

## COURAGE IN R. J. PALACIO'S NOVEL *WONDER*

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### Abstract

This research is entitled *Courage in R. J. Palacio's Novel Wonder*. This study focuses on the types of courage and the factors behind the courageous actions taken by August Pullman as a protagonist in the novel. It examines what actions are considered courageous actions and what factors affect the courageous actions. This study used the qualitative method as the research method because the data is not numerical. The type of data in the study is the text from two data sources, i.e., primary data and secondary data. The primary data source is the novel, and the secondary data source is the related information. The aim of this study is to find out what types of courage are given by the protagonist and what factors cause him to be courageous in the novel. The writers used Dungeate's theory of the six types of courage to classify the types. The study also applied the study conducted by Rate et al. in implicit theories of courage to classify the factors of courageous actions. The result of the study shows that first, the types of courage found in the protagonist are physical courage, social courage, intellectual courage, and emotional courage; second, the factors that can be found in the protagonist are external circumstances, affective, and motivational factors.

**Keywords:** *courage; factors of courage; types of courage; wonder*

### 1. Introduction

*Wonder* (2012) is a novel written by American writer and graphic designer R. J. Palacio. *Wonder* is her debut novel and was published by Alfred A. Knopf Inc., a New York publishing house, on February 14, 2012. *Wonder* is a children's novel that tells the story of a boy named August Pullman, Auggie, who has a facial deformity that is very rare from birth called Treacher Collins syndrome, or TCS, which is also known as mandibulofacial dysostosis. Since childhood, he has had to undergo various health treatments. He didn't even go to a regular school. At home, Auggie studies by homeschooling with his mother. In this case, the problem that will be studied focuses on the courage to overcome all the obstacles faced by the character, namely August Pullman, Auggie.

Courage is trying something scary and surviving even when doing it is excruciating. According to Paul (2010), courage is the state or quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, or vicissitudes with self-possession and without fear. Courage is the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and

withstand danger, fear, or difficulty. Courage stems from a connection to a cause and is driven by motivation, love, devotion, compassion, or passion.

The reason why the writers chose this topic is because of the theme of the novel *Wonder*. The writers are interested in analyzing one of the dominant themes in this story, namely the courage of the protagonist, August Pullman. The protagonist in the novel who suffers from a complicated disease, is discriminated against by society because of his physical appearance. People were always watching him wherever he was, and it made him uncomfortable. Moreover, he is homeschooled, and his mother is the only teacher he has. It is interesting to know how August Pullman, with his courage against it all, was finally able to accept himself in his life after being depressed for being an abnormal child and being discriminated against by society, especially his school friends. Life is a series of challenges and obstacles that must be faced with courage. It means that courage is needed in this life. Courage is a kind of strength, power, or determination to face a scary situation. Courage is needed when a person feels fear, pain, or anxiety. Courage is needed in almost every basic human activity. People need courage to face their desired destiny and overcome despair. Therefore, the writers want to analyze in detail how the protagonist, August Pullman, has the courage to go through all the discrimination he has experienced, and courage is an interesting topic to study.

## 2. Literature Review

The protagonist is the main character who generates the action of a story and engages the reader's interest and empathy. The protagonist is often the hero or heroine. The protagonist is the central person in a story and is often referred to as the story's main character. According to Fowler (1987), a protagonist is the main character in a story, novel, play, or other literary work, it is the character that the reader or audience emphasizes. Protagonist in ancient Greek drama: the first actor to engage in dialogue with the chorus, in later dramas playing the main character and some minor characters as well (Protagonist, 2013).

Nurgiyantoro (2010: 176-177) says that the protagonist is a character whose storytelling is prioritized in the novel in question. He is the character who is described the most, both as the perpetrator of the incident and as a result of the incident. Baldick (2001: 207) defines the protagonist as the chief character in a play or story, who may also be opposed by the antagonist. Originally, in ancient Greek theater, the protagonist was the principal actor in a drama. A protagonist is the main character in a plot or play. Basically, a protagonist is always a hero or heroine in a story.

Based on the definition of protagonist above, the protagonist can be defined as the main actor in a literary work. The protagonist is the character who pushes the action forward. Since the protagonist is the central character of a story, it is he who must determine where it goes. The protagonist is always present as an important actor who influences the development of the story. This shows that the protagonist is very influential in the course of a story, both in novels and in other literary works.

