
An Analysis On John Green's Deconstruction Of The Manic Pixie Dream Girl In Paper Towns

Women's roles in literature have continuously evolved throughout age, with female characters becoming more and more present as time goes by. Women in literature nowadays are now becoming the main characters in novels such as *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *The Fault in Our Stars* where in the novels are held in the female protagonists' point of views, but there are still stereotypes associated with women used in novels, thus defining women by these stereotypes, this includes the Manic Pixie Dream Girl. According to a blog post discussing the Manic Pixie Dream Girl, (Zuckerman, 2015) John Green has stated in his Tumblr that his book *Paper Towns* "aims to defy the character trope" unlike his other book, "Looking for Alaska", which features the trope through the character of Alaska.

The former is a story about Quentin, who is brought on a night of adventures by his long time crush Margo Roth Spiegelman, who suddenly disappears. Using the clues left to him, he pursues Margo, even going on an unplanned road trip with his friends in order to find her, only to learn that the Margo he thought he knew isn't who she really was. John Green's goal to deconstruct the trope through his character of Margo Roth Spiegelman has raised the question: "To what extent is John Green successful in defying the Manic Pixie Dream Girl trope through his character of Margo Roth Spiegelman in *Paper Towns*? According to Nathan Rabin (2014), John Green, for one, felt so passionately about the toxic nature of the trope that in a Tumblr post he declared that his novel "Paper Towns" "is devoted IN ITS ENTIRETY to destroying the lie of the manic pixie dream girl" before adding, "I do not know how I could have been less ambiguous about this without calling (Paper Towns) The Patriarchal Lie of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl Must Be Stabbed in the Heart and Killed." In an interview with *Vulture*. The Manic Pixie Dream Girl is a term coined by film critic Nathan Rubin in describing Kirsten Bell's character in *Elizabethtown*. He describes the manic pixie dream girl as a character who "exists solely in the fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures".

In a following essay, *The Bataan Death March of Whimsy Case File #1: Elizabethtown*, (Rabin, 2007), Rubin (2007) states that the Manic Pixie Dream Girl is an archetype that "taps into a particular male fantasy: of being saved from depression and ennui by a fantasy woman who sweeps in like a glittery breeze to save you from yourself, then disappears once her work is done.". The trope of the Manic Pixie Dream girl emphasizes the sexist characteristics of women as the trope turns women into guides that help in the growth of the male character instead of creating characters out of the women. Manic Pixie Dream Girls are solely there for

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the fulfillment of the male character. According to LA Review of Books (Cramb, 2016): "The power of the manic pixie dream girl is a limited, feminized kind of power, too often the kind women in our culture are encouraged to pursue. Instead of changing the world, they inspire men to change the world; they act as muses instead of artists." Nathan Rubin originally coined the phrase to call out cultural sexism but in the end, he believes that the trope itself has turned sexist. According to the Odyssey (2017): "The issue with this archetype is that it primes audience members to see women's talents and personal choices as disposable and secondhand in nature. It inspires the idea that women are simply tools needed to propel the patriarchy and help men lead better lives." According to TV Tropes ("Manic Pixie Dream Girl", n. d), the Manic Pixie Dream Girl is the character whose presence is to provide the male hero meaning in his life. She's "stunningly attractive and energetic" and she will focus on the male protagonist and help him to learn to live freely and love madly yet the Manic Pixie Dream Girls can be pulled away from the trope through character development which gives them more depth. The female characters perspectives may also contribute in separating them from the trope and further giving the idea that they are not there for the male character's enjoyment. In an interview with Digital Spy (2015) John Green described the MPDG as "a very lazy trope" and one that is ultimately dehumanising. "I think the danger - and it is to me a real danger - is that when you put people on a pedestal and you idealise them, you romanticise them, you may think you are somehow doing them a favour but in fact you are dehumanising them," he explained. The significance of this study is to view how an author is able to defy and deconstruct a trope as this essay will focus on John Green's success in portraying his characters. For this essay, lines from the text were analyzed into giving a better idea on how John Green deconstructed the Manic Pixie Dream Girl trope through the views of the characters in the text. The novel is narrated in the first person point of view through the protagonist, Quentin Jacobsen. From the beginning, the readers can see that Quentin feels a connection with Margo as he states that him ending up living next to Margo Roth Spiegelman was a miracle. He described her as the "most fantastically gorgeous creature that God has ever created." (Green, 2015)

