven for the rest of their lives. This is due to the fact that people with cancer might be able to overcome this fatal illness by psychological stamina. As a result, optimism plays a vital role in empowering the protagonists’ psychological readiness to accept cancer and cope with it naturally. These characters, therefore, develop rapidly in the plot as they consider their illness as an inevitable part of their lives; Mousa and Adeeb (2021) write: “the theme of optimism plays a major part throughout the development of these characters” (p. 1). Hence, the significance of the theme of optimism lies in its role in enhancing the mature development of the characters, which meticulously reflects the authorial utilization of their fictional characterization as narrative stereotype of cancer survival in severely harsh health ailment. Furthermore, optimism is highly significant because it empowers the mental sanity needed for reinforcing the protagonists’ fortitude: “optimism is a mental attitude that is characterized by hope and faith in success and a positive future” (p. 19). Consequently, Mousa and Adeeb (2021) find that the theme of optimism is merely a fictional clue for exploring the stability of the protagonists’ healthy mind and the narrative development of their dispositions.

Mousa’s and Adeeb’s (2021) study is plainly thematic as it focuses on the theme of optimism and how Green uses it as a way of survival followed by the protagonists’ suffering from cancer. Similarly, Yulius Sujiwa (2018) traces the thematic attributes of Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars*. Unlike Mousa and Adeeb, Sujiwa (2018) maintains that love is the central thematic peculiarity pursued by Green’s narrative descriptions. He primarily links the theme of love with the passionate affairs of the protagonists who undergo romantic experience together. This experience lies at the heart of the theme of love that is eruditely approached in the plot. In this respect, he approaches the theme of love in terms of its denotative and connotative meanings. That is, love has two concomitant meanings that essentially relate only to the female protagonist, Hazel. First, love’s denotative meaning relies on Green’s description of Hazel’s perception of love as a way of viewing her passionate experience as supreme and sublime. In this case, love appears direct and explicit; and Green utilizes it in the superficial love relationship between Hazel and her lover. Second, love’s connotative meaning gets its profound insights from the implicit nuances employed by Green to depict the genuine and realistic image of passionate love really experienced by Hazel; Sujiwa (2018) comments: “the word ‘love’ means to explain the love experience which is experienced by Hazel Grace Lancaster. It deals with her view of love and how she experiences her love in the novel. The meaning of her love is divided into two, namely: the literal meaning of Hazel’s love and the deeper meaning of Hazel’s love” (p. 5). Being so, both the implicit and explicit meanings of the theme of love are multifarious; and they tremendously contribute to the perception of ideal love relations described in the novel. Sujiwa (2018) follows a narrative study to analyze the setting and the context of the novel for highlighting Green’s accentuation of the subjective attributes of the main characters. As a result, the major

finding of his study is the exploration of love as emotional embodiment of not only Hazel's feelings and speech, but also her behaviors that are entirely controlled by her love experience.

Nurhuda Fithroni (2017) studies the relationships between the social and psychological traits of Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*. The novel abounds with narrative descriptions that incarnate the essence of psychological complexes and their influence upon the personalities of the main characters. That is, Green eruditely depicts the affinity between the characters' psychological barriers which emerge in the novel's plot as indicators of other social factors related the maturity and development of these characters. Fithroni (2017) solely interprets Hazel and Augustus as the primary characters that presage nasty psychological and social conditions. In this respect, Fithroni (2017) applies J. W. Thibaut's and H. H. Kelley's Social Exchange Theory to explore the notions of attractiveness and reciprocity as literary paradigms of the concept of friendship that governs the entire social affairs of the main characters, namely, Hazel and Augustus. These characters have a close relationship that is severely affected by detrimental social and psychological circumstances; Fithroni (2017) writes: "Hazel and August are the main characters who run the relationship. Their relationship has good condition to reciprocate each other. First, the writer would like to analyze rewards which have the function to increase good outcome in relationship" (p. 28). Fithroni (2017) maintains that this relationship reflects Green's concern with reforming social and psychological problems via positive friendship precisely portrayed in the novel. Therefore, the main finding of Fithroni's (2017) study is the exploration of attractiveness and reciprocity as exemplification of the characters' emblematic transition to social and psychological independence, satisfaction, and stability.

Though the aforementioned studies relate to the topic of my research, they only focus on the thematic aspects of Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*. They trace interrelated themes and how Green tries to enhance the novel's literary significance by approaching the pandemic plights of the major characters. That is, Green utilizes the novel to promote for psychological escapes from the physical and spiritual ordeals suffered by the characters. Consequently, the novel encourages people with cancer to get rid of psychological torment by being optimistic and daring to face their destiny. In this way, they could be independent and strong enough to survive and develop great psychological fortitude. However, these studies rarely interpret the technical components of the novel. My study, therefore, departs from these studies by combining both thematic and technical discussion of the selected novel as a postmodern narcissistic pastiche, which is hardly approached in previous studies. Furthermore, the significance of my study lies in the exploration of the concept of "cras es noster" in the novel. To explain, the concept of "cras es noster" means that the future literature might be preserved by exalting previous grand literary works i.e., writing innovative literary pastiches. This concept is almost absent in any current study on literary postmodernism and its pertinent genres. One last difference between my study and previous studies is the qualitative interpretation of the selected novel as nostalgic pastiche comprising narcissistic self-reflective authorial voice. Thus, the novel will be analyzed as a literary reflection of Green's fervent obsession with writing creative postmodern fiction to establish vigorous place for literature in the future.