### 2.1 Definition of Courage

Wodaard (2004: 174) says that courage is defined as the ability to act for a meaningful (noble, good, or practical) cause despite experiencing the fear associated with a perceived threat exceeding the available resources. Courage requires sacrifice, risk, and overcoming fear for a good purpose. To have courage is to endure, persevere,

and overcome. While Kidder (2009) states that courage is the quality of mind that enables one to encounter danger and difficulties with firmness, or without fear, or without fainting of the heart.

Paul (2010: 2) also defines that courage comes in different ways. Being courageous can be from surviving through cancer to a child rescuing his dog from a busy street, and also towards people that are judging others by what they do, wear or say. Courage is also doing some brave deeds without thinking about what the consequences could be. She says that we have all faced the challenge of being courageous, and being courageous is not always easy because it takes heart to do a courageous act.

Clancy in Rate (2007) says that courage is likely defined as a willingness to face tough choices as well as overcoming the fear associated with them. Courage has been defined by Walton in Rate (2007), who says courage consists of three characteristics: (1) careful presence of mind and deliberate action, (2) difficult, dangerous, and painful circumstances, and (3) a morally worthy intention at the agent's personal risk and suffering.

In addition, Sutherland (1996) stated that courage is what it takes to overcome fear. Fear is an emotion that corresponds to a perceived risk. So, to show courage, one has to understand the risks and move on. In human life, obstacles always come into our lives anytime and anywhere without knowing what obstacles they will be. Courage is the answer to facing unexpected obstacles as well as the big obstacles that come in our life.

## **2.2 Types of Courage**

According to Dungeate's theory (2011), types of courage are divided into six, i.e. physical courage, social courage, intellectual courage, moral courage, emotional courage, and spiritual courage. These types will be explained further below.

### **2.2.1 Physical Courage**

Physical courage is the type most people think of first, the one that allows us to risk discomfort, injury, pain, or even death. Physical courage is all about making use of physical strength to deal with the problems and difficulties that arise in life. It can be related to the physical strength shown by individuals to save somebody's life by putting his or her own life at risk. Examples in everyday life include firefighters running into a burning building, saving and protecting children from dangerous animals, police catching thieves, and someone undergoing chemotherapy. We have every right to be wary of pain: it tells us where our limits and boundaries are. However, sometimes there are things that are more important than pain, and our physical fears become boundaries to be crossed. However, sometimes there are things that are more important than pain, and our physical fears become boundaries to be crossed. Therefore, physical courage requires keeping the body healthy, strong, and tough to get through any challenges, be they physical challenges or other challenges.

### **2.2.2 Social Courage**

Social courage is defined as a display of courage in which the risks involved could damage an individual's esteem in the eyes of others. Social courage is standing up tall, being able to greet the world with your head held high, and feeling comfortable in your own skin. Social courage means not conforming to the expectations of others and

being willing to show your true self, even if it means risking social disapproval or punishment. It means being able to express opinions and preferences without checking to see if they are in line with "everyone else's" opinions and preferences. It helps us apologize and move on. It is not about attracting or craving attention, it's about not minding attention. Some simple examples of social courage are being honest, admitting mistakes, and apologizing to people when you make mistakes. Another example of this type of courage is being yourself. Being true to yourself without checking to see others' preferences is a courageous action.

### **2.2.3 Intellectual Courage**

Intellectual courage means being willing to grapple with difficult or confusing concepts and ask questions, it means being willing to struggle to gain understanding and answers and risk making mistakes. Sometimes what we learn challenges previously accepted ideas or contradicts the teachings of a family or cultural group. Intellectual courage means being intrinsically motivated to learn and question rather than extrinsically motivated. Given the information explosion of recent decades, along with easy and indiscriminate access to it, being a critical thinker will only become more important, not less. Being passive recipients of information and forgetting to track sources or cross-reference data can quickly turn even the brightest minds into moldable mush. Integrity and authenticity are interwoven with intellectual courage; they mean telling the truth no matter how uncomfortable. A simple example is a student who asks questions during the teaching and learning process in class. Many students do not dare to ask the teacher questions, even though the teacher has given students the opportunity to ask questions about the topic being discussed.

