

THE POETICS OF PAIN AND CANCER AND THE QUESTION OF GENRE IN TWO CATASTROPHE NARRATIVES*

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And Cancer alone was screaming And death
alone was crying over its mercilessness Abla
al-Reweiny's *The Southerner*

We lived in an apartment on a street of the city
but our only address was leukemia
Donald Hall's *The Best Day*

These two quotations by the Egyptian writer and critic Abla al-Reweiny and America's fourteenth poet laureate Donald Hall reflect the painful experiences they went through with their spouses. Their tragedies "stimulated the autobiographical [/biographical] impulse" and acted as the springboard for the biography and memoir they finally produced (Couser 1). The first work is Abla al-Reweiny's *Al Janubi: Amal Dunqol* (1985), or *The Southerner*, a biography of her late husband, the Egyptian poet Amal Dunqol (1940-1983). The second one is *The Best Day, the Worst Day: Life with Jane Kenyan* (2005), Hall's memoir about his life with his wife, the poet Jane Kenyon (1947-1995). This paper aims at studying these two works which can be labelled "catastrophe narratives."

"This article is dedicated to my aunt Amira, a great fighter and a wonderful human

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Miriam Fuchs was the first one to use this term in her book, *The Text is Myself: Women's Life Writing and Catastrophe* (2005). She examines life stories written by "women who were galvanized to work creatively" because of the catastrophes they went through" (Fuchs 5). Though Fuchs focuses on works written by women, "this category of writing" is not only linked to women's lives and texts, but "is (e)specially compelling to persons who [reach a certain life juncture when they] are, or believe themselves, to be susceptible to events beyond their own determining" (4). Catastrophe narratives can also be related to texts dealing with psychological traumas such as the personal narratives (diaries and letters) of Virginia Woolf and Anais Nin.

However, these texts and those examining them mainly focus on traumas that occurred during childhood and frequently follow a psychoanalytic approach which is not used by Fuchs in her study of catastrophe narratives. Fuchs distinguishes catastrophe from trauma and uses the first term "for situations that occur rapidly, with immediate and shocking effects" and remarks that unlike crisis and trauma narratives, "the activity of writing" in catastrophe narratives is "eruptive, not cumulative" (6, 8). Thus, one can define catastrophe narratives as "highly...responsive texts. Responsiveness involves confronting horrible circumstances, and confrontation generally involves submerging or displacing those circumstances into other narratives and personae" (Fuchs 8).

This is the case in the catastrophe faced and portrayed by al-Reweiny (1953-) and Hall (1928-). It was caused by a terminal illness that unexpectedly afflicted their spouses and brought about their premature death. It was cancer: Dunqol suffered from lung cancer and Kenyon from leukemia. Both poets lost their lives at a young age (they were in their forties) and at the prime of their writing careers with so much yet to give. Because of the special relationship between authors and subjects, the texts reveal the horrible effect of the catastrophe on both.

Though the tragedy of cancer is the motivating element for writing these two texts, *The Southerner* and *The Best Day* depict other painful elements that affected the protagonists and triggered their creative responses. These events "come to operate internally as part of the rhetoric and structure of the books" (Fuchs 12). Among the issues examined by studies on personal narratives are the construction and rewriting of the selves and lives of the subjects of these narratives, as well as the selection and organization of events. This paper will show how the characters and lives of Dunqol and Kenyon were shaped by pain in general. Truly, no one is immune against pain, but in these works, the authors highlight the role played by pain in weaving the fabric of the subjects' life stories and in shaping their poetic creativity. This is also evident through the authors' focus, selection and organization of certain incidents in the lives of their protagonists.