3. Research Methodology

This study follows a qualitative study of Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*. It offers an in-depth analysis of the novel's textual and contextual peculiarities. In this sense, it embarks a close-reading of the characters, narrative point of view, and setting. The textual discussion comprises Green's technical utilization of the descriptions of the personal attributes of the characters and how they interact with each other on the grounds of interpersonal relationships. It highlights these attributes in terms of the narrative point of view which conveys to the reader realistic impression about the characters' lives and the places where they meet, live, and travel. Such places, hence, are the core conceptual narrative sense of spatial setting per se. To clarify, the places depicted in the course of the plot are fictional manifestations of postmodern life which engulfs the living conditions of the characters. Being so, the study is limited to three textual elements, i.e., characters, narrative point of view, and setting which reflect the novel's appropriation of postmodern narcissistic pastiche within its narrative nuances and thematic insights.

The thematic characteristics, on other hand, are the essence of the methodological study of the selected novel's context. In this regard, it accentuates Green's thematic depiction of postmodernism's yearning for reviving Renaissance's grand literary styles by revealing Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* as an avant-garde pastiche. It, consequently, demonstrates how postmodernism attempts to find viable solutions to writing block or impasses which might face the future of postmodern writing styles. The interpretation of the novel's embodiment of postmodernism's nostalgic look at previous works, especially the Shakespearean drama, will be conducted on the novel's narcissistic plot. It applies the Latin concept of "cras es noster," which means the future is ours, in order to explore Green's allusive insertion of a narcissistic mood. As such, the concept of "cras es noster" represents the novel's narcissistic overtones regarding the context of futuristic postmodern literature. Thus, the study

examines the novel's textual elements to provide different understanding of the novel as a postmodern pastiche.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The Fault in Our Stars hinges on the story of Hazel Grace Lancaster. She is a sixteen-year-old girl with fatal thyroid cancer badly affecting her lungs. To obey her mother's behest, she joins a support group to help people with cancer. She meets Augustus Waters, who is a seventeen-year-old boy, at one of the meetings held on cancer patients. Augustus develops osteosarcoma, and as a result of some medical treatments, he becomes an amputee as he loses his right leg. He also joins the meeting to help his friend Isaac who suffers from eyes cancer. Augustus and Hazel fall in love; and they begin asking each other about their own preferred novels. Augustus offers Hazel with a copy of *The Price of Dawn*, while Hazel gives him *An Imperial Affliction* whose main plot is about a cancer-ailing girl, Anna. Hazel specifically chooses the novel because the story of Anna resembles her own suffering from cancer. Augustus zealously reads the novel and he is disappointed with its sudden end i.e., it does not have a conclusion. He is frustrated as he feels that Anna will die suddenly just as the novel does. Hazel informs him of the novel's author, Peter Van Houten, who published it and returned back to Amsterdam where he abruptly disappeared.

Augustus becomes obsessed with Van Houten's identity; and he embarks a challenging journey to find him. After a hectic week, he could reach him through Lidewij, who is Van Houten's assistant. Then, he starts making contact with Van Houten via email correspondence. Augustus and Hazel write several emails to Van Houten asking him about the novel's conclusion, yet, the latter does not reply quickly. Eventually, Van Houten replies; and he tells them that he will exclusively answer Hazel. Augustus's fervent curiosity to know the end of the novel motivates him to buy tickets for him and Hazel to travel for Amsterdam as he insists on meeting Van Houten in person. On a picnic day, he surprisingly gives the tickets for her wishing to meet Van Houten as soon as possible. They could reach him after a daunting journey. To their surprise, they find him alcohol-addicted and he does not know that they will visit him. They find him very aggressive, especially with adolescents and young people. After that, Lidewij tells them that he arranged the meeting on his behalf in order to encourage them to come to Amsterdam. He stops being the assistant of Van Houten and befriends Augustus and Hazel. After this resignation, he takes them to Anne Frank House where they exchanged their first romantic affairs confessing their genuine predilection to each other.

Augustus is frustrated again as he recognizes the return of his cancer, and his health worsens as they return back to Indianapolis. As a result of this deterioration, he stays in the ICU for days. He becomes extremely afraid of his death and, consequently; he invites Hazel and his friend Isaac to recite some eulogies before his imminent death. He dies shortly after that pre-funeral scene, and Hazel undergoes agonizing bereavement. Van Houten feels moved by the untimely death of Augustus and he comes from Amsterdam to attend his funeral. He tries to apologize for not cordially welcoming them in Amsterdam and he feels repentant about that, yet, she vehemently rebuffs his apology. As time passes, Lidewij discovers many letters sent to Van Houten from different persons including Augustus. One of these letters is a mere obituary written by Augustus to Van Houten about the possible death of Hazel as she suffers from cancer, too. Hazel takes the letter and reads it in front of Lidewij. It says that it is unavoidable to be hurt in this chaotic world and it is people who hurt us. Therefore, we should choose suitable persons to hurt us; and he is very pleased with choosing Hazel to hurt him if she dies before him and leaves him alone in this world. He wishes that she could have the same feeling. The novel ends with Hazel's feeling of happiness and satisfaction of choosing him as a person who could hurt her, but in what sense? It is only when he dies, he could truly hurt her. Thus, it is common to encourage people with cancer to overcome their illness through different medical and psychological strategies, like pep talk and support. But in this novel, Green offers a new way of overcoming such fatal illness. He approaches the novel's thematic nuances of cancer in a postmodern context.

