



REPRESENTATIONS OF THE MARGINALIZED TEEN IN SCREEN ADAPTATIONS OF JOHN GREEN'S PAPER TOWNS, AND LOOKING FOR ALASKA

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Abstract:

Among today's authors of young adult fiction, American writer John Green stands out for his strong influence on both books and their screen versions. His novels, *Paper Towns* and *Looking for Alaska*, have received praise and become popular, connecting deeply with teen and young adult readers. These emotional and thoughtful stories have been successfully adapted into movies and TV shows, reaching an even wider audience. Lately, there has been a noticeable rise in web series and films that explore the inner lives and struggles of teenagers and young adults. This trend shows that media is paying more attention to youth voices and relying on them for cultural relevance. Green's stories, with their honest look at love, loss, identity, and growing up, continue to shape and reflect how youth are portrayed in today's media. Through these adaptations, the emotional depth of young adult fiction gains new life in visual and digital storytelling. This research article focuses on marginalized teens in the screen adaptations of John Green's *Paper Towns* and *Looking for Alaska*.

Key Words: Teenagers' Literature, Literature Adaptation, Marginalized.

Children and teenagers have always been treated as a special and unique audience by the entertainment industry. This kind of acknowledgment became more pronounced with the rise of movies and technology, setting itself apart with an eye to the unique interests and aspirations of younger patrons. Now, over the last few decades, adolescents have been placed at the forefront within the domain of cinema, with pioneering works evolving beyond the treatment of traditional narratives, characters, and themes. John Green, the celebrated American author, has had a profound influence on young adult fiction, captivating young audiences first in the United States and later in Europe. Besides publications such as *The Fault in Our Stars*, *Paper Towns*, and *Looking for Alaska*, which have been well-received in their adaptations. In recent times, a distinct rise in the making and following of web series and films centring around teenage and young adult lives and issues has been evident. This growing trend, in a sense, indicates the cultural shift in media consumption, where his poignant and emotionally resonant novels have captivated readers worldwide and have been successfully adapted into films.

Based on John Green's novel *Paper Towns* (2015), the movie was directed by Jack Schreier. The story revolves around Quentin Jacobsen, seventeen years old, called "Q" for short, getting along in the town of Jefferson Park, Florida, and going to the local high school. Quiet and introverted, Quentin has but two close friends Ben and Radar. In Margo Roth Spiegelman's eyes, he was her adventurous childhood friend: as Margo grew older, she became one of the most popular girls at school, known for her mysterious absences and thrill-seeking lifestyle. Unbeknownst to Ryan, he never kept his promises for long. One of Margo's favorite phrases, "Everyone deserves a miracle," becomes a powerful symbol in the story.

However, one night, she renters Quentin's life, sneaking through his bedroom window just like old times. Margo convinces Quentin to accompany her on a night of mischievous revenge. They take turns visiting the homes of Margo's boyfriend Jason, Rebecca, and Lacey. Margo has just learned that Jason cheated on her with Rebecca and suspects that Lacey knew about it and kept it from her. That night, Margo and Quentin exact revenge on all who wronged her. Ending the day, Quent.

Paper Towns (2015) treats quite serious themes like identity, perception, and trifling adolescent idealism in its screenplay, adapted from John Green's novel and directed by Jake Schreier. It concerns Quentin Jacobsen's pursuit of Margo Roth Spiegelman: a girl he idealizes yet does not generically know. As the story progresses to the ending, this film aims to dismantle the romanticized idea of a "manic pixie dream girl" by way of Margo, who does not let others define her but chooses to define herself. The story initially traces a conventional coming-of-age path; Quentin steps out of his comfort zone to partake in a night of rebellion, led by Margo. This sets up an odyssey not only across an expanse of land but also into maturity. Quentin's obsession with Margo is the exact conduit that describes how teenagers confuse infatuation or admiration with real connection. His belief that Margo left clues for him is really his projection: he wants to impose narrative meaning on her actions as if they were clues from a puzzle designed specifically for him. The turning point in the story is really when Quentin realizes that Margo is not a fantasy or a mystery to solve but that she is a whole person with her own inner life.