### **2.2.4 Moral Courage**

Moral courage is the ability to stand up for and practice that which one considers ethical, moral behavior when faced with a dilemma, even if it means going against countervailing pressure to do otherwise. Moral courage requires that we rise above the apathy, complacency, hatred, cynicism, and fear-mongering in our political systems, socioeconomic divisions, and cultural and religious differences. Doing the right thing means listening to our conscience, that quiet voice within. Ignoring that voice can lead to feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and diminished personal integrity. Moral courage requires us to make judgments about what actions or behaviors are supportive of our highest ideals and which ones are destructive. It demands that we recognize our responsibilities and see the consequences of our own actions. Standing up to a bully and volunteering in volunteer activities are simple examples of moral courage. Simpler examples of moral courage are picking up trash and doing homework or chores without being reminded.

### **2.2.5 Emotional Courage**

Emotional courage is being open to experiencing the full spectrum of emotional experiences, both positive and negative. Often, the terms "emotion" and "feeling" are used interchangeably, but it's good to be more precise. Emotional courage also means loving yourself, being proud of yourself, and believing that you deserve love and happiness. Basically, it has to do with self-acceptance, coupled with a willingness to step outside of our comfort zone and explore new ways that may not be familiar. It also seems to be related to the quest for self-realization and fulfillment. Emotional courage

requires extracting and removing the real and largely intangible sources of fear that result in anxiety, worry, sadness, and depression that can poison the proverbial source of joy. Happiness is the keyword most associated with emotional courage and having the courage to be happy unconditionally. Emotional courage means being willing to give your heart without expecting anything in return, such as helping a friend who is in trouble, helping a stranger who is in trouble, showing affection in public, and maintaining eye contact, and smiling.

### **2.2.6 Spiritual Courage**

Spiritual courage fortifies us when we grapple with questions about faith, purpose, and meaning, either in a religious or non-religious framework. Spiritual courage means being available to the deepest questions about why we are here, what is my life for, do I have a purpose? These are profound existential questions and can be quite frightening, which suggests why fundamentalism of all kinds can gain mastery over us. Thus, we yearn for definite answers to these questions and are attracted to ideologies that offer a resolution to our uncertainty. Spiritual courage means accepting that you are unlikely to find the answers but asking them anyway. We all must call upon our spiritual courage when we consider our own mortality. Spiritual courage means opening ourselves up to our own vulnerability and the mysteries of life. Spiritual courage allows us to encounter people of different religious faiths and spiritual traditions without judgment. Praying sincerely is one example of spiritual courage. There are other examples, such as respecting one another's religions and letting go of the need to control everything in life.

## **2.3 Factors of Courage**

Rate et al. (2007) conduct a study to analyze what factors can cause courage in a person. They conclude there were three factors. They are external circumstances, affective, and motivational.

### **2.3.1 External Circumstance**

External circumstances are factors that affect courage from the outside. It is intended to be an event that occurs in the environment and that prompts a person to have feelings of courage. External circumstances, including behaviors such as defending in difficult situations, persevering in the face of obstacles, not giving in to fear when making decisions, and "acting" even in the face of fear.

### **2.3.2 Affectives**

Affective is a word that crops up a lot in psychology; it means having to do with emotions or moods. As humans, we have feelings. We are created to be able to feel happy, sad, fearful, and other emotions. You could say these affectives influence from within. Affective factors are factors that greatly influence a person's ability to be brave, because if there is no feeling like fear, a person might not have the drive to do something bold. Affectives are very related to courage.

### **2.3.3 Motivational**

Motivation is also one of the factors that influence the emergence of one's courage. Motivational: Here is the maximum motivation to do noble deeds with the aim of wanting to achieve the ideal end result of a courageous act. The results here are not

getting recognition and praise from people, but they are results achieved to satisfy yourself and also achieve your own ideal goals.

### **3. Research Method**

A research design is a plan or strategy for conducting research. Research design is a set of methods, frameworks, and procedures used by the researcher to collect and analyze data related to the subject matter of the research problem. Research design also serves to design or develop an intervention with the aim of solving complex problems in the field of education.