The postmodern appropriation of narcissistic narrative incarnates the authorial implicit presence in the plot. Anthony Elliott (2021) discusses the relationship between pastiche as a literary genre and narcissistic narratives. He contends that literary narcissism is a mode utilized by authors in order to expose certain questions about reality and society. That is, the author can integrate social matters within the plot's contexts that reflect the author's psyche in relation to his/her literary production because narcissistic narratives are "non-functional modes such as pastiche"; and they genuinely convey the "social consequences of these psychological qualities include increased egoism, narcissism" (p. 169). Being so, Elliott (2021) highlights the very implied presence of authors in their works through egoistic intervention in the plot. In this way, authors inter the textual demarcation of their fictional plots by alluding to their literary achievements. Consequently, this presence is a kind of egoistic action performed by authors to be present in the fictional plot; and they enhance its subject matter. As a result, authors might interrogate vital questions about reality or society. The plot's incidents, therefore, become the

premise that exemplifies the projection of the authorial voice in the events. Strikingly, it is an integral component of pastiche which imitates previous canonical works to exalt their literary value.

Green, in *The Fault in Our Stars*, inserts narcissistic narrative commentaries by composing postmodern pastiche. To clarify, pastiche; as a literary genre, is utilized by authors to praise previous great works. The title of the novel, here, praises the Shakespearean style and thematic matters. It is quoted from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, which means that Green revitalizes the Shakespearean innovative technique and style in a postmodern pastiche. Green also accomplishes his implied presence in the novel's plot by commenting on fictional books mentioned in the events. Green inserts the name of the Dutch author Peter Van Houten, who is Hazel's favorite author. Hazel is very fond of Peter Van Houten's grand writing style as he derives his thoughts and themes from biblical sources; and she wishes she could meet him: "I'd learned this from my aforementioned third best friend, Peter Van Houten, the reclusive author of *An Imperial Affliction*, the book that was as close a thing as I had to a Bible. Peter Van Houten was the only person I'd ever come across who seemed to (a) understand what it's like to be dying, and (b) not have died" (p. 13). Houten's grand writing style invokes the Shakespearean look at human matters expressed in precise dramatic diction. Green, here, has implicit literary insights about his presence in the plot in terms of Houten's personality as a great author. In doing so, he reinforces postmodern pastiche writing style for the sake of prolonging the innovative spirit of fiction in the future; which, presumably, is the inevitable time of "cras es noster (Note 1)". As such, Green provides a literary remedy for overcoming contemporary writing problems. Peter Van Houten, who is the fictional replica of Green, is afraid of the death of fictional writing; Hazel recalls Peter Van Houten's fear of this problem mentioned in one of his letters: "I remembered Van Houten's letter: Writing does not resurrect. It buries" (p. 145). Green accentuates the possibility of prolonging the vitality of postmodern literature as a way of preserving previous grand works by means of exquisite fictional elements; or as Augustus puts it simply: "brilliant and haunting novelization" (p. 23).

Peter Van Houten's obsession with composing creative fiction embodies Green's pursuit for fictional perfection as a literary escape from the contemporary decadent over-used literary forms. He reflects this pursuit in Peter Van Houten's avant-garde technique as he leaves his novel open-ended, which strikes Hazel and Augustus's curiosity about the events of its end. As such, the narrator describes Peter Van Houten's literary avant-gardism which, in turn, exemplifies Green's attempt to make postmodern literature "live again in an infinite fiction" (p. 30). The narrator, in this case, conveys Green's depiction of infinite fiction that reinforces the vigor of narrative literature in the future. Again, Green's utilization of this self-reflective mode is the embodiment of narcissistic narrative qualities, and he potentially employs them in the plot to revive the postmodern literary techniques. Postmodern authors have a narrative predilection to create new literary forms to prolong the vitality and significance of literature in everyday life. They are concerned with reinventing the great narrative forms inherited from their literary ancestors. As a result, they highlight pastiche as a way of imitation and replication of the past forms as well as reinforcing their literary effect upon readers. The innovation of such pastiches would help authors to avoid the deleterious retardation of the inherited literary forms, and; simultaneously, giving them new voices that guarantee the continuation of composing literary masterpieces. Postmodern pastiche, therefore, becomes the remedial alternative to the debilitated and over-utilized literary forms and techniques in a creative rhetorical style. Postmodern Pastiche, then, takes its parodic function to applaud previous great literary works; Henry Gates (2018) writes: "this rhetorical naming by indirection is, of course, central to our notions of figuration, troping and parody. This parody of forms, or pastiche, is in evidence when one writer repeats another's structure by one of several means, including a fairly exact repetition of a given narrative or rhetorical structure, filled incongruously with a ludicrous or incongruent content" (p. 291). Being so, the optimal function of postmodern narcissistic narrative forms is to resurrect the spirit of literary innovation passed down through generations of authors till postmodernism.

