The Fault in Our Stars: More than "Sick Lit"
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Nathalie op de Beeck & Lurlene McDaniels

- In her article, "Sixteen and Dying": Lurlene McDaniels's Fantasies of Mortal Endangerment, Nathalie op de Beeck critically analyzes "sick lit" through the novels of Lurlene McDaniels
- TFiOS has been accused by some critics as being part of this genre despite its differences to the "sick lit" prototype, which make it markedly different
Characterizing "Sick Lit"

"Any attempt to express resistance or occupy a mature subject position is bound to fail for the protagonist, who learns to bear her pain and accept a subordinate role in society"

"...heroines may be spiritually strong, but they lack physical and emotional resources and they always look to men for stability. They are patients and patience personified."

"None of these heroines have the agency to change their unlucky situations."
"Illness or death impedes development by allowing an adolescent to be attentive to her physical body, yet diverting her own (and others') attention away from that body's sexual potentiality. Courtship and marriage, requisites of the fairy tale, are deferred."

"These virtuous virgins perform their physical and psychological suffering in a stoical way, inspiring their peers with their ability to bear pain and their uncompromising morality."
Someone Dies. Someone Lives

"In a typical novel, an all-American teen has her plans for dating, summer vacation, or college disrupted by devastating health problems, a sick friend, or the death of someone she loves. When the heroine's life takes its tragic turn, her ordinary interests in good grades, spring break, and cute boys are displaced in favor of a fascination with sudden illness and death"
The Nature of the Heroine

"The myth of the redemptive child and the good death is established early and often. 'When the spiritual power of death is combined with the natural sanctity of childhood, the child becomes an angel endowed with salvific force,' (Tompkins)"

"Their heroines embody moral lessons in chastity, charity, and humility, and look askance at greed and temptation. They find love, so long as it remains tragic and physically unfulfilled"
"Rather than write first- or second-person narratives with shock endings, McDaniel creates an omniscient outsider who describes the heroine's powerful feelings, creating the illusion of psychological intimacy while maintaining a safe physical distance from the abject body."

"[readers find] cathartic pleasure of reading about girls in physical and psychological distress."
And then There's TFiOS...

- Hazel and Augustus are characterized by more than their disease
- Their love is realized with sexual discovery
- They do not have faith (although Augustus believes in some afterlife)
- Female heroine does NOT die and does NOT assume typical female role
- Cancer is already a fact of life for Hazel
- Green presents a 1st person narrative and Hazel has CHARACTER and INTELLECTUAL/EMOTIONAL AGENCY