

**How to Cite:**

Rana, S., & Pandya, D. (2022). Cancer narratives, communitas and liminality: A study of fictional cancer narratives and the formation of communitas. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S5), 11516–11526. <https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS5.11127>

# **Cancer narratives, communitas and liminality: A study of fictional cancer narratives and the formation of communitas**

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**Abstract**--The present study is based on the qualitative exploration of Cancer narratives through the lens of Liminality, the theory that was proposed by Arthur Van Gennep. It was further explored by Victor Turner. The Cancer narratives also show that the cancer patients go through a mental condition called pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal stages. The liminal stage proves, "a neither here nor there," kind of stage. The study also aims at finding out the how illness can bring a change in an individual's perspective of life. It also aims at finding out whether the disease has been studied in the right perspective. Besides how communitas helps in understanding the cancer condition because those who are not in the lethal range of cancer don't understand what a cancer sufferer has to go through. How cancer influences people of different age, gender and stages of life is also the objective of the study? How the doctors who treat cancer patients feel about their patients because the patients come to the doctor for hope and assurance?

**Keywords**--Cancer narratives, communitas, illness, liminality.

**Introduction**

In the selected cancer narratives, *The Fault in Our Stars*, *A Walk to Remember*, *Before I Die*, *How to Climb an Eiffel Tower* and *A Rather Unusual Romance*, we find that as soon as Cancer condition is revealed to the protagonists they come out with their wish list. In *Before I Die*, Tessa Scott comes up with her wish list, "I have got a whole long list of things I want to do." (BID, 6) and goes on a spree to fulfill them. In *The Fault in Our Stars*, Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters go to New Zealand so that they can meet their favorite author. In fact even the mother of Hazel wishes that her daughter get the best of life before she dies, Hazel

admits, “ One might marvel at the insanity of the situation: A mother sends her sixteen year old daughter alone with a seventeen year old boy out into a foreign city famous for its permissiveness. But this too was a side effect of dying. (TFOS, 159) Lara Blaine patches up with all her broken relations in the end and in *A Rather Unusual Romance* both the cancer sufferers; Alan and Erin dump their bitter past and relations so as to a meaningful life.

Illness can bring reformatory changes in one’s perception about life as well as a better understanding of the time and space left with individuals. The famous critic Susan Sontag, herself a cancer sufferer, stated in her famous book *Illness as Metaphor*, “Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds a dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick.” (Sontag 1) Thus having a disease and developing an understanding about it are two important issues while medicines can take care of the physical aspect to the best of the latest development but the way cancer is demoralized is a sign of worry. Not telling the patient about cancer was also a norm in the recent past because of the fear associated with it may harm the patient and hence the close relatives were informed about it by the doctors. In fact there were laws like the Freedom of Information Act of 1966, in which a clause, “exempted from disclosure matters whose disclosure would be an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.” (Sontag 8)

Sontag notices that it is quite astonishing on the part of our much advanced post industrial societies that we find it difficult, “to come up to terms with death.”(Sontag 8) Death has become a taboo. So far death in sleep or sudden death is considered as good death. The most common definition that is accepted about death is, “to cease to be alive.”(<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/death>) But it is an ordinary and outdated definition of death. Shelley Kagan raises some pertinent questions, “If I won’t exist after I die, can death truly be bad for me? Would immortality be desirable? Is fear of death appropriate? Is suicide ever justified? How should I live in the face of death?” (<https://philpapers.org/rec/KAGD>)

Death is associated with ceasing of vital activities but modern science offers us the possibility of reviving life e.g. a frozen sperm can be used for artificial insemination in humans as well as in animals. “Death is described as ‘mysterious,’ the biggest problem with idea of death is nobody knows what happens after death.” (<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/death/v-1>) “Death is typically regarded as a great evil, especially if it strikes someone too soon.” (<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/death/v-1>) In the texts under study out of five novels we find that the characters of four novels are quite young and face death at early stages of life. Hazel got cancer at the age of thirteen; Augustus is barely seventeen and an amputee because of cancer. Jammie is sixteen and is about to die (*A Walk to Remember*); Tessa Scott is sixteen and she is told that she hasn’t got enough time. (*Before I Die*) and Lara Blaine is a healthy young woman of 29 and one fine day while exercising in a gym she falls unconscious and the hospital authorities give her the bad news. (*How to Climb an Eiffel Tower*)