The 2019 TV adaptation of *Looking for Alaska*, based on John Green's popular novel, is an eight-episode miniseries directed by Josh Schwartz. It follows sixteen-year-old Miles Halter, nicknamed "Pudge," who leaves his boring life in Florida to attend Culver Creek Academy, a boarding school in Alabama, searching for what he calls "The Great Perhaps." Miles is fascinated by the last words of famous people, with his favourite quote by François Rabelais: "I go to seek a Great Perhaps."

At Culver Creek, Miles meets his quirky roommate Chip Martin, known as "The Colonel," who becomes his closest friend. Through the Colonel, Miles meets a close group of friends, Alaska Young, a mysterious and emotionally complex girl he quickly falls for; Takumi, a witty Japanese-American student; and Lara, a Romanian girl who eventually dates Miles. Together, they face the challenges of growing up, strict rules from the tough headmaster called "The Eagle," and a rivalry with a privileged group called the Weekend Warriors.

Alaska is known for her sharp mind, moody charm, and love of literature, but she also struggles with emotional pain and contradictions. Although she's dating an older college student, Jake, she shares a deep emotional bond with Miles. Their connection grows as they share secrets, pranks, and deep thoughts. Pranks between the two student groups escalate, leading to Miles being brought before the school's disciplinary board. He stays loyal and doesn't betray his friends. Meanwhile, Alaska, dealing with inner struggles and feelings of not being enough, breaks up with Jake and makes questionable choices, like telling the headmaster about another couple breaking rules, causing her friends to doubt her. During Thanksgiving break, Alaska convinces Miles to stay at school with her rather than go home. The tension between the groups builds, culminating in a big prank where Miles and his friends hack into the Weekend Warriors' academic records. Then tragedy hits. Alaska asks Miles and the Colonel to help her sneak off campus one night. The next morning, the Eagle announces she died in a car accident. Heartbroken and full of guilt, Miles, the Colonel, and Takumi try to find out if her death was an accident or something else. They learn it happened on the anniversary of her mother's death, which might explain her impulsive actions. Though some questions remain, the three friends start to find peace. The series ends with a touching tribute: a joyful, well-planned prank in Alaska's memory, symbolizing love, friendship, loss, and the ongoing mystery of life and death.

The screen adaptations of John Green's *Paper Towns* and *Looking for Alaska*. offer powerful representations of the marginalized teen, delving into the psychological, emotional, and social complexities that define adolescence. Through characters like Quentin Jacobsen and Alaska Young, these narratives expose the alienation, identity struggles, and the longing for meaning experienced by teens who feel out of step with mainstream societal norms. The cinematic portrayals maintain the essence of Green's original literary voice, capturing the loneliness and quiet resilience of adolescents navigating marginality - whether due to emotional trauma, non-conformity, or intellectual and existential curiosity.

In *Paper Towns*, *Quentin's* journey reflects a deeper commentary on how teenagers romanticize others as a way to find purpose, only to confront disillusionment. The film critiques idealized notions of youth and highlights the importance of self-awareness and personal growth. Similarly, *Looking for Alaska*. portrays a deeply emotional narrative of love, loss, and the search for understanding, particularly through Miles and Alaska, who are both isolated in their own ways. Their experiences at Culver Creek become a metaphor for the inner turbulence teens face when dealing with grief, identity, and belonging.

Both adaptations resist simplistic or stereotypical depictions of teenagers. Instead, they foreground emotional nuance and complex introspection, inviting viewers to empathize with the often-overlooked realities of adolescent life. Ultimately, these films not only remain faithful to Green's intent but also serve as culturally significant texts that validate the experiences of marginalized youth and encourage a more compassionate understanding of adolescence in popular media.

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