Hence, pain is an omnipresent theme in both works. "Postmodernism," to quote Barbara Davis, "has given us license to compare, if not the writers' emotions, at least the texture of their contexts, just as it has legitimated the study of grief, mourning,

and memory among historians and cultural anthropologists" (525). My springboard for the discussion of pain and the possibility of its sharability is Elaine Scarry's book, *The Body in Pain*. The paper will also discuss the way both authors and subjects confronted the catastrophe of cancer. This affected the portrayal of this tragic experience, and made the two writers devise and strategize their protagonists and narrative scripts in a way that "offer[s] glimpses of reconciliation as well as.. .resistance or protest" (Fuchs 7, 4). The overwhelming nature of their tragedies or the content of their narratives affected their forms which will also be examined by this paper. The forms of these two books raise questions about the blurred line of demarcation between the different kinds of personal writing, be it biography, autobiography or memoir.

Choosing these two books is not only due to their common theme of pain and catastrophe, but also to other points of similarity. In them poetry affects the portrayal of pain and cancer, and the protagonists' reaction to them. The two couples mostly enjoyed reading and writing poetry. For example, al-Reweiny refers to poetry in the title of one chapter as "The Lord of our House." Similarly, Hall and Kenyon call their home "the house of poetry" (BD 196)¹. Poetry also played a crucial role in introducing the authors to their future spouses, and in strengthening their relationships. Al-Reweiny was a fan of Dunqol's poetry. She met him first when she—a journalist trainee—wanted to interview him. Hall was Kenyon's professor at Michigan University where she took two of his courses.

Additionally, one feels that writing these personal narratives was to al-Reweiny and Hall some sort of therapy, a psychological relief from their catastrophes which apparently placed them in a state of "disequilibrium" (Fuchs 6). Both books make one think of Chekhov's remarkable short story "Grief" in which the main character, Iona the cabdriver, is trying throughout the text to find someone with whom he can share his grief. He wants to talk about the illness and the last moments of his son's life. When he has no one to talk to, he tells the story to his horse. Both al-Reweiny and Hall had definitely found people to whom they could tell the stories of their loved ones, but apparently, this was not enough. They seem to have needed to put their grief on paper and to tell their stories to a wider range of people; hence came their books.

By materializing their grief or putting it on paper, they produced, to quote Suzette Henke, some forms of "scriptotherapy" (xii). Miriam Fuchs does not examine writing's healing effect, but associates it with Henke's examination of trauma narratives and to "the rubric of representations of individual post-traumatic stress disorder" (7). However, one cannot overlook this effect in catastrophe narratives. Like Fuchs, I am not going to present a psychological study of al-Reweiny's and Hall's books. Still, one feels that through writing them, they were, according to Miriam Fuchs, trying to "reconstruct what the catastrophe has damaged," and were also "seeking safe ground and ultimately survival" (4). Indeed, psychologists agree upon the therapeutic and relieving effect of personal narratives in general.² Janet McKenzie, a member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, discusses this effect: "Creative activities can be excellent forms of therapy" for "we all have at least one big

story to tell and counsellors find that their clients may tell several short stories during one session.... Sharing such stories can be a relief and very constructive" (I).³

McKenzie discusses different kinds of writing. Regarding autobiography, she remarks that one reason for writing it is personal crises. Keeping a diary "may quickly help...[one] to retain some sense of control in a confusing situation" or "when life's events seem to be running out of control and.. .[one is] experiencing feelings of powerlessness" (McKenzie 1). The two texts reveal that authors and subjects experienced such feelings while undergoing their traumatic experiences. Keeping a diary, McKenzie adds, helps in recording information. Hall kept a diary in which he recorded details about his wife's illness, medications and their side effects. Hence, his memoir offers the reader a detailed account of the development of Kenyon's leukemia.

Hence, creative activities, be they writing (in different forms) or painting, drawing and other forms of craftwork, are means of releasing our feelings by telling our different big stories. This is emphasized by the Egyptian writer Ne'mat al-Behairy who remarked in an interview: "Writing purifies; it is a form of rebellion, revolt and anger.... When I write, I feel that many of my inner wounds and pains are out on paper; this is what made me write about my last experience with cancer...." (Magdy 44; my translation).