This research, with the title *Protagonist's Courage in R.J. Palacio's Novel Wonder*, discusses courage by the protagonist, August Pullman. This research was analyzed based on the six types of courage proposed by Dungeate (2011) and implicit theories by courage by Rate, Clarke, Lindsay, and Sternberg (2007) to classify the factors of courageous actions. In conducting this study, the writers used a qualitative research method to process and arrange the data. Creswell (2009: 4) states that qualitative research is a study to investigate and understand the meaning individuals or groups assumed to be a social or a human problem. It is used to find out why and how a social phenomenon happens.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 Protagonist's Courage Types**

In this research, the writers present the data that she found in the novel based on the six types of courage. According to Dungeate (2011), types of courage are classified into six categories. They are physical courage, social courage, intellectual courage, moral courage, emotional courage, and spiritual courage. Then the writers analyze the courage type in the data and analyze the factors of courage as well.

#### **4.1.1 Physical Courage**

Physical courage is about having the guts to do something that might physically stand up to someone's fears and take some action. Just like what August did when he helped his friend, whose actions would harm him too. August has physical courage, and we can see that in the following quotation.

"Look," I said, stepping in front of Jack and holding my hands up in the air like a traffic cop. "We're a lot smaller than you guys . . ."

"Are you talking to me, Freddie Krueger? I don't think you want to mess with me, you ugly freak," said Eddie. And this was the point where I knew I should run away as fast as I could, but Jack was still on the ground and I wasn't about to leave him. (Palacio, 2012: 184)

During the big movie *Night Retreat*, August and Jack run into big trouble. When they were about to return to the giant screen, they met a group of 7th graders, and they made fun of August's face. They fought so that Jack was pushed and fell. August thinks he has to protect Jack even though Auggie's body is smaller than his. He has the physical courage to stay and protect Jack by not leaving his friend alone.

#### **4.1.2 Social Courage**

Social courage is the courage that someone has to express opinions and be themselves without checking other people's preferences and opinions. It is about being

true to yourself despite the risk of discomfort and social disapproval from others. The social courage that August shows when he is no longer ashamed of himself is shown in the following quote.

Walking through the halls that morning on my way to the lockers was, I have to say, absolutely awesome. Everything was different now. I was different. Where I usually walked with my head down, trying to avoid being seen, today I walked with my head up, looking around. I wanted to be seen. (Palacio, 2012: 60)

The data above shows that August has social courage. It can be seen in his increased self-confidence on Halloween at his school. So far, August can only look down when he goes to school because he does not have the courage to show his face. Social courage is also shown in the data below.

Anyway, it's not that I care that people react to me. Like I've said a gazillion times: I'm used to that by now. I don't let it bother me. It's like when you go outside and it's drizzling a little. You don't put on boots for a drizzle. You don't even open your umbrella. You walk through it and barely notice your hair getting wet. (Palacio, 2012: 145)

The data above shows that August has social courage. When August dared to be himself, regardless of the opinions of others, he was living in his inability to show himself.

The protagonist's social courage can also be seen from the data below.

"You want to know what's wrong with my face?"

"Yeah, I guess. If it's okay for me to ask."

He shrugged. I was so relieved that he didn't seem mad or sad.

"Yeah, it's no big deal," he said casually. "The main thing I have is this thing called man-di-bu-lo-facial dys-os-tosis— which took me forever to learn how to pronounce, by the way. But I also have this other syndrome thing that I can't even pronounce. And these things kind of just morphed together into one big superthing, which is so rare they don't even have a name for it. I mean, I don't want to brag or anything, but I'm actually considered something of a medical wonder, you know."

He smiled.

"That was a joke," he said. "You can laugh."

I smiled and shook my head.

"You're funny, Auggie." I said.

"Yes, I am," he said proudly. "I am cool beans." (Palacio, 2012: 95)

The evidence above shows that August, as the protagonist, has the courage to reveal who he is and what illness he suffers from without feeling ashamed to reveal it when one of his best friends, Summer, asks about his facial condition.

#### **4.1.3 Intellectual Courage**

Intellectual courage is about asking questions, being willing to struggle to gain understanding and answers, and having a relentless quest for the truth. August has

intellectual courage in his life. August has intellectual courage, as can be seen in the following quotation.

"The word's 'supposedly,' by the way," I said.