The beginning already gives us a sign that Margo could be a Manic Pixie Dream Girl. Quentin also seems to know plenty about Margo as he knows personal information about Margo such as her relationships, although the readers aren't sure how reliable Quentin is, they can only view the characters from how he perceives them but this further showcases Margo's character as a possible Manic Pixie Dream Girl. In the book, Margo convinces Quentin to sneak out and assist her in completing her personal tasks, by doing this, she manages to push Quentin out of his comfort zone. During the escapade, Quentin says: "It was 2:49 in the morning. I had never, in my entire life, felt less tired." (Green, 2008, p. 52) This shows how much he enjoyed spending time with Margo, even when it was early in the morning and he had classes the next morning, which is very important to him. Margo has pushed Quentin into embracing and enjoying life more. The readers are shown through the text that Margo is a character who is very significant in Quentin's life as his thoughts usually revolve around Margo. After their previous adventure,

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he felt hope that Margo would spend her final high school days with him as seen from the lines: ' He knew "she couldn't spend the last week of school with the friends she'd always had, so maybe she would spend them with me after all"(Green, 2008, p. 93) The night Margo disappeared, he kept trying to fall asleep "hoping that Margo Roth Spiegelman would return to my window and drag my tired ass through one more night I'd never forget. "(Green, 2008, p. 93) Margo has become a character who Quentin hopes could brighten his life and give it substance. Quentin goes to an abandoned minimall which was Margo's previous hiding spot and didn't care about the dirty surroundings, because he was in a place where Margo had been alive, he disregards the environment, as long as he felt close to Margo he was satisfied. Margo's previous presence in an unfamiliar area makes Quentin feel more comfortable giving the readers an idea of what effect Margo holds over Quentin. However, during his night in the minimall he realizes that the person he thought was not who she truly was, stating that the image of Margo he imagined in the abandoned minimall struck him as lonely and so very "unMargo" (Green, 2008, p. 169) then he believes that what he needed to do was find out what Margo was like when she wasn't being the Margo people had in mind. (Green, 2008, p. 170)

As the storyline progresses, he realizes that he has seen and mis-seen Margo. He describes Margo as a "metaphor rendered incomprehensible by its ubiquity, that there was enough room for endless imaginings, an infinite sets of Margo. " (Green, 2008, p. 173) Quentin is madly in love with Margo Roth Spiegelman as Quentin himself puts it, there is a point where he makes trying to understand Margo his job because he realizes that his perception of Margo was very different from who she really was. He has an important moment of realization from his night at the minimall stating that "The fundamental mistake I had always made—and that she had, in fairness, always led me to make—was this: Margo was not a miracle. She was not an adventure. She was not a fine and precious thing. She was a girl. " (Green, 2008, p. 199) and "That was the Margo as I'd seen her. But then, inside the buildings, she is not the Margo I'd always imagined. " (Green, 2008, p. 206) when searching the minimall for clues. These lines also show Quentin's realization that Margo may not be the person he imagines her to be, but was her own person. In the minimall, he also tries his best to imagine what kind of person Margo was, as it is different from what he expected. Quentin mentions in the first few chapters that "I cared too much about a day of school"(Green, 2008, p. 92) when thinking about Margo's adventures but there is a shift in attitude caused by Margo as Quentin starts sacrificing school days and important school events such as prom night and graduation in order to search for Margo. He mentions that Margo, the only girl he would go to prom with was "tramping some kind of perpetual or something. " (Green, 2008, p. 123) and when Quentin finds out where Margo is, his first instinct is to head for her, dropping his graduation in order to find Margo.

When Radar tells him that they are lining up for graduation, he says "I'm not going. Can't risk the time"(Green, 2008, p. 238). On their journey to find Margo when his friends start getting worried that Quentin may end up disappointed. In reply, he says that he just wants to find her