The concept of "cras es noster" finds its path again in postmodern fiction that attempts to obliterate any obstacle confronting the empowerment of narrative literature in the future. It entails the optimistic view of futuristic literary styles which adroitly reinvigorate any literary form that is necessary for creating fictional devices in the future. In this sense, the meaning of "cras es noster" occupies an exclusive place in the future of literary forms and the way they may be elevated, developed, and empowered by authors who are profoundly concerned with perpetuating narrative pastiches in various postmodern cultural contexts. The concept of "cras es noster" implies the postmodern nostalgic yearning for previous grand literary forms, yet, giving them new narrative peculiarities through innovative pastiche. The past's canonical works could be immortalized by dint of postmodern pastiches. Shakespeare renaissance dramatic dexterity is immortalized in Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, or as Hazel puts it simply: "a lot of people end up remembering Shakespeare" (p. 84). Green—through writings a pastiche on Shakespeare—utilizes Hazel's fictional voice to proclaim the need for writing contemporary immortalized

writing form in postmodernism and even beyond. Here, Green's authorial implicit voice is expressed through Hazel's attitude towards writing innovative fiction by dint of continuing writing in great styles; Hazel says: "I wonder, though, if you would mind answering a couple questions I have about what happens after the end of the novel. I understand the book ends because Anna dies or becomes too ill to continue writing it" (p. 43).

Postmodern pastiche entails the appropriation of the text by inserting some fictional comments on the nature of the work itself or other literary works. Florian Lippert and Marcel Schmid (2020), in *Self-Reflection Literature*, tackle the postmodern attributes of innovative pastiche which is underpinned by authors for paving the way for futuristic horizons to re-activate dormant literary techniques and forms. Lippert and Schmid (2020) trace the literary "palimpsest" (Note 2) as a form of fictional writing that lost its influential presence in literature due to the lack of employing it in several genres. They (2020) draw an analogic between palimpsest and narcissistic postmodern pastiche. Postmodernism highlights this reflective mode to defy any literary changes threatening the progression of avant-garde fiction even after postmodernism; Lippert and Schmid (2020) comment: "the palimpsest often degenerates to a narcissistic postmodern toy where literature talks itself about itself" (p. 234). Hence, the effective utilization of postmodern pastiche accentuates the satirical acumens of narcissistic narrative that aims at revealing the function of pastiche in enlivening the exhausted spirit of fiction. Consequently, the satirical nuances of narcissistic pastiche are vital to empathize the necessity of literary allusions to other grand literary works since it is primarily "a form of satirical emphasis" (p. 234). Narcissistic pastiche, argue Lippert and Schmid (2020), offers exuberant narrative allusions to great authors and their works. As a result, authors project these allusions via nostalgic tones which elevate contemporary literary forms as well as empowering their effective use in different generic contexts.

Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* comprises several effective allusions to great authors and their seminal works. Yet, my focus here is on Shakespeare who is an enormous literary milestone; and his works are almost eternal. They also have exceptional literary potential in dealing with many humanistic and cultural issues saturated by philosophical insights and inspired by the Renaissance's departure towards new writing novelty. The novel blatantly deals with the Shakespearean grand style. In fact, the novel's title is quoted from the Shakespearean tragedy, *Julius Caesar*, which is considered as a perfect Renaissance tragedy. When Augustus Waters emails to Peter Van Houten, he does not receive any reply. However, he receives a good reply from Peter Van Houten after a long time. In the email, Augustus praises Shakespeare's utilization of "hamartia" (Note 3) in a perfect tragic plot. By the same token, Peter Van Houten is a great fan of Shakespeare because of his innovative dramatic structure. Therefore, Peter Van Houten replies to Augustus as follows: "I am in receipt of your electronic mail dated the 14th of April and duly impressed by the Shakespearean complexity of your tragedy. Everyone in this tale has a rock-solid hamartia" (p. 64). In this respect, Green projects his own admiration of Shakespeare as a humanistic dramatist who pedantically could write about human conscience and emotions in a tight dramatic structure, which is almost missed in postmodern dramatic thematic topics. Therefore, he utilizes the novel as a vehicle for underscoring the enhancement of postmodern pastiche aggrandizing the previous exemplary authors and works, such as Shakespeare. In doing so, he lays the stone for cutting-edge literary forms finding their suitable place; and he implicitly practices the concept of "cras es noster"; which connotes better future for fictional writings that emulate Shakespearean diction, writing manner, formal precision, ingenious themes and so forth. Such emulation is the core conceptual ramification of Green's nostalgic tone expressed by virtue of his characters, namely, Peter Van Houten and Augustus.