When it comes to acceptance the readers find a common response, Lara Blaine is unable to accept the fact that she is only 29 and she got cancer. The most tragic case among all the cancer sufferers is that of Hazel Grace. She admits sarcastically, "I told Augustus the broad outline of my miracle diagnosed with Stage IV thyroid cancer when I was thirteen. I didn't tell him that the diagnosis came three months after I got my first periods. Like: Congratulations! You're a woman. Now die. It was we were told incurable." (TFOS, 24) Arthur Van Gennep makes us understand as something that separates us from life. Death is basically the separation of different elements, "man is often thought to be composed of several elements whose fate after death is not the same-body, vital force, breath-soul, head-soul, etc." (Rite of Passage, 146)

A disease like cancer also brings the notion of victimhood. Sontag says, "Cancer today –always seemed to be a mysterious disease of individuals, a deadly arrow that could strike anyone, that singled out its victims one by one." (Sontag, 38) Not only this the person afflicted with cancer often asks, Why me? The same notion is not attached with any other disease like diarrhea or TB. Susan Sontag observes, "Cancer is viewed as forms of self-judgment, of self- betrayal." (40) Severe illness conditions also tests ones will power to face it. It often brings out the worst and the best in a person. Not only as an individual but as a community also, in the face of epidemic or pandemic, how an individual or a community responds, reacts and revives also depends on the deeper values besides external factors. Like, we recently witnessed in the case of different nations and their response to Covid-19.

Not only revelation of fatal diseases cut shorts one's life it also comes as a revelation of how the life was well spent or not well spent. The common factor that comes out in the five novels is the realization of having done not enough during the given time and space. Not only in the select texts can one find this sort of emotion in fact in several other fictional and non-fictional accounts of cancer we find such regretful feelings. Suddenly the characters realize that they were leading an ordinary life. They have wasted their time so far. They haven't left any mark on the world.

Sontag mentions, the case of sixty year old civil servant in Kurosawa's film *Ikiru*(1952). The protagonist feels, "With one year left to live, Watanbe wants to do something that is worthwhile, wants to redeem his mediocre life." (Sontag 42) Likewise when Hazel asks Augustus in *The Fault in our Stars*, whether he fears oblivion he replies, "I fear earthly oblivion,"(168) He further says that he regrets, "that I won't be able to give anything in exchange for my life." (168) The guilt of not being able to do something great for the society is heavy on the minds of cancer sufferers. Hazel asks jokingly that Augustus obsession with giving something in exchange of his life is just weird. Augustus replies, "Everyone wants to lead an extraordinary life." (169) Tessa Scott broods over her past fifteen years of tiny life and regrets the fact that she will never be able to do anything that might make her famous, "I'll never be famous or leave anything worthwhile behind." (BID, 53) The young lady, Lara Blaine of the novel *How to Climb an Eiffel Tower* is blatantly told that she will not be able to have kids after radiation.

Human body is a field of play for millions of microbes, bacteria, viruses etc. One body of flesh, blood, bones and well engineered systems is viable to attacks by

foreign bodies and internal malfunction can also happen at any point of time. But its' not just the body that is affected, it is the mind also that is greatly involved especially when the disease is life threatening. Thinking beings are greatly affected from a grave illness the moment it is revealed. Announcement of a lethal disease breaks the normal flow of thought. The mere announcement shatters the on-going constructed identity. The check-up, test reports and the treatment transports the individual to the threshold. The threshold, where the individual has to take a decision about oneself; either the individual has to learn to accept and carry on with the condition or crumble under the pressure of pain and limited time.

