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## Making sense of cancer through autobiography: suffering, stigma, and regeneration in Lance Armstrong's *It's not about the bike*

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper through a discussion of the therapeutic value of autobiographical narratives of disease seeks to emphasize the importance of Lance Armstrong's autobiography, showing how someone after once having physically and emotionally devastated by a disease like cancer, and bearing the stigma of socio-cultural myths and constructions of the disease can come out triumphant and attain regeneration through an indomitable will to survive and live.

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Autobiography; cancer; narrative; regeneration; social awareness; stigma

Lance Armstrong was diagnosed with third-stage testicular cancer while he was in the 25th year. Cancer later metastasized to his abdomen, lungs, and brain. He was given only 40% probability of recovery. But he struggled heroically and came out as victorious over cancer. This paper tries to understand the physical, psychological, emotional, social, and economic impact of cancer through the autobiography of Lance Armstrong. Cancer is a condition of an uncontrolled increase in the cells of a living body, and it has been called the emperor of all diseases perhaps one of the most dreadful ones (Mukherjee, 2011). Literary autobiographies cannot provide any concrete way to eradicate cancer as physical sciences can, but they can help in easing the pain of the patients or contribute significantly to combat the cultural constructions or myths around cancer, sensitizing the masses and raising awareness about the disease. Literature is known to have its own therapeutic value: according to Aristotle, poetry helps in the "catharsis" or purification of emotions that results in a better understanding of the human condition or a kind of clarification of life (Aristotle, 1895). Literature is regarded in two ways; purely artistic or as being a purposeful commentary on life and times. There are critics like Addison or Johnson, who sternly believe in the moral and purposive nature of literature (Trace, 1997, p. 21). It accounts distinctive features and movements of the history including human and social concerns. Modern literature tries to present life as it is, with all its beauties and crudities. As a result, there is an emergence of literature that portrays the intellectual and psychological dilemmas including seamy and dingy aspects of life, as well as human illness or disease. Writers like Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann, and James Joyce frequently adopted disease as one of the major themes in their

works. Mann (1965) in his essay "Goethe and Tolstoy" paradoxically claims that disease gives dignity to human beings because it brings out their spiritual qualities: "It is possible to think and feel about illness as a highly dignified human phenomenon ... in disease resides the dignity of man; and the genius of disease is more human than the genius of the health" (p. 108).

### **Therapeutic value of autobiographical narratives of cancer**

This romantic exaltation of disease in literature as something ennobling may not be entirely true, but indeed, it provides the readers with a certain strength to cope with their illness. The therapeutic value of the narrative accounts figures prominently in the works of Mary Shelley particularly in those works like *Mathilda* and *Valperga: Or, the life and adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* (Brewer, 1994, p. 387). The Modernist Writers extensively explore the relationship between disease and writing. Woolf (1930/1967) writes, "Considering how common illness is, how tremendous the spiritual change ... it becomes strange indeed that illness has not taken its place with love and battle and jealousy among the prime themes of literature" (p. 193). Solzhenitsyn (1970) describes his experience of cancer in his *Cancer ward*, with a penetrating insight into personal and social phenomena affecting the disease. The portrayal of disease in fictional or non-fictional narratives including biographies or autobiographies can be helpful in spreading awareness about illness or disease and the consequent healing and recovery.

Going through written descriptions of disease by others can increase emotional resilience and psychological well-being of the patients. Such an activity creates a sense of the all-pervasive nature of pain in the patients by acquainting them with other co-sufferers or motivates them to resist against the disease with the stories of survivors. Literary interventions can relieve distress, and therefore, improve the quality of life for cancer patients. Poetry Therapy, a technique of treating patients, is based on the notion that self-expression of one's suppressed feelings or ideas into contemplative narratives, or going through others' descriptions of misery or suffering can benefit patients, is now empirically tested and proved. Cummings (2003) opines, "I confess this ritual of reading (and rereading) poems by fellow breast cancer survivors comforts me ... lift(s) my spirits and recharge my batteries ... moving me closer, day by day, to my own recovery" (para. 3). Many people have tried to pen down their experiences of disease or suffering of other causalities. Expression, as well as the reading of someone else's experience in the form of autobiographical narratives, can be substantially effective in making sense of life, understanding illness and reaching at some conclusion.