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because he wants to see her alive. This further emphasizes Margo's importance in Quentin's life because she is his number one priority. She indirectly pushed him to go on an adventure. He also gets mad when his friends raise the idea that Margo may not necessarily be where they want her to be (Green, 2008, p. 267) When Quentin has a close brush with death, his first thought is her, but now there is a shift in his perception as he starts blaming Margo for putting his life at risk (Green, 2008, p. 268) In the end of the road trip, before they find Margo, he states that he just wants to remember Margo one last time, hoping to see her again (Green, 2008, p. 278) This shows the readers how much he really cares for Margo, how much he wants to see her. When him and his friends finally find Margo, Quentin feels irritated at Margo's attitude. "I'm so pissed at her. For... for, I don't know. Not being the Margo I expected her to be. Not being the Margo I thought I had finally imagined correctly" (Green, 2008, p. 284) Quentin is mad that his false perception of Margo is similar to who she is in real life. He is suddenly mad when he realizes how much Margo has taken away from him, blaming her for his actions. There is also a moment when Quentin states that "We are now as I wished we could be then. " (Green, 2008, p. 299), comparing their current situation to a situation which shows how his perception of Margo has changed over the journey. "I stand in the parking lot, realizing that I've never been this far from home, and here is this girl I love and cannot follow. I hope this is the hero's errand because not following her is the hardest thing I've ever done. " (Green, 2008, p. 304)

Quentin is aware that his perception of Margo is flawed, understanding that she is her own person. He understands that he cannot follow her and that she will not come back to their hometown anytime soon, he cannot control her actions. Margo Roth Spiegelman's importance to Quentin is highlighted by his thoughts and his actions which defy his norms. From Quentin's point of view, the readers can also observe what other characters thoughts are towards Margo. From the first chapter the readers are already given the perception that Margo is popular around her school, with her stories being passed around, Margo is one with a good reputation in her school. However, it is a different case when it comes to her family. Her parents believe that Margo's reason for running away is self centered and have been irritated to the extent that they changed the locks to their home. From Quentin's interaction with Margo's parents, it reveals that they are ashamed of Margo's behavior to him. Mrs. Spiegelman states that "I don't want her under our roof. I know its terrible but it's true. " (Green, 2008, p. 102) Margo was a burden to her parents that they have bad thoughts on her, even describing her as a sickness in the family. (Green, 2008, p. 103) In one of the chapters, Quentin tells his parents about how Margo has left clues and he believes that it is her asking him to find her. His parents give their opinions on Margo, believing that she wants attention and reminding Quentin that she wasn't his responsibility. Other characters such as Ben and Radar, Quentin's best friends, and Lacey, Margo's best friend also view Margo differently as they posses different relationships with her. Ben is a character whose views on Margo are negative as he says that "Whatever, it's a little lame of her, to, hijack the last three weeks of school, you know? She's got you all worried, and she's got Lacey all worried, and prom is in like three days, you know? Can't we just have a fun

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prom?" (Green, 2008, p. 153) and when Quentin states that Margo could be dead he described her as a drama queen who wanted attention. (Green, 2008, p. 153) Ben's opinions serve as a source of conflict for Quentin when they are looking for Margo. There is a part where Ben is too hungover where Quentin gets frustrated that he proceeds to insult Ben. "It bothered me that Ben only wanted to talk about Margo when it involved an adventure that appealed to him, that he thought there was something wrong with me for focusing on her over my friends, even though she was missing and they weren't." (Green, 2008, p. 211) Ben takes Margo's disappearance lightly, not showing as much drive as Quentin, Lacey, or Radar.

Although Ben helps Quentin in his pursuit for Margo even when he doesn't really care for the reason, he stays loyal throughout. Radar seems to show more sympathy to Quentin as he always tries to help him. "Q, tomorrow and the next day, and the day after that and all the days for the rest of my life, I am happy to participate in your investigation. But I have a girlfriend. She wants to have a nice prom. I want to have a nice prom. It's not my fault that Margo Roth Spiegelman didn't want us to have a nice prom." (Green, 2008, p. 163) Although Margo is not a priority, he still wants to help Quentin in achieving his goal. When the four of them encounter Margo, he says, "I never knew you until I got to know you through your clues, I like the clues more than I like you." (Green, 2008, p. 283) Radar also had a false perception on Margo, preferring the Margo in his mind to the Margo in front of him. Before Lacey is introduced in the novel, Margo's opinion of Lacey is shown as Margo calls Lacey a terrible friend but throughout the story, the readers learn that Lacey is someone who cares for Margo as she is worried about her disappearance. She also cares deeply about what Margo, when faced with the possibility that Margo had killed herself due to the "signs" Margo gave off, she started to cry. She also stated that "Everything sucks without Margo." (Green, 2008, p. 184) Lacey is also shown to have a flawed perception of Margo as she admits that "I had no idea who she really was. I honestly never thought of her as anything but my crazy beautiful friend who does all the crazy beautiful things." (Green, 2008, p. 200) This shows how she had also associated Margo with beauty and fun, thus creating a false illusion of Margo in her mind. Margo Roth Spiegelman is a girl who "loved mysteries so much that she became one." The readers' knowledge of Margo is limited to what Quentin knows. Margo Roth Spiegelman is a mystery to her peers as she is known for going on extreme and extraordinary adventures such as travelling with the circus and spending time with a band. Margo is glorified in Quentin's eyes yet Margo is also a person with negative qualities, such as being vengeful and seeking revenge on multiple people. Margo is a character who is very secretive, not letting any of her friends into her room. Margo is a character who is aware of what people perceive of her as she is viewed as a character who seems perfect in the eyes of the people surrounding her but she is a character who, just like everyone, is deeply flawed. This is supported by the quote "I looked down and thought about how I was made of paper. I was the flimsy-foldable person, not everyone else. And here's the thing about it."