The study of cancer narratives reveals that cancer not only affects the patient but it also affects the doctors as well. Famous oncologist, Siddharth Mukherjee writes in his book *The Emperor of All Maladies*, it is one of the best-selling books also, "Cancer was an all consuming presence in our lives. It invaded our imaginations; it occupied our memories; it infiltrated every conversation, every thought." (Mukherjee, 4). He calls the treatment of certain kinds of cancer as, "terrifying to experience, terrifying to observe and terrifying to treat." (Mukherjee 3) The pleading eyes of patients, the hopes that they have from the doctors, the last hope that they want to cling to is the doctor and this is all pervading in his entire book. "Will you turn me out if I can't get better?,"(191) haunts the sensitive doctor. It brings even the doctors to the threshold of sanity and insanity because most of the times they also feel helpless in the absence of a sure shot cure. Lara Blaine and her friend Jane also pity the doctors because an oncologist's job is quite tough. When Lara confronts her doctor Dr. Pemachokatha she realizes that, "it must be so hard to be an oncologist. This poor guy has to give people bad news all day." (*How to climb An Eiffel Tower*, 161) It is indeed expected that anyone who is not from the field of medical sciences would find it difficult to understand and accept Cancer but what if a world famous neurologist happens to catch the same problem.

That is what happened when a famous neurologist and scientist came to know that he has cancer. Just to mention one such example here, it happened with Paul Kalanithi, the world renowned neuroscientist, he penned down his biography before dying at the age of thirty seven. The reaction of the all knowing doctor is also the same. When the test report is read out he says, "Do you think there's any possibility that it is something else?"(*When Breath Becomes Air*, 4) And then it is followed by the same response as that of any family in such a situation. "We held each other tightly, like young lovers. In the past year we both suspected, but refused to believe, or even discuss that a cancer was growing inside me." (4) In his biography Dr Kalanithi admits, "I was trying to see death as both doctor and patient." (138) While his studies in knowing his stage IV lung cancer helped him in collecting the data and possibility of treatment as a doctor but it was in no way helping him as a patient. He was in the same liminal condition of betwixt and between like a layperson, "Like my own patients, I had to face my mortality and try to understand what made my life worth living." He dangles between the two worlds of being neither here nor there. He says, "Torn between being a doctor and a patient, delving into medical science and turning back to literature for answers, I struggled, while facing my own death, to rebuild my own death, to rebuild my old life-or perhaps find a new one." (139)

In the recent past human inventions have conquered polio, diphtheria, cholera, smallpox, AIDS etc and recently to a great extent Covid but Cancer treatment has not given any permanent assurance. In fact many diseases that came after Cancer have been controlled with accurate mode of treatment but cancer cure has not progressed that much. Pain and trauma is also associated with it. The process of treatment is also difficult. Moreover it is something that devours the cells from inside according to the type of cancer a person has. It is still at the stage of trial and error at the behest of thousands of patients around the globe. Mukherjee calls Cancer as an enemy about which we know not much. He takes Sun Tzu's support to make us understand it, "if you know your enemy and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles: if you do not know your enemies but do know yourself, you will win one and lose one: if you do not know your enemies nor yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle."(*The Emperor of All Maladies*, 210). So this is how a doctor explains cancer.

Liminality as proposed by Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner helps us in understanding the mental condition of cancer sufferers but liminality being an area of anthropology, encompasses everything. The most accepted definition of anthropology is that, "It is the study of what makes us human. Anthropologists take a broad approach to understanding the many different aspects of the human experience, which we call holism."

(<https://www.americananthro.org/AdvanceYourCareer/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=2150>)

Anthropologists study Archaeology, Biological anthropology, Cultural Anthropology, Linguistic Anthropology, Applied and Practicing Anthropology. Thus, cancer narratives need to be looked at through the purview of biology because it affects the physical body, archaeological many oncologists are studying it under a separate branch called as Historical Oncology, Linguistic analysis is also important because whether we study the fictional account or non-fictional account we deduce an undercurrent similarity in all the cancer narratives. Hence a comprehensive analysis of cancer narratives is pertinent within the purview of Liminality.