In December 1995, a conference on narrative and identity was held by the International Research Centre for Cultural Studies in Vienna. Various scholars from Psychology, Philosophy, Social Sciences, Literary Theory, and Communications affirmed the value of "narrative as an expressive embodiment of our experience, as a mode of communication, and as a form for understanding the world and ultimately ourselves" (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001, p. 1). A specific kind of authority can be attributed to these kinds of accounts in understanding cancer because the writer has himself gone through such an experience. In the present times, there is a wide range of narratives and autobiographies dealing with cancer such as breast cancer, testicular cancer, prostate cancer, and lung cancer. Autobiography is a record of an individual's personal experiences directed to the self-

development or discovery. It is a biography written by someone about himself or herself. It implies a “full account of the facts of man’s life, involving the attempt to set forth his character, temperament and milieu, as well as his experiences and activities” (Abrams & Harpham, 2015, p. 30).

Cancer is one of the most horrific diseases in the modern times. As the number of cancer patients or survivors increased, there is a subsequent increase in the appearance of narratives of cancer. Ryan and Ryan’s (1979) *A private battle* is an autobiographical account of the struggle with Prostate cancer for four years. The book is remarkable for its treatment of personal relationships, and a must read for cancer patients, as well as people desirous of having a better understanding of life. Sheehan’s (1996) *Going the distance* is a very inspirational book for making sense of life in difficult times. Sheehan, a former cardiologist and runner, pens down his experiences of Prostate Cancer. Middlebrook’s (1996) *Seeing the crab: A memoir of dying* is an intense portrayal of her traumatic breast cancer experiences. Similarly, Rich’s (1999) *The red devil: To hell with the cancer* explores the problems cancer causes in personal relationships. Sedgwick (2000) in her *A dialogue on love* narrates her experience of cancer and her ideas on life, death, and disease after she has undergone mastectomy and chemotherapy. Frank (2002) in *At the will of the body: Reflections on illness* declares:

Illness as an opportunity, though a dangerous one. To seize this opportunity, I need to remain with illness a little longer and share what I have learned through it ... critical illness offers the experience of being taken to the threshold of life. (p. 1)

Conway’s (2007) *Ordinary life: A memoir of illness* recounts her struggle with breast cancer and lymphoma. Similarly, Armstrong’s (2001) autobiography *It’s not about the bike: My journey back to life* depicts his suffering and recovery from cancer. Lance Armstrong is an American champion cyclist and cancer survivor who won the Tour de France for record seven times after his recovery. The proceeding part of the paper deals with a detailed micro-analysis of the text and its various critical and theoretical aspects.

The book won the William Hill Sports Book of the Year award in 2000. It appeared in the first rank at *The New York Times* Best Seller list. It also received Christopher Award for Adult Books in 2001. The book tells us how Lance having rare chances of survival, actually turns out to be the greatest champion in the history of cycling. How having once suffered agonies of testicular surgery, brain surgery, and chemotherapy, he becomes a figure of public inspiration by winning the Tour de France. Lance proceeds to tell us how he successfully conquered cancer.

### **Early life of Lance Armstrong: playing with fire**

Lance was born on 18 September 1971, in Texas, United States. His mother was only 17 when she had him. She brought him up with great love and care and “raised him with an unbending rule: ‘Make every obstacle an opportunity’” (Armstrong, 2001, p. 17). Lance never knew who his father was: “He was a non-factor – unless his absence was a factor. Just because he provided the DNA that made me doesn’t make him my father” (p. 18). His mother was married to his father during her pregnancy, but she left him before he was two. Lance’s mother raised him living through immense penury and poverty while she herself “worked part time and finished the school” (p. 19). When

Lance was three years old, his mother married to Terry Armstrong, and as Terry legally adopted Lance, his surname was changed from Gunderson to Armstrong. Terry who is reminiscent of Murdstone in Dickens (1981) novel *David Copperfield*, was very gruesome and used to whip Lance for his childhood play activities, he explains: "I didn't like Terry Armstrong. I thought he was an angry testosterone Greek, and as a result, my early impression of organized religion was that it was for hypocrites" (Armstrong, 2001, p. 21). When Lance was 14 his mother had to go through the experience of a painful hysterectomy. While she was in the hospital, Terry was writing love letters to another woman. Lance's mother, Linda was the greatest influence of his life. His mother had become his "best friend and most loyal ally. She was my organizer and my motivator, a dynamo" (p. 30). She used to tell him, "if you can't give your 110 percent you won't make it" (p. 30). Mentally and emotionally he was so prepared by his mother that he was able to put a laughing face even to the greatest tribulations in his life.