Abla al-Reweiny stressed this concept in a personal interview. She said, "I was emotionally charged and needed to let out everything inside me about the experience and the man I lived with. This was my testimony, a vital one. I wrote the book at one go without replacing one chapter with another."⁴ She did review the language, but no major changes were made. Her words made her text seem, to use Wordsworth's famous expression, like "a spontaneous overflow of emotions." Her need to vent her emotions explains why she wrote her work shortly after Dunqol's death, by the end of 1983, while her feelings were still acute. Thus she presented the experience so freshly.

Hall's memoir came ten years after the death of his wife, but he, too, presented the experience so freshly that one feels as if it had taken place only recently. However, he had earlier revealed his immediate feelings of loss in an autobiographical collection of poems about his wife's illness and death, and his life after her. The book, which also contains letters written to her in verse, came out in 1998, three years after her death, under the title *Without*. In a radio interview, he remarked, "And writing her letters after her death gave me the only sort of happiness of the day. I felt in communication with her somehow, not supernaturally, but poetically" (Brown 2006). Furthermore, responding to the letters sent to him after his wife's death, Hall says, "gave me comfort. I wrote everyone, even strangers, about her last days and hours, about her brain-stem breathing, about pulling her eyelids down. It helped, to spread my sorrow and outrage over the world" (BD 6). So, like al-Reweiny, he was driven by the need to release his grief, or, to quote Barbara Davis, "to bridge the abyss of final separation" (524).

Consequently, the two books seem like treatises on loss or elegies written in memory of the writers' loved ones. One can apply to them Mitch Albom's remark: "I suppose tapes, like photographs, and videos, are desperate attempts to steal something from death's suitcase" (63). These personal narratives steal from death the authors' shared memories with their subjects and keep them alive. Barbara Davis's remark about two other texts dealing with catastrophic experiences can be applied to these two personal narratives: "Indeed, what unites these two different testaments, apart from loss, is their resolute refusal to forget, while carrying on all the way with their lives; and the utter honesty of their unadorned voices" (525).

Regarding structure, both books are written in chapters with titles that reflect their themes. However, the reader can easily notice that *The Southerner* falls into three parts: the first one is like an introduction to Dunqol, the poet and the man, and his meeting with the author, the second deals with their relationship and marriage, and the third with his journey with cancer until his demise.⁵ Hall's memoir lacks such division. Yet, one can detect a certain pattern as chapters alternate: one chapter traces the story of the two poets' families, their love affair and marriage, or other episodes from their life prior to leukemia; the second speaks of Kenyon's journey with her malignant disease. This in a way explains the title of the memoir, the best day followed by the worst one.⁶

These points of similarity between *The Southerner* and *The Best Day* narrow the cultural distance between them and show them as exemplary texts of pain and catastrophe. But before examining the portrayal of pain in the two works, it is important to discuss the meaning of the word and its characteristics. *Webster's Dictionary* defines pain as "localized physical suffering associated with bodily disorder (as a disease or an injury)" or as "acute mental or emotional distress or suffering; grief." Though these definitions explain what pain is and the reasons behind it, they fail to truly convey the feeling created by it or associated with it. We feel that pain is an uncomfortable and definitely unhappy sensation, but how and to which extent, are very difficult to imagine.

Consequently, one feels with Elaine Scarry that "Physical [and I would add psychological] pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story" (3).⁷ In *The Body in Pain*, Scarry presents an exclusive study about pain with a focus on the physical side of it. She rightly believes it to defy and resist language. Hearing about someone's pain, or about events happening within that person's body arouses our feelings of sympathy, pity and the like. Nevertheless, the actual sensation or imagination of the pain and its immensity may seem very remote as if they were "belonging to an invisible geography"; they appear as something that has "no reality" or as distant as the mysterious and undetectable galaxies (Scarry 3). Such qualities make the experience of pain mostly difficult to deny or confirm, which makes Scarry draw a line between writing about the pain one experiences and that experienced by someone else. In the first case it is "effortlessly grasped," whereas it is not in the latter (4).