The cancer narrative, *A Rather Unusual Romance* is unusual in many aspects. It is an arresting novel by British author, Stevie Turner, where a divorced woman Erin is shown fighting with cancer alongside looking after her children all by herself. During the frequent visits to hospital and chemotherapy sessions she happens to meet Alan who is also suffering from cancer. The protected chamber where both of them receive chemo sessions becomes their first meeting ground. The radiation chamber is the place where their romance blossoms. Similarly, Hazel Grace and Augustus Waters, the two cancer-afflicted teenagers in the fiction, *The Fault in Our Stars*, meet each other at an informal Support Group Centre meant for cancer patients. Both of them fall in love but the sword of death constantly hanging on their heads doesn't allow them to promise each other that are meant for eternity.

The very word, Cancer, makes one feel, 'at death's door,' (109) it makes one feel, 'a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach,' (*A Rather Unusual Romance*, 108). The feeling of neither being here nor there is well expressed when Alan says, "I am between the devil and the deep blue sea then, aren't I? I'm damned if I do, and

damned if I don't." (119) In fact the linguistic deconstruction also helps us in gauging the fact that the cancer keeps the person at the threshold of life. The following phrase is repeated many a times, "Aha! Back in the land of living," (ARUR, 95). Consecutive appearances of negative phrase like wears off, wandered off, drifted off, whiff off, head off, and signed off etc are also common in cancer narratives. The Doctors are presented as bad news deliverers; doctors who are not sure about the treatments they are giving. The constructed identity is shattered with the entrance of Cancer.

Since human mind is complex, the study of mental state in different conditions is of utmost importance. Cancer narratives need to be studied for the sake of knowing the human experience encoded in language. Fiction also helps in decoding the hidden meanings in the text. How the unconscious tries to balance the conscious level is well evident in cancer narratives. During the course of terminal illness and due to a variety of life experiences the mind is stored with many memories; in conflicting situations the suppressed feelings of unconscious sometimes conflict with conscious it often leads to depression, anxiety and isolation. If the deep rooted cause is rightly analyzed, the conflict is resolved and it results in better human health at least for the period of survival.

Arnold Van Gennep, the famous anthropologist gave the concept of Liminality. It became popular with the passage of time. It was further explored by Victor Turner (1920-1984). He devoted his entire life in investigating rituals. He explored this social process in terms of the way tribal people resolve crisis. As a researcher he integrated the idea of liminality, the threshold, the betwixt and the between. "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial." (*The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Victor Turner, 104) For him all these processes were designed to restore behavior in the society, in the garb of rituals. He categorized liminality into Liminal and the Liminoid. In technologically simpler societies people undergo liminal process whereas in technologically complex societies they undergo the process of Liminoid. He had also tried to study the connection of body, brain and culture, but unfortunately he did not live long enough to explore it extensively. Liminality helps in operating our social life and how it helps in the evolution of a person. Turner also proposed the notion that the human brain is a liminal organ that operates between the genetically fixed and the radically free state. The technique of co-adaptation helps us to evolve out of our genetically engineered brain. Turner's idea of liminality is something that is fluid, dynamic and anti-structural in nature.

Turner was keen on understanding the liminal stage, the state where an individual doesn't belong to the previous condition nor he/she is part of the reincorporation. Besides he also coined a term *communitas*, a term that refers to an unstructured community; a kind of social group in which people come together because they have common experience. Liminal has originated from the Greek/Hebrew word limen that means harbor, a place between the land and the sea. The word has various meanings in different cultures like in Latin, limes used to be known as borders or confines of the Roman Empire. Similarly, limen meant threshold or passage. According to Christianity the word limbo that is similar to limn meant, half-way station i.e. place between Heaven and Hell, where the souls

of those who died in the friendship of God wait for their salvation by Jesus Christ. The concept of liminality is visible in ancient religions also like Pythagorean view of metempsychosis, which is also referred by Socrates in the myth of Er in Plato's Republic. Er was allowed to come back to the world of the living and recount what he saw in the land of the dead, the souls of recently departed people meet at a middle station, where they are allowed to select their next destination.