Lance had to face difficulties at every step but he was shaped by each encounter with troubles and experiences as "the wind shapes a mesquite tree or a plain" (p. 17). Lance believed in having a "dumb focus", he believed that the "old wounds and long-ago slights become the stuff of competitive energy" (p. 22). Right from his childhood Lance was very adventurous. In his childhood, he devised "a game called Fireball which entailed soaking a tennis ball into Kerosene, lighting it on fire, and playing catch with it wearing a pair of garden gloves" (p. 25). It was his adventurous nature that he liked biking in hilly areas. When Lance was 15, he entered in 1987 President's Triathlon in Lake Lavon and competed with well-known contestants. He would doctor his date of birth to meet the minimum age requirement of 16. In his early life, Lance had a quarrelsome and unstable temperament, regularly beating his opponents or competitors. He had a disappointing performance in the Barcelona games, finishing 14th in the road race. However, the most influential man in American cycling, Jim Ochowicz was deeply impressed by him. Och's search for finding a young American, who could win the Tour de France was finished when he found Lance. Lance's first race under Och's coaching was in San Sebastian. On the day of his debut it rained heavily, and Lance finished last, but he did not quit:

An American in cycling was comparable to a French baseball team in the World Series. I was a gate-crasher in a revered and time-honoured sport, and I had little or no concept of its rules, written and unwritten, or its etiquette. Let's just say that my Texas manners didn't exactly play well on the continent. (Armstrong, 2001, p. 53)

It is important to note here that in his pre-cancer career Lance failed to make his mark in the field of bike racing. He lacked the inner strength called self-discipline and "had neither the body nor the mental toughness yet to endure the hardship" (p. 67). While Lance was yet making his tryst with destiny in cycling the news of cancer was like a bolt from the blue. He was diagnosed with the third-stage testicular cancer on 2 October 1996. The news of cancer turned his entire world upside down:

It was like being run off the road by a truck, and I've got the scars to prove it. There's a puckered wound in my upper chest just above my heart, which is where the catheter was implanted. A surgical line runs from the right side of my groin into my upper thigh, where they cut out my testicle. But the real prizes are two deep half-moons in my scalp, as if I was kicked twice in the head by a horse. Those are the leftovers from brain surgery. (Armstrong, 2001, p. 2)

## Coping with cancer: living in between life and death

Cancer ruins a patient physically and mentally, the life and psyche of a cancer patient are constantly haunted by images of mortality. The traditional discourses about the disease and its association with an inevitable impending death further defer the hope and treatment in most cases. The disease becomes a testing time for family and friends. Almost all the narratives of cancer pay minute attention to the depiction of the response of friends and family. In *It's not about the bike* we have a mixed response to Lance's diagnosis with cancer. While some people were greatly shaken or broken by the news others tried to console and reassure him. Lance's mother, at first completely traumatized, attempted to be as encouraging as ever to Lance. Lance describes that the experience of cancer gave him a chance to rethink his life from a different perspective: "It was as though all my blood started flowing in the wrong direction. Everything now stacked up differently: the anxieties of life – a flat tire, losing my career, a traffic jam – were reprioritized ... it was humanizing" (Armstrong, 2001, p. 74). Lance's treatment of cancer included a testicular surgery by Dr Reeves at Texas, a brain surgery by Dr Scott Shapiro at Indianapolis, and Chemotherapy by Dr Nicholas. There was a possibility that chemotherapy and radiation could render Lance sterile, so he was advised to store his semen in a Bank in San Antonio. In the book, there is a pathetic description of Lance when he is given a vial to extract his semen:

I was in severe pain; the cut from the surgery was right at the top of my groin and met my abdomen. I was depressed and falling apart emotionally ... shock of the diagnosis, and now I was supposed to summon an erection? ... Conceiving a child was supposed to be wreathed in hope, not this sad, solitary, desperate procedure. (Armstrong, 2001, pp. 82–83)

Gygax (2009) has pointed out that most writers present their traumas in an unconventional and crudely realistic way (p. 292). Lance also portrays the grim reality and details of cancer treatment with almost a realistic vein, taking every care to catch the feel or the atmosphere of the procedure related to the diagnosis and management of cancer and its accompanying pain:

The aftermath of the surgery was very painful – the incision was long and deep and in a tender place ... it appeared from the biopsy and the blood tests that the cancer was spreading rapidly. It was typical of testicular cancer to move up the blood line into the lymph glands, and they had discovered some in my abdomen ... The tests showed that I was stage three, with three different cancers in my body, the most malignant of which was choriocarcinoma, a very aggressive, blood-borne type that was difficult to arrest. (Armstrong, 2001, p. 79)