Scarry's view is right; however, this dividing line can sometimes be blurred when one has undergone the same pain or experienced it with someone so close to him/ her that they seem as if they were one. This oneness applies to the couples in these two texts; hence, the authors were able to feel for their subjects and to depict their painful experiences from a different perspective. Despite the fact that "there is ordinarily no language for pain, under the pressure of the desire to eliminate it, an at least fragmentary means of verbalization is available both to those who are themselves in pain and to those who wish to speak on behalf of others" (Scarry 13). Scarry remarks that the existing vocabulary remains limited; it contains "a handful of adjectives" and we have "as if structures, it feels as if...it is as though..." (15). In addition to this limited vocabulary, Miriam Fuchs suggests that "catastrophes trigger forms of representation that incorporate tropological and substitutive discourses" (170). And she gives the examples of "story segments and intertextuality" which, we will see, are frequently used by the two authors (Fuchs 18).

With this background in mind, the two texts read as attempts to share with the readers the unsharable experiences of the pain of the writers' loved ones. Having witnessed some of these experiences, the scriptors of these two narratives reflected their own feelings as well. This proves the interrelation between physical and psychological pain, which can occur as a result of one another. In the two books, pain tells the stories of the protagonists. In *The Southerner*, al-Reweiny portrays Dunqol's life as one of constant pain. Nessim Megalli, too, remarks: "Between the beginning and the end, there was a hard exhausting journey, a wonderful epic of the struggle of the soul..." (13).

Dunqol suffered from the pain of bereavement at a very young age when his brother,⁸ sister and father passed away one after the other. The loss of his family members was followed by "the loss of the city, the loss of the country. These continuous losses always put him in confrontation with death" (S 16).⁹ In a fragmented narrative, al-Reweiny reveals his early encounter with injustice when his uncles stole his little family's land leaving them destitute. This and his varied readings left their strong imprint on his character and poetry. Thus he became a rebellious man and poet who would always express his anger at injustice and side with the poor and the oppressed (S 56). In turn, his life would be coloured by pain, as he remarks in his poem "Spartacus" Last Words, "Whoever says 'No'... did not die / and remains a soul forever in pain" (S 34).

Besides, with time his sensitivity and lack of security made him afraid of trusting anyone lest he should be hurt: "Therefore, he did not open his heart except to a few, perhaps five, or three, or one. Perhaps I was that one and sometimes there was no one" (S 32). However, speaking of his pain to al-Reweiny marked the birth of their love and the beginning of her role in his life as "the weary's pillow." This metaphor, the title of a chapter, is taken from one of his letters to her, making the text a composite one (S 27). In that letter, he describes love as "a pillow in a closed room where I would rest and be myself" (S 27).

Al-Reweiny depicts the feelings and various painful experiences of her husband/subject without using descriptive language or going into unnecessary details. She rather resorts to his voice, namely by quoting from their conversations, and his letters and poetry. He once told her: "I am a man whose journey with suffering started at the age of ten. From the age of seventeen up till now [the time when he met al-Reweiny], I have been estranged from anything that could make me feel secure" (S 23). She also makes good use of his poetry throughout the book to "repeat the content of the text, clarify it, or comment on a given event" (Malti 155).

For example, she quotes from "The Book of Genesis" to refer to his uncles' cruelty: "I saw Adam's son building fences round the farm / of God, buying from around him guards and selling to his brethren/bread and water /.../ I said: let there be love on

earth, but there wasn't love/love has become the property of those who can pay /.....
.... / And God saw that it was not good" (S 55).¹⁰ She also quotes from "The Elegies of Yamamah": "My heart's battle is with God... where is my father's heir/.../ my father's name is entitled to be taken on by his son/how come that my father dies twice" (S 57). Thus pain in *The Southerner* acquires a voice in a concise and powerful way.

Similarly, *The Best Day* shows that Kenyon's life was coloured by pain, but in a different way. Her childhood was not comfortable though her family was not poor: "Until she was nine, she went to the one-room Foster school.... In several poems she recorded her displeasure in her one-room school" (BD 47). Hall presents fragmented stories. One of them reveals how, like Dunqol, she suffered from bereavement, though at an older age. Her great loss was her father whom she looked after during his illness