Innate human behavior and the process of identity formation immediately correlate with cancer narratives. Because, the study of cancer narratives reveal that as soon as Cancer is diagnosed the first thing that it shatters is a person's constructed identity. "Only this time what I really wanted to shout out was to the Gods above, that this cannot be happening to me. I am young, I am a sportsperson, I am living my life full-tilt. I have just won a World Cup. How can I have Cancer?" (Yuvraj Singh, *The Test of My Life*, 92) Identity crisis doesn't apply to minors with cancer because by the age of twelve a child is not that much conscious about a fixed identity. Although, the traces of identity in the form of name and gender is there but largely the child is unable to understand what cancer is doing to him/her. Before the diagnosis of Cancer the constructed identity is 'I', after the diagnosis it immediately shifts to shattering of that identity. It is starkly visible in cancer narratives chosen for the present study. The moment, the doctor reveals the bad news to the person, after that how He/she looks at that constructed 'I' is worthy of exploration not just as a scholar but as a human also.

So more than the body the first thing that Cancer attacks is one's identity. The study of cancer narratives reveals how the survivor converted the 'I' into the other. Researches reveal that writing about cancer helps in spreading awareness as well establishing support groups for better care. "Writing had always been a refuge for me, a place to express my thoughts, my reality and also share my fears and insecurities." (Vaidya, Amit, *Holy Book*, 6) The study shall explore the impact of Cancer narratives in creating social bonds also. The preliminary reading of the texts also shows that cancer acts as a trigger in the patient about, "how and what to desire" because his common desires comes into direct conflict that is constructed by society around him-comes to a standstill. This is also an interesting point of study in chosen cancer narratives. "Not ever. I'll never be famous or leave anything worthwhile behind. I'll never go to college or have a job. I won't travel, never earn money, never drive, never fall in love or leave home or get my own house." (Denham, Jenny. *Before I Die*, 53)

Cancer stories reveal that right from the revelation of diagnosis up to the treatment, the conscious as well as unconscious dangles into uncertainty. The fear of recurrence of the cancer cells always bothers the psyche of the patient. It leaves a permanent impact on their psyche. Although all the humans know that they are going to die and life and death instincts are in built. Besides several instinctive behaviors like fear, the instinct is in stored in the form of memory. In both the novels there are many common motifs in various forms in fact they are mostly present in binaries. Some of the common motifs are fight or flight, hope and despair, life and death, light and dark etc. Some of the words that could be seen in every text are time, cancer-enemy, war-battle, miracle, mind-body-spirit,

blood, hair, agony, isolation, nausea, haunting of memories, nostalgia, prayer, spirituality, food, uncertainty, pain, psyche and loss of breath.

John Green's novel *The Fault in our Stars* is the story of the battle of three teenagers namely Hazel Grace, Augustus Waters and Issac. Green has taken the title from Shakespeare's famous play *Julius Caesar* wherein one of the scenes Cassius tells Brutus about the role of personal initiatives and the role of our stars or our destiny. But in the novel, the meaning is juxtaposed because the characters understand that having cancer is none of their fault, they can't blame themselves, and it is only because of the abnormal growth of certain cells that are going eat up their organs slowly in a period of time. They are not even certain whether the carcinos will stop or recur. Hazel Grace is only sixteen and due to her thyroid cancer she has to always carry an oxygen cylinder tied with long tubes to her nose and tucked to her ears because she can't breathe without the help of those tubes. Her self-esteem, her image is hurt due to the presence of that oxygen cylinder that she has to carry. Augustus Waters is a tall, young, handsome hunk of seventeen but cancer has taken away half of his right leg. He is an amputee; he walks with the help of an artificial leg. Both of them meet at the Cancer Support Group meant for giving emotional and psychological support to cancer patients. Since both are young, attractive and share common interests they soon fall in love with each other though they resist falling in love because they know that their life is uncertain and both of them don't want to leave any vacuum, void or a sense of loss of the beloved for each other. They accept the fact that the world is not a wish-granting -factory. By the time the narrative ends after turmoil and tribulations they end up being more mature about death, dying and disappearing into oblivion.