Peter Van Houten is a mere exemplification of postmodern narcissistic pastiche. This is due to the fact that Green conceptualizes the significance of reverting back to the sources of grand literary writings, such as Shakespearean dramatic compositions. This is true to Hazel's questions about Peter Van Houten's book and its pertinent components: "I know these are not important literary questions and that your book is full of important literary questions, but I would just really like to know" (p. 43). Furthermore, Peter Van Houten necessitates the need for resorting to these writings by direct allusions, especially when the novel integrates obvious references to Shakespearean writings. In essence, the integration of the authorial accentuation of previous grand literary genres is a coherent embodiment of the authorial subjectivity. In this regard, Polona Petek (2021) makes an analogy between the narcissistic text and its narrative echoes within the demarcations of fictional genres. Petek (2021) maintains that the author's presence in the narrative text is his/her subjectivity per se; and this subjectivity is the crux narcissistic structural components because postmodern narrative combines the authors' "subjectivity and its fundamentally narcissistic structure" (p. 12). Being so, Petek (2021) does not separate the author from the text due to the nature of narcissistic narrative descriptions which represent the plot's self-reflective attributes. The author invests narcissistic structure as a technique of self-representation encompassing symbolic connotations; Petek (2021), here, describes postmodern narrative structure as "narcissistic investment in one's

self-representation facilitates all subsequent symbolic signification” (p. 62). Petek (2021) pinpoints the authors’ self-representation as the core of a narcissistic textual clue that “produces an intensification of the subject’s narcissistic investment in speech” (p. 117). The narcissistic subject, in Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars*, denotes the authorial utilization of self-reflective narrative clues as allusion to other works or writers. This is true to Augustus’s remembrance of Shakespeare’s works, especially when the narrator describes him and Hazel; and both of them “end up remembering Shakespeare” (p. 84).

As argued earlier, the novel is a mere pastiche of Shakespeare’s literary legacy. It elevates the Shakespearean writing style for the sake of empowering the evolution and progression of literary modes in postmodernism and even after it. Strikingly, Green does not manipulate the Shakespearean writing style. Neither does he neglect its vital relevance to postmodern avant-gardism. Instead, he embellishes the novel’s plot with ornamental narrative clues about the presence of Shakespeare as a literary milestone in the course of the events. He depicts such presence through nostalgic reference to the Shakespearean effect upon literature as a whole. For example, Augustus keeps sending emails to Peter Van Houten out of curiosity. He insists on knowing the enigmatic end composed by Peter Van Houten’s avant-garde dexterity reflected in his optimistic attitude to write great fiction. He renders his writing style an optimistic tone that is mentioned in the letter which he sent to Hazel in order to recommend reading his novel: “the author of that novel was so thin, so frail, so comparatively optimistic!” (p. 47). Consequently, he makes a comparison between Shakespeare and Peter Van Houten; and reveals his inclination to the latter’s style which resembles the Shakespearean literary grandeur. In this case, imitating the Shakespearean style would enable them to avoid any writing fault: “easy enough to say when you’re a Roman nobleman (or Shakespeare!), but there is no shortage of fault to be found amid our stars” (p. 64). In this quotation, there is a direct reference to Shakespeare as a considerable writer; and Augustus greatly admires him. This reference embodies Green’s obsession with producing postmodern pastiche to enliven the Shakespearean literary spirit via the concept of “*cras es noster*,” which, in turn, could be achieved in the future of literary narratives. Augustus conspicuously epitomizes Green’s nostalgic allusion to Shakespeare and his contemporary literary splendor in terms of narrative pastiche. For this reason, Augustus jilts down hectic schedule to explore the mysterious end of Peter Van Houten’s novel. He reiterates his curious persistence of knowing whether the end of the novel represents a colossal literary style, or it is just an unintentional fault.

The presence of Peter Van Houten and other characters, who are obsessed with literary novelty, is a blatant indication of the novel as a postmodern pastiche. In essence, postmodern literature tackles the issue of innovative writing, which is exactly accentuated by Houten and Augustus. In this context, David McCracken (2016) discusses the postmodern emphasis on the necessity of writing in new styles as a way of empowering the contemporary literary forms. He argues that postmodernism has a historical quality of creating literary forms, especially when they follow the dictum “make it new by making it new again” (p. 9). In this sense, McCracken (2016) unravels a sorely significant function of postmodern innovative manner through which authors attempt to violate the inherited norms of creative writing; and they depart towards unprecedented styles in order to save the spirit of literature as a human product. As such, the historical aspect of creative literary writing dissolves as authors begin to use new techniques. Once writing ingenuity is achieved, literature continues to be affective; and it provides new fictional insights that might be further explored or developed in the future. McCracken’s (2016) discussion of postmodern novelty appeals to my argument concerning the tracing of new literary styles i.e., postmodern authors have to follow new writing paths to explore genuine fictional modes. That is, they address paradigmatic and stereotypical issues interrogated by previous authors. However, they express the same historical or inherited themes in new technical forms, and; therefore, they make the previous literary forms “new again” (p. 9).