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People love the idea of a paper girl, They always have. And the worst thing is that I loved it too. ” (Green, 2008, p. 293), this quote shows that she was aware that she was aware of what people thought of her and actually enjoyed how they viewed her. “Because it’s kind of great, being an idea that everybody likes. But I could never be the idea to myself, not all the way. And Agloe is a place where paper creation became real. A dot on the map became a real place, more real than the people who created the dot could ever have imagined. I thought the paper cutout of a girl could start becoming real here also. And it seemed like a way to tell that paper girl who cared about popularity and clothes and everything else: “You are going to the paper towns. And you are never coming back. ” (Green, 2008, p. 294) She believed that heading to Agloe would help her find herself and help her escape from the perception people had of her when she was back in her hometown. Margo is a character who helps in driving the storyline for the main character Quentin, making her seem like a Manic Pixie Dream Girl, but throughout the story she starts showing signs defying the trope, thus separating herself from the trope.

These confessions from Margo reveal to the readers that she has put up an illusion in order to hide her true personality. “You didn’t come here to make sure I was okay. You came here because you wanted to save poor little Margo from her troubled little self, so that I would be oh-so-thankful to my knight in shining armor. ” (Green, 2008, p. 284) She believes that Quentin’s reason in finding her was to rescue her for his own personal gain and from her reaction, it is seen how angry she is into being turned into a damsel in distress. “You’re not even pissed at me, Q! You’re pissed at the idea of me you keep inside your brain from when we were little!” She is tired of what people think of her as it is not her real self but is also revealed to be guilty of judging Quentin. “And then you surprise me, you had been a paper boy to me all these years—two dimensions as a character on the page and two different but still flat, dimensions as a person. But that night you turned out to be real. ” (Green, 2008, p. 292) She is proven wrong by Quentin by his actions that night of their adventure, she is surprised to see that who she expected Quentin to be is different from who he was, this shows us how she also has false perceptions about people, providing us with her thoughts. Even if Margo’s characterizations can only be viewed from Quentin and the rest of the character’s eyes but this doesn’t prohibit John Green from defying the trope by giving Margo an opportunity to be her own self. Manic Pixie Dream Girls are characters who provide the male characters’ opportunities to grow and develop. John Green creates Margo as a character who will help Quentin realize that what he expects of a person may not be what the person may be.

From these points, it can be said that the descriptions of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl apply to Margo Roth Spiegelman as she is a character who is viewed as a romantic interest in the eyes of the main character, she is viewed as the extraordinary girl by her peers, placing her in a box. Margo’s character in the novel has also helped in developing Quentin’s character by helping him gain more confidence in himself and making him step outside of his comfort zone. John Green is able to defy the trope by creating a character for Margo Roth Spiegelman, by giving

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her her own flaws, her own thoughts. The readers can only view Margo in Quentin's eyes but the readers also get to see Margo as he discovers more about her. Along with Quentin, the readers get to discover that Margo is a character whose sole purpose is to be her own person, not to help Quentin grow. John Green creates a character with her own goal to follow. At the same time Margo acts as an example of the trope as she helps Quentin develops character throughout the story when he realizes that his perception of Margo is flawed, thus showing how different his thoughts were from the start of the book til the end. Margo helps Quentin realize that she is a person different from what people perceive of her. Margo is a character whose purpose isn't to exist for Quentin, but to exist on her own terms. John Green creates a character who is aware of what people are thinking of her and gets tired so she runs away. People argue that Margo is still a Manic Pixie Dream Girl, that her purpose in the story is still to help the male protagonist grow, but Margo also has a purpose in her own life. John Green is able to destroy the trope by creating a character who has her own visions and goals, someone who is a mystery to everyone but herself. R

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