*A Rather Unusual Romance* is rather unusual because a woman who is divorced and has to look after her children all alone along with battling with cancer is rather unusual to fall in love. While visiting the hospital for treatment she encounters Alan who is suffering from cancer too. Both of them become a great support to each other. The question of recurrence of cancer cells hovers around them constantly till the day when they decide that they need to live their lives a day at a time and not to worry about future.

The theory of liminality is applicable on cancer narratives because, "the dangers accompanying these transitions – threats to identity, potential disruptions to the social order – are managed and contained by the rites of passage." (22) Arthur Van Gennep, the famous anthropologist gave the world an opportunity to understand the transitions through cultural perspective. Cancer narratives offer an opportunity to understand the liminal concept through permanent perceptual changes. According to van Gennep, "rites of passage follow a tripartite pattern and consist of: a separation or dis-aggregation phase during which the individual detaches himself/herself or is detached from the community and the role he/she played hitherto within that community; a transitional or liminal stage in which, isolated from his/her familiar social context, routines and activities, he/she 'passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state' and normally undergoes tests that gauge his/her readiness for the new role that he/she will assume." (23) (Turner, 1974, 80); a reincorporation



or re-aggregation stage in which he/she is welcomed back into the community. (Turner, 23)

John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, presents the dilemma faced by two teenagers who suffer from cancer. Augustus Waters and Hazel Grace, feel themselves separated from the normal society. It is evident when Augustus and Hazel plan to go to Amsterdam. At the airport the authorities announce their names so that they can be pre-boarded because according to flight rules sick people need to be boarded first. "Every single person in the gate area turned squarely to me," (144) as she was wearing a cannula and also carrying an oxygen cylinder. The physical evidence of feeling separated from the rest is apparent from her mental dialogues, "I could feel everybody watching us, wondering what was wrong with us, and whether it would kill us, and how heroic my mom must be and everything else. That was worst part of having cancer," Hazel is disturbed by the fact that, "the physical evidence of disease separates you from other people. We were irreconcilably other, and never it was more obvious than when the three of us walked through the empty plane." (144)

Initially when cancer first enters in Hazel's life at the age of 12, she feels separated from her school friends, when her best pal Kaityln comes to meet her she feels, "I guess it could never again feel natural to talk to her."(47) "Any attempts to feign normal social interactions were just depressing because it was glaringly obvious that everyone I spoke to for the rest of my life would feel awkward and self conscious around me." (47) The feeling of separation that a cancer patient feels can be compared with pre-liminal stage suggested by Genep. In the novel *The Fault in Our Stars*, Hazel Grace is diagnosed with Stage IV Thyroid Cancer, it followed terrible tests, diagnosis, treatments, 'then radiation.'(TFOS, 24) always gasping for air, and 'soon got into one of those experimental trials.'(25) Since she is stepped into teenage so didn't even have the chance to go into denial mode that normally happens in such cases. In fact she grew up with cancer, so didn't even get enough time to experience pre-liminal stage, hardly twelve of years of life and she is into cancer. Augustus Waters also a teenager but now an amputee because of Cancer. Thankfully in their liminal stage they happen to meet each other in the Cancer Support Centre and their meetings help them in coming out of the liminal stage together. Their love affair blooms in an environment where uncertainty is already guaranteed. Their teenage romance revolves around sickness, diagnosis, doctors, death, drugs, trials, treatments, philosophy and decision making. Their friendship helps them in making a decision about their life. They reach to a conclusion, "My cancer is me. The tumours are made of me. They are made of me surely as my brain and my heart are made of me. It is a civil war, Hazel Grace, with a pre-determined winner."(216) They reach to a stage of maturity where they decide not to think of death any more. They look at the world with pragmatic approach they accept that, "the world is not a wish-granting factory." (TFOS, 198) Thus they overcome the anxiety of being a cancer patient. They accept the things as they are and try to come up with the decision to do the best for themselves. They do not break up or feel defeated after developing an understanding of the scenario. Similarly, in the novel, *An Unusual Romance*, Erin and Alan's romance blossom in a Radio-iodine Suite while getting a treatment of radio-iodine drink. They are both isolated and