Green offers a tangible example of this literary renewal as he deals with literary novelty by depicting fictional characters. The correspondence between Peter Van Houten and Augustus is a typical representation of how writing attracts the attention of the receptive readers. Peter Van Houten approaches a typical story of a girl whose end is left open; his novel does not tell the destiny of this girl at the end. Being infatuated by the complicated plot, Augustus strenuously tries to meet Peter Van Houten to ask him about the end. To his disappointment, Peter Van Houten appears apathetic, and he does not pay attention to Augustus’ correspondence at the beginning. Remarkably, the novel’s plot directly refers to the great style of Shakespeare that must be renewed in a postmodern context. Augustus comments on the importance of remembering the Shakespearean literary rhyme handled to commemorate great contemporary persons: “we do indeed remember Shakespeare’s powerful rhyme, but what do we remember about the person it commemorates? Nothing. We’re pretty sure he was male; everything else is guesswork. Shakespeare told us precious little of the man whom he entombed in his linguistic sarcophagus” (p. 64). Such correspondence incarnates Green’s postmodern literary pastiche which exalts the

Shakespearean style expressed in an accurate linguistic manner. Augustus' admiration of this style leads him to recognize the necessity of having great contemporary authors like Shakespeare, but in a new historical context to resurrect the over-exploited literary forms. Hence, the novel is a postmodern pastiche holding a nostalgic reference to Shakespeare's grand style. For this reason, I tend to describe Augustus' fervent quest for resurrecting Shakespearean style as a cogent synthesis of the concept of "cras es noster."

Augustus' research for new forms entails Green's utilization of narcissistic narrative elements. To elaborate, postmodernism allows great space of imaginary descriptions for empowering the thematic and technical components of literary works. This is due to the fact that it has an authentic venture for resurrecting literature but in new styles. In other words, it tries to find indubitable place for literature in its diverse genres in the future—or as my study describes it—the practical accomplishment of the concept of "cras es noster." When supported enough, the future of literature will be assured even after postmodernism; exactly like our present is a future imagined by previous great authors who wrote eternal themes and techniques. Helene Carol Weldt-Basson (2018) describes postmodern pastiche writing as imitation, but this imitation does not devalue or belittle the literary grandeur of previous works. Unlike parody, pastiche is a rhetorical postmodern genre which has aesthetic significance leading to the culmination of composing great works in the future (Note 4). Weldt-Basson (2018) contends that pastiche text does not transform literary works into other genres. Furthermore, it does not create new genres from the scratch. It is naturally a complimentary genre praising previous texts, or as Weldt-Basson (2018) describes it simply: "once a text imitates (instead of transforming) another text, it becomes a pastiche [parenthesis in original]" (p. 4). In this regard, postmodern pastiche does not dismiss the importance of previous works for the favor of current themes and techniques. Instead, it prepares them to be immortalized in the context of futuristic writings, namely, innovative pastiche.

In Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, the same matter is explicitly addressed through the characters. Peter Van Houten, who is introduced as a great writer in the plot, answers some crucial questions posed by Augustus. He says that the most important way to immortalize literary modes is to write about them, but in a new manner. He also discusses the effect of language in literary writings. He says that language is not fundamental to immortalize literary modes since it is not influential in the process of resurrecting literature. He just mentions the necessity of keeping writing about inherited literary manners in a new style: "you do not immortalize the lost by writing about them. Language buries, but does not resurrect" (p. 64). Peter Van Houten's obviously refers to the process of immortalizing previous literary works by virtue of narcissistic narrative style. Nevertheless, he repudiates the use of language as the only way to preserve literature from aesthetic deviation, though language is necessary for explaining fictional incidents. Moreover, he exemplifies the postmodern nostalgic predilection to the grand literary modes, but they must be embellished and sustained by purely groundbreaking techniques and themes. Peter Van Houten's enthusiasm for this literary novelty incarnates my perception of the concept of "cras es noster" implicitly projected by Green in the plot's events. On that account, Green casts postmodern nostalgic overtones over the novel as a narcissistic pastiche extolling Shakespearean literary style. Hazel, in this respect, discusses the plethora of the Shakespearean quotes in the novel. In fact, these quotes are the essence of Green's use of Shakespeare's aphoristic interpolations in his novel's plot since the novel "happened to be turned to a page of Shakespeare quotations" (p. 109). Here, Hazel's self-reflexive commentary on the presence of Shakespeare in the plot embodies Green's deliberate composition of the novel as a postmodern pastiche.

As argued earlier, postmodernism offers multifarious implications of narrative pastiche used by authors to address certain aspects of reality. Paolo Euron (2019), in this regard, claims that postmodern pastiche is broadly used by authors; and it evidently appears in the intensive use of fictional allusion. As a result, the employment of literary allusion sustains the vitality of narrative pastiches and their treatment of contemporary social or cultural ameters. Moreover, Euron (2019) accentuates the general attributes of literary reference to other works or authors by "a large use of pastiche" which serves as narrative aptitudes utilizing "references to other literary works rather than to reality, and the general assumption that the literary work should appear as fictive, created work" (p. 212). Euron's (2019) explication of postmodern pastiche reinforces the nostalgic insights of narcissistic narrative clues about great authors or works. These clues have accessible fictional hints about the future of narrative genres which should be creative. Such creativity is similar to Hazel's attempt to urge Peter Van Houten to keep writing new novels through experimental manner since no writer could emulate his genuine writing style: "sober up. Write another novel. Do the thing you're good at. Not many people are lucky enough to be so good at something" (p. 156). Hazel's encouragement of Peter Van Houten to write in a distinctive style embodies Green's postmodern obsession with perpetuating fictional writing in the future which has parallel optimistic insights into the renaissance concept of "cras es noster," or, the future is ours, which is expressed, in Hazel's words, as nostalgic attitude to great future styles: "yeah. My nostalgia is so extreme that I am capable of

missing a swing my butt never actually touched” (p. 128).