It is pertinent to say here that Lance draws on his professional wisdom attained in the field of cycling in his battle against cancer: the discipline, the extensive physically torturing practice and a spirit of resolution and never quitting. Lance had to undergo tremendous mental and physical agony. After the completion of his treatment, his blood markers started showing an improvement but a fear of relapse was always there:

I didn't have cancer anymore, but I didn't not have it, either. I was in a state of anxiety called remission, and I was obsessed with the idea of a relapse. I would wake up in the night with phantom pains in my chest, and I'd lie in bed in the darkness, covered in sweat and listening to the sound of my own breathing, convinced the tumours had come back. (Armstrong, 2001, p. 161)

The romantic theme of spiritual growth expressed in Hemingway's (1952) *The old man and the sea* is echoed in Lance as well. All great literature presents the value of unconquerable spirit and invincibility of the noble and sincere effort. Lance like Hemingway's Santiago attains heroic dimensions by coming out victorious against cancer. The personal suffering of Lance makes him understand life from a closer perspective: "When I was sick, I saw more beauty and triumph and truth in a single day than I ever did in a bike race" (Armstrong, 2001, p. 5). He takes stock of his life, his shortcomings, and failures from a more close perspective. The motif of *carpe diem* appears in the book though for a short time. It shows how disease can radically change one's outlook towards life. It emphasizes that life is short, and we should make the most of the time available and live every moment of it. Lance has been terribly busy throughout his life: "I had missed most of my 20s. I was too busy being a pro athlete and making a living from the age of 15 on to do the things most people in their 20s do" (p. 174). He found his new love in Kristin Richard nicknamed as Kik "an account executive for an advertising and public-relations firm in town" (p. 162). The winter phase of his life seems to have come to an end:

Now I had a chance to go back and live it. I was still tentative about what would happen to my health, not knowing what I had left, if it was just one day, or two years, or a long life. *Carpe diem*, I told myself, seize the day. (Armstrong, 2001, p. 174)

Lance was entirely transformed after going through the experience of cancer, now he has a renewed interest in life, he wants to see, live, enjoy and use his life for the general good of the human race.

### **Socio-cultural, economic, and emotional challenges of cancer**

Every disease presents to the subject its social, economic, and emotional challenges. Schulz et al. (1995) observe that cancer affects the social, physical, and mental capacity of the patient as well as the entire family that usually results in an economic breakdown of the family, further ruining the patient psychologically (p. 21). Lance also explores these issues in his book. After the disease had seized him, Lance's professional career as a cyclist came to an end, and the only source of his income and livelihood was ruined, this economic crisis lead him to an emotional and mental disturbance. His sponsors backed out as he was rendered incapable of even stirring his body by chemotherapy, and could no longer be beneficial for them, this threw Lance into a deep financial crisis. Even though previously a millionaire, the expensive cancer treatment drained his resources. A large number of his friends left him during his treatment of cancer, his girlfriend Lisa also broke away with him. Lance explains this in the book:

Cancer does one of two things to a relationship: it either brings you closer together, or it tears you apart. In our case, it tore us apart ... it was just a case of exhaustion; we had spent so much energy fighting the illness and gotten through all of the hard parts, but in the end it left us numb, too. One day in March, she said, "Let's see other people." "Okay," I said. (Armstrong, 2001, p. 171)

Cancer patients find it difficult to reconcile themselves to their own physical and social existence and make sense of their life and meaningless suffering. The disease and its treatment cause a medical procedure related distress, fear of relapse, "changes in body image and sexuality, as well as physical toxicities that result from adjuvant therapy" (Ganz, 2008, p. 642).

Sontag (1977) in *Illness as metaphor* avers that cancer was previously considered “*obscene* ... in the original meaning of that word: ill-omened, abominable, repugnant to the senses” (p. 9). Tumours and an uncontrolled cell growth are taken as something hideous, repulsive, or demonic. Cancer like many other dreadful diseases is a cause of social stigma to patients. The stigma associated with cancer can be described as having some undesirable physical features or handicap associated with the disease. Cancer is surrounded by certain myths about the disease and the subject who suffers from it. This attribution of stigma on the patient can further trigger an identity crisis, feeling of intense psychological disruption, shame, and guilt regarding not being able to avoid or control the disease (Chapple, Ziebland, & McPherson, 2004, p. 1). Literary writers like Camus (1947/1948) reject the popular, moralistic conviction that links disease with karma or actions of a person. This feeling of shame or guilt often results into the desired or forced social distancing and breakdown of the social life of the patient (Albrecht, Walker, & Levy, 1982; Crandall & Moriarty, 1995). According to Gough (1998) Jacky Stacey’s *Teratologies: A cultural study of cancer* is an autobiographical account of her struggle with cancer as well as an exploration of the cultural ramifications of the disease (p. 220).