kept in Radio-iodine suites next to each other. They become friends because people having treatment on high radiations are allowed to talk to each other.

The close study reveals that the cancer patients Hazel Grace, Augustus Waters, Alan and Erin go through pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal stages. When cancer is first diagnosed all of them are thrown into a condition where they feel themselves separated from the society. Although they stay within their families but they feel separated because now, due to their lethal medical condition they will not be considered as normal. Though they are not normal due to the cancer cells, but the impact is more on the mental state; the shock that revelation of cancer gives affects the mental condition. So now, one is inflicted with a medical condition but one has to take a decision about the left over time and space. The characters under study go through that liminal process, that dilemma of, 'to be or not to be,' that uncertainty, that predicament of not knowing about the next day, the process of frustration, fight, helplessness and futility of that frustration. One thing that is revealed in the study is that due to each other's support the teenaged couple and the aged couple emerge out of their Liminal stage in far better way than they could have done it all alone. The moral support that they give each other plays a pivotal role in crossing over the threshold of life and death. They emerge as winners not over death but over their own thoughts about death.

Cancer affects the day to day life of cancer patients. Hazel cannot go to school after the age of twelve. Augustus cannot go to college like other teenagers. His leg had to be amputated for the threat of growing cancer cells. Alan and Erin lose their jobs and cannot support their families financially like they used to do. They happen to spend more time in completely isolated Radio-iodine chambers for radio-active treatments where Alan and Erin are made to drink radio-active liquid for cancer treatment. Thus disorder, disruption and disturbance in day to day routine are a part of cancer patient's life. Hazel always carries an oxygen cylinder wherever she goes. It is also revealed that the liminal stages are irreversible. After going through pain, mental agony, lot of anguish, body image issues, disorientation, threat of perishing into oblivion the characters come to an understanding about accepting each breath as it comes. Once they come to an acceptance about their own temporary existence and the temporariness of the existence of millions of other people who inhabit the earth or who had inhabited the earth before them also- this revelation becomes irreversible. So their post-liminal stage is irreversible. Alan puts a ring in Erin's finger despite knowing their future and Hazel decides not to mourn the death of Augustus Waters.

The theory of liminality has brought the inclination of academia in other fields in recent times. Its role in transforming an individual is also being studied. The causes that lead to the in-between liminal stage and how it impacts an individual and the community is being studied seriously. Liminality has also helped in realizing that the society is not a thing it is rather always in a process with successive phases and so is the individual. The constant human desire to seek some solace from a structured society forces them to pass through rituals of various kinds. It is a part of the evolutionary process and it will continue because humans are always in a state of liminality.

## Conclusion

The study of Cancer narratives reveal that the characters of the novel who are suffering from cancer form *communitas* because they affiliate with each other. They go through a stage of dilemma of indecisiveness about themselves; a state where they are not sure whether they are going to be alive. Neither they are dead nor are they among the dead. So, liminal condition becomes a permanent feature for a long time in their lives. But with the help of *communitas* they come to terms with their condition and adopt a new outlook to receive the best of life.

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