"What are you talking about?"

"You said 'supposably' before," I said. (Palacio, 2012: 29)

Although Auggie has limitations in his face, he has strength in his brain. He is a smart kid not only in science but also in language. When Julian incorrectly says supposedly, he tries to justify Julian's supposably word. With this action, he can show his courage in his opinion and prove that homeschooled children are not stupid. August's intellectual courage is in other data.

"Okay, this one is the one," said August, pointing to a picture on the screen of a bunch of potatoes with wires poking out of them. "How to build an organic battery made of potatoes. Now, that's cool. It says here you could power a lamp with it. We could call it the Spud Lamp or something. What do you think?"

"Dude, that sounds way too hard. You know I suck at science."

"Shut up, you do not."

"Yeah I do! I got a fifty-four on my last test. I suck at science!"

"No you don't! And that was only because we were still fighting and I wasn't helping.

you. I can help you now. This is a good project, Jack. We've got to do it." (Palacio, 2012: 130)

August is a smart kid. He really likes science lessons. At the time, there was a science exhibition, and August was recognized for his courage in making decisions and taking action to make the spud lamp. August's intellectual courage can be defined as having an awareness of the need to face and deal fairly with ideas, beliefs, or points of view about which one has strong negative emotions and which have not been taken seriously.

#### **4.1.4 Emotional Courage**

Emotional courage is the courage to follow the heart instead of following the mind. An individual who has emotional courage is ready to experience positive emotions at the cost of negative ones. August has emotional courage, which means he follows his heart to keep positive emotions. This can be seen in the following quote.

"No, it's okay, Mom, really."

"You don't have to go to school if you don't want, sweetie."

"I want to," I said.

"Auggie . . ."

"Really, Mom. I want to." And I wasn't lying.

(Palacio, 2012: 32)

Although Auggie's first day at school is bad, especially after meeting Julian, he still wants to go to school. Even his mother, who initially persuaded him to go to school, suddenly changed her mind in order for Auggie to quit school. This shows Auggie's attitude of challenging himself by following his heart, which has positive emotions.



During the night at Broarwood Nature Reserve, August and his friends got into a fight with the 7th graders. After the fight, August grew in emotional courage, as shown in the following data:

"Yo, dudes," said Jack, hand high in the air. "That was really cool of you guys to come back for us. Really cool. Thanks."

"No problem," answered Amos, high-fiving Jack. And then Miles and Henry high-fived him, too.

"Yeah, dudes, thanks," I said, holding my palm up like Jack just had, though I wasn't sure if they'd high-five me, too. (Palacio, 2012: 178)

On the data, August ventured to raise his hand to do a high five like his other friends did. Even though he thought his friends were not replying to his high fives, he already had the courage. Simply, emotional courage means that you are willing to act on your emotions when you feel them, even if you fear the outcome.

#### **4.2 Factors of Protagonist's Courage**

Every courageous act that the protagonist performs in August has factors that affect his taking those actions. Rate et al. (2007) conducted a study to analyze what factors can cause courage in a person. Those factors are external circumstances, affective, and motivational. Those factors are found in the novel as factors behind the protagonist's courageous actions.

##### **4.2.1 External Circumstances**

External circumstances are events that occur around a person. This is a factor that influences the outside. This event happened around August for the protagonist and influenced him to be courageous. The first incident occurred when August's sister, Via, made him think from a different perspective and taught him how to act and deal with the problems he experienced at school like other people in general. It can be seen in the following quotation.

"You have to go back to school. Everyone hates school. sometimes. I hate school sometimes. I hate my friends sometimes. That's just life, Auggie. You want to be treated normally, right? This is normal! We all have to go to school sometimes despite the fact that we have bad days, okay?" (Palacio, 2012: 84)

Via reassures Auggie that what he is going through is normal in life. He wanted to convince August that the problem was not because he was different, but that it was normal and often happened in daily life or at school. August had to be strong and brave to face things like that. She also told August that if he avoided his problems at school and did not want to go to school anymore, he would be treated like a child with special needs because he could not handle his problems on his own.