The subject invariably suffers from subsequent physical, emotional and psychological distress. In most of the autobiographical texts written by cancer survivors or patients, several issues recur that are loaded with gender connotations (Fernandez-Morales, 2009, p. 670). In a patriarchal society where power or masculinity is associated with male reproductive organs, the stigma of having one’s testicles cut is quite understandable. Lance had to undergo testicular surgery, chemotherapy also wrecked him emotionally as well as physically, as a result of which he was rendered infertile. Lance had to listen to unpleasant and derogatory remarks of people around him. At one of the parties a guest asked Lance’s wife, “are you sure he is good enough for you? He is only half a man” (Armstrong, 2001, p. 182). Lance had a rare type of testicular cancer that metastasizes to blood and other body organs. This kind of cancer is connected to fertility and sexual health since it can cause complete to partial sexual dysfunction. According to Schover and von Eschenbach (1984), “A survey of men treated for non-seminomatous tumours revealed that 20% had low levels of sexual activity, 10% had erectile dysfunction, 6% had difficulty reaching orgasm, and 38% reported decreased orgasmic pleasure” (p. 29). But Lance by winning the toughest sporting event succeeds in contradicting the cultural construction of masculinity that connects power with fertility and male genitalia. Lance makes use of metaphors related to armed battle to narrate his victory over testicular cancer that metastasized to his brain and lungs (Newman, 2001, p. 96). After the rigorous treatment and his untiring effort, Lance was able to defeat cancer. The cancer experience radically altered Lance’s thinking, physical sufferings and mental torments made him understand life better. Now he started feeling a sense of belongingness towards other cancer patients. He looked upon himself more as a cancer survivor than a cyclist. He realized that the true meaning of life is in serving others. He felt it his mission to serve the ailing humanity and sought his regeneration and salvation through this service:

I felt I had a mission to serve others that I’d never had before, and I took it more seriously than anything in the world ... I no longer felt that it was my role in life to be a cyclist. Maybe my role was to be a cancer survivor. My strongest connections and feelings were with people who were fighting cancer and asking the same question I was: “Am I going to die?” (Armstrong, 2001, p. 156)

Thus, Lance finds his new sense of purpose. Now he cared little for his name and fame and exploits on bike: "I had scaled things back proportionately and tried to come up with an alternate plan for the future, with no bikes in it" (p. 171). During his struggle with cancer, Lance was determined to play his part to promote well-being among cancer patients. He decided to form a charitable foundation named *Livestrong* to combat cancer. The first thing he did to popularize the cause of the disease was to stage a charity bicycle race. It was called Ride for Roses:

I wanted the foundation to manifest all of the issues I had dealt with in the past few months: coping with fear, the importance of alternate opinions, thorough knowledge of the disease, the patient's role in cure, and above all, the idea that cancer did not have to be a death sentence. It could be a route to a second life, an inner life, a better life. (Armstrong, 2001, p. 157)

### The attitude matters

The biggest thing that got Lance through the cancer was his attitude. Lance survives because he had the will to live. It was the result of a calibrated effort by him, his mother, and other dear ones. Lance takes every care to make sure of his recovery; reviewed cancer Literature, consulted nutritionists, Yoga and other experts and specialists of Testicular Cancer like Dr Einhorn and Dr Nicholas at Indianapolis, the epicentre of testicular cancer treatment. Lance believed in the attitude of never quitting. From his childhood, he was so educated by his mother that he always believed in putting up a tough battle against all odds. He believed in the famous maxim that if you think you can:

I believed in belief, for its own shining sake. To believe in the face of utter hopelessness ... to ignore apparent catastrophe ... We are so much stronger than we imagine, and belief is one of the most valiant and long-lived human characteristics. To believe, when all along we humans know that nothing can cure the briefness of this life, that there is no remedy for our basic mortality, that is a form of bravery. To continue believing in yourself ... believing in whatever I chose to believe in, that was the most important thing. (Armstrong, 2001, p. 117)