The futuristic implications of postmodern narrative capacities are reiterated in Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars*. The eponymous title is directly quoted from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*; a great tragedy about conflicted human emotions and feelings. In a striking way, Green makes the novel as a postmodern pastiche elevating the thematic characteristics of the Shakespeare’s tragedy. In other words, Green projects passionate and intricate human interactions about the destiny of people. Shakespeare offers precise descriptions of the death of Caesar at the end of the play. He also provides the reader with very expressive diction about disappointment, murder, deception, hypocrisy. This is undoubtedly ascribed to his pedantic portrayal of human internal feelings and their relative influence on the characters’ external behaviors; and this literary adroitness renders Shakespeare a distinctive reputation as the “bard of humanity”; which means the poet of human attributes. By the same token, Green provides the reader with accurate and expressive depictions of human emotional nature. Hazel and Augustus suffer from a fatal disease, namely, cancer. They know well their destiny, which makes Hazel laments the imminent death before they actually die and leave life: “neither of these futures struck me as particularly desirable. It seemed to me that I had already seen everything pure and good in the world, and I was beginning to suspect that even if death didn’t get in the way, the kind of love that Augustus and I share could never last. *So dawn goes down to day*, the poet wrote. *Nothing gold can stay* [italics in original]” (p. 151). In this case, Green creates a vivid picture of how Hazel and Augustus are very emotional. They are moved by their forthcoming death; and they express passionate feeling through terse statements. What unites Shakespeare’s and Green’s styles is their capacity of depicting true human feelings and emotions on the verge of nasty and inevitable death. Green, in this case, drives his own style from the Shakespearean dramatic manner, yet, he bolsters it with his postmodern literary prowess. As a result, he produces a postmodern pastiche encompassing nostalgic references to previous canonical works to find a satisfactory place for literary innovation in the future, which is the appropriate temporal entity of the concept of “*cras es noster*.” This is because nostalgia refers to the author’s response to the possible decline, or death, of literary forms if they are not employed by authors; and Hazel tells Gus about this fact: “nostalgia is a side effect of dying” (p. 128).

Green’s formulation of the novel as a postmodern pastiche conflates the previous grand styles with contemporary narrative elements by highlighting its narcissistic plot. Moreover, he conveys such narcissistic pastiche to the reader through the thematic entanglements of death which is expressed differently by his narrative perspective and the Shakespearean dramatic techniques. In fact, postmodern fictional narratives comprise different literary fragments from various works, or as Arthur Berger (2019) puts it simply, postmodern pastiche is “a work of art that is a combination of fragments from here and there, is the dominant art form of postmodernism” (p. 64). Being so, Berger (2019) discusses the elective nature of postmodern pastiche. To clarify, postmodernism contains diverse literary modes and forms through which authors arbitrarily select these forms and exalt them in new narrative contexts. Postmodern eclecticism could grant authors cutting-edge themes exquisitely laud grand canonical works.

Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars*, similarly, elects some thematic literary fragments previously written by great authors. He writes them via his unique fictional style, particularly the theme of death. This theme is evidently dominant in the novel’s plot; and it features the untimely death of the young protagonist, Hazel. Green’s writing sublimity is motivated by the Shakespearean depiction of death. In this context, Augustus talks about Peter Van Houten’s treatment of the theme of death. The characters are inflicted with bad fortune as they meet their end in a tragic way. This is because they are enfeebled by their pandemic state. Their health deteriorates once they developed cancer. Even the characters who are introduced in Peter Van Houten’s novel are weak like Augustus and Hazel. They all disappear at the end of the plot; Augustus describes their weak existence in the plot in these words: “but to be perfectly frank, this childish idea that the author of a novel has some special insight into the characters in the novel ... it’s ridiculous. That novel was composed of scratches on a page, dear. The characters inhabiting it have no life outside of those scratches. What happened to them? They all ceased to exist the moment the novel ended” (pp. 103–104). Though Augustus loves Peter Van Houten’s style, he does not like the end of the novel because it is vague and bizarre. Therefore, Green perceives the theme of human frailty through postmodern lens. His self-reflective portrayal of Peter Van Houten’s *An Imperial Affliction* is an explicit incarnation of his narcissistic style i.e., Peter Van Houten’s novel is a literary replica of Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars*. In doing so, he relentlessly attempts to find a successful place for literary forms in the future, exactly elucidated by Green and construed in Augustus’s complimentary acclaim of Peter Van Houten: “You are the most qualified person to imagine that future” (p. 104). Green apparently inserts his view of the continuation of literary forms and techniques in the future by dint of Peter Van Houten’s adept writing style. The novel, in this sense, is as an appropriate way to represent the concept of “*cras es noster*” by which postmodern authors—including