"The point is we all have to put up with the bad days. Now, unless you want to be treated like a baby the rest of your life or like a kid with special needs, you just have to suck it up and go." (Palacio, 2012: 84)

August began to think that what Via said was true: that he should face his problems at school by acting like he was, not by avoiding them, because it would be

more complicated if he avoided them. August became a more courageous person. He was brave enough to come to school after what he had been through.

When their dog named Daisy gets sick and is about to be taken to the emergency vet. August had only thought about people's views of him. Via had said this to August.

"Auggie," said Via. "Come quick. Mom needs to talk to you."

"I'm not apologizing!"

"This isn't about you!" she yelled. "Not everything in the world is about you, Auggie! (Palacio, 2012)

Through the data above, she said that to August to make August realize that he wasn't always the center of all attention and not everything about him. That there are many things in this world outside of him and he should be aware of that.

#### **4.2.2 Affective Factor**

Affective is commonly known as mood or feelings. It could be said that this is a factor that affects someone from the inside. Feelings can be positive or negative. These feelings affect the protagonist when she makes decisions and takes courageous actions. Before August joined the school, he only interacted with his family. He only learns something from his family and only has problems with family. Ever since he entered school, he had been very afraid to meet other people, even though school was, like he thought, a terrible place for a child. But he got inspiration from his teacher, Mr. Brown, to be more daring, as shown in the data below.

As I wrote down Mr. Browne's September precept, I suddenly realized that I was going to like school. No matter what. (Palacio, 2012: 42)

From the data above, August used to be very reluctant to interact with other people, especially at the school he hated so much. August became a child who liked school thanks to the positive energy of Mr. Brown. One of the inspirations that Mr. Browne gave was, "When given the choice between being right or kind, choose kind." From there, August had a positive feeling that he would like school.

#### **4.2.3 Motivational Factor**

The factor that influences August's courage is motivation. This factor is the one that motivates someone to take courageous action. August got a lot of support from the people around him, especially his mother. The first was when August didn't want to go to school because he didn't have the courage and didn't trust himself. However, her mother tries to make her understand that this is the best choice for her. This can be seen in the quotation below.

"I'm not going to say it won't be a big challenge for you, because you know better than that," she answered. "But it'll be good for you, Auggie. You'll make lots of friends. And you'll learn things you'd never learn with me." She turned in her seat again and looked at me. "When we took the tour, you know what they had in their science lab? A little baby chick that was just hatching out of its egg. It was so cute! Auggie, it actually kind of reminded me of you when you were a little baby . . . with those big brown eyes of yours. . . ." (Palacio, 2012: 16)

Since he was born, August's mother has always given positive support to what he always does. After what he experienced at school, he locked himself in his room, and every night his father and mother accompanied him to sleep. His mother read a book to August. Suddenly, August started crying, and his mother gave him motivation, as shown below.

Mom put the book down and wrapped her arms around me. She didn't seem surprised that I was crying. "It's okay," she whispered in my ear. "It'll be okay." (Palacio, 2012: 50)

The words spoken by August's mother could motivate August to be a brave child, to face problems calmly, as well as to give understanding to August that he was not a strange child, even though he was born different from other people, he was still valuable.

The motivation he gets is not only from his mother, but he also gets it from his sister as we find in the following data.

For a second, I imagined how cool it would be to be Via and Justin right then, having all these people standing up and cheering for them. I think there should be a rule that everyone in the world should get a standing ovation at least once in their lives. (Palacio, 2012: 161)

He also got motivation from his sister. When he saw Via's appearance, he thought that he wanted to be like her. He also wanted to get a standing ovation.

## 5. Conclusion

After analyzing R.J. In Palacio's novel *Wonder*, the author finds four types of courage out of six types of courage based on the conversation or dialogue and narration used by August Pullman as the protagonist in the novel. The types of courage found in August are physical courage, social courage, intellectual courage, and emotional courage. The courage shown in the novel is when August dares himself to overcome various obstacles by overcoming his fears. It is seen that August has taken many bold actions to overcome his fear, such as starting to attend school and interacting with people other than his family.

All types of courage are contained in August and his actions are motivated by external, affective, and motivational factors. These factors can be seen as motivating August to be bold. External circumstances are needed to trigger one's feelings (affective), and motivation is needed to overcome them. Each type of courage data contained in the novel is influenced by three important factors: external circumstances, affective factors, and motivational factors.

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