In the book, we have an episode with Dr Nicholas, who tells Lance that he chose Oncology as his field because it gives him a chance to positively influence lives of suffering people. It may be one of the toughest and tear-jerking professions but "There's no question it's disheartening and sad, but even when you don't cure people, you're always helping them ... you can help them manage the illness. There are more human moments in oncology than any other field" (p. 274). During his visit to a children's ward who were affected by cancer, Lance comes to know the responsibility everybody shares towards his fellow creatures: the little bald, creatures with no eyebrows, gloomy yet enthusiastic to live, seem to give him the message of hope and life. The meaningless suffering of the children and their audacious reaction to the inescapability of their situation herald an epiphanic illumination for Lance:

It's a fact that children with cancer have higher cure rates than adults with cancer, and I wonder if the reason is their natural, unthinking bravery ... Adults know too much about failure; they're more cynical and resigned and fearful. Kids say, "I want to play. Hurry up, and make me better." That's all they want. (Armstrong, 2001, p. 272)

Lance is the only person in the history of bike racing to win Tour de France for seven consecutive times, and he retired with all the honour and unbounded admiration in 2004. Lance was acknowledged as a source of public inspiration and was hailed as a

person who through his suffering and bout against cancer could serve as a lighthouse figure or survivor to motivate the cancer patients in their struggle and hope to live through their illness. It was when he made a comeback in 2008 that the tables were reversed, and he lost all his reputation as a legendary cyclist after a doping controversy. Lance was described as a cheater and a morally debased person who consistently tried to maintain a precarious reputation with all his lies in his trials, and slurs on the press reporters (Macur, 2014). He lost all his fame, and the support for his foundation is steadily diminishing as the celebrity donators are backing out: this is indeed deteriorating to the cause of cancer patients and the mass awareness movements against the disease. Whatever Lance did in his bike racing should be seen in relation to the fact that he has done a lot for the millions of people who suffer from cancer. He was once a hope for them, and there are cancer survivors for whom the success story of Lance turned out to be life-changing, and they also came out conquering cancer realizing that even death cannot defeat a person who has the will to live. Moreover, the work he did for the cancer patients through his foundation could only be done if he would succeed since all the money and charity he was able to garner for the purpose was directly related to his success story and popularity as a sports icon. So we must take a charitable view of Lance's guilt and any judgements against him must first take into account his contribution to the welfare of cancer patients. The House of the Representatives of United States Congress lauded his role as a cancer survivor who has become emblematic of human victory over cancer and adverse fate itself:

Lance Armstrong's bravery and resolution to overcome cancer have made him a role model to cancer patients and their loved ones, and his efforts through the Lance Armstrong Foundation have helped to advance cancer research, diagnosis, treatment, and after-treatment services. (H.R. Con. Res. 381, 2005)

## Conclusion and future perspectives

*It's not about the bike: My journey back to life* is an autobiographical account of Lance Armstrong's journey from adolescence to maturity, cancer to health, worldly to spiritual growth. The book primarily deals with Lance's struggle and consequent victory over Cancer. As the title suggests, it is not about the bike, it is about life. Lance takes Tour de France as a metaphor for life: life itself is like a race and requires considerable courage, toughness, and a spirit of resolution that is necessary to achieve anything worthwhile whether it be Tour de France or any other magnificent achievement.

There is a limited awareness and information in general public about cancer and cancer services. The discussion and analysis of the literature of disease or autobiographies of patients can be greatly helpful in creating general awareness about the disease. Awareness about the disease is the key to early diagnosis, treatment, and eradication of the disease. It can lead to an increased understanding, an improved and enhanced research and development in the field of cancer. In July 1985, Donald Regan, the President of the United States was diagnosed with Colon Cancer. The wide coverage of the disease and general discussion of the President's disease in media and literature created a great social awareness about cancer in the country and a subsequent increase in the recovery rate of cancer patients (Palladino, 1999, p. 535). Moreover, such an explorative discourse

about the life narratives of cancer patients can be helpful in deconstructing and dismantling the cultural constructions or myths about the disease. The autobiographies or self-narrative accounts of people living with or dying of cancer should be discussed and researched on scientific, political and cultural levels. These can also be studied in relation to the social, emotional, or psychological well-being of the patients. In the recent past, a significant number of autobiographical accounts of life-threatening illnesses such as cancer and AIDS have appeared. Analysis of such narratives can acquaint us with socio-cultural aspects of the disease.

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