Green—could establish avant-garde literature by writing nostalgic narrative pastiches. The novel prophecies optimistic departure towards safe writing havens, just like Hazel's and Augustus' optimistic feelings to overcome cancer as a health obstacle. Green's implicit voice concerning postmodern experimental narratives is projected through Hazel's and Augustus' explicit voice about the necessity to overcome writing obstacles, especially when they encourage Peter Van Houten to surmount his writing block and start writing immortal works, like the Shakespeare. Though she lives in critical health conditions, Hazel insists on keeping writing for the sake of enlivening fictional writing: "the ambulance was still driving away from us, so I [Hazel] kept writing it" (p. 134). Hazel's insistence on writing incarnates Green's symbolic emphasis on writing avant-garde fiction to save postmodern literature from decline, which resembles Hazel's declining health conditions. Thus, Green's fervent style exemplifies the very notion of "cras es noster" which ensures the continuation of grand narratives in the future, though postmodern fiction lives in critical conditions, like Hazel. This is due to the prevalent literary exhaustion in the context of postmodern fictional writing.

5. Conclusion

This paper has studied Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* from a postmodern perspective. It has revealed Green's utilization of the novel as a pastiche of grand works, especially Shakespeare's literary capacity. Therefore, the study's analysis attempted to explore the concept of "cras es noster" through discussing the novel as a postmodern narcissistic pastiche. The study's findings and contribution are limited to two interrelated postmodernism's avant-garde literary issues. First, the analysis has highlighted Green's composition of the novel as a postmodern pastiche exalting previous literary modes and giving them authentic literary features. As such, the interpretation of the characters has accentuated Green's adroit formulation of the plot's thematic characteristics. It has unraveled how Green projects his own conceptualization of the postmodern literary avant-gardism and empowering them with integrated narrative themes and techniques. The technical aspect of the study lies in Green's employment of narcissistic narrative incidents demonstrating self-reflective attributes, which are rarely pursued in the novel. Therefore, the main findings of the study relate to the selected novel as a postmodern pastiche and the concept of "cras es noster."

The study has unraveled the concept of "cras es noster" as being present in the novel via its narcissistic emphasis on writing great works to enhance the future of fictional writing. Narcissistic narrative structure is the one major contribution of the study. The bulk of previous academic researches focuses on Green's thematic treatment of the pandemic insights of the major characters who suffer from cancer. However, my study has concentrated on the narrative elements of the plot; and how Green expresses his perception of contemporary postmodern literary modes through the pandemic themes. Strikingly, the pandemic themes are symbolically approached in terms of the future of literary modes. That is, the future of literature might be devoid of literary expertise. Consequently, the study has examined the exquisite depiction of the characters as reflection of Green's search for genuine literary techniques. In doing so, the study has discussed the possibility of creating innovative literary modes that would reinforce the utilization of new narrative components in the future. Green's obsession with the future of narrative literary modes is explored by virtue of the concept of "cras es noster." As the concept indicates, it has implicative nuances about the future of literature whether in postmodernism or even beyond it. My application of the concept lies in the necessity of appropriating new narrative techniques and themes that might empower the social and cultural effect of literature in general and postmodern fiction, in particular.

Furthermore, the study has explored Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* as a postmodern pastiche of Shakespeare's grand style. Pastiche, here, relates to the nostalgic tone of the novel, which is the second finding of the study per se. As the plot unfolds, the characters, such as Peter Van Houten and Augustus exchange emails about literature. Peter Van Houten's *An Imperial Affliction* is a novel with an open end, which makes Augustus very curious about the destiny of its protagonist, Anna. Here, he embarks a serious journey to meet Houten to ask about the end of the novel in order to understand its literary value. When they meet, they discuss the Shakespearean literary potential; and Green, presumably, highlights this issue to emphasize the need for avant-garde literary writings by dint of nostalgic allusion to previous grand authors and works.

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Notes

Note 1. The concept of “cras es noster” is a Latin expression which means “tomorrow, be ours” (Carrer & Gheller, 2015, p. 9). In my study, it will be interpreted as a reflection of Green’s attempt to find an innovative and effective place for literature in the future i.e., his novel resurrects the deteriorating spirit of contemporary postmodern fictional narrative.

Note 2. Yiorgos Kalogeras et al. (2021) define literary palimpsest as a work “in which the old texts interact in complex ways with the new ones” (p. 3); and these “texts do relate to one another”; whereby “the palimpsest is an inherently dialogical device that fosters intertextual conversations” (p. 6). In this study, I will demonstrate the selected novel’s interaction with old texts through allusion i.e., it refers to grand literary works; especially the Shakespearean tragedy, *Julius Caesar*.

Note 3. Hamartia refers to the “tragic flaw” committed by the tragic hero; and it eventually leads to his / her downfall (DiEdwardo, 2022, p. 41).

Note 4. This is the core of my perception of the concept of “cras es noster” in Green’s *The Fault in Our Stars*. My argument, here, relates to the novel as a nostalgic pastiche which attempts to resurrect previous grand styles via postmodernism’s narcissistic literary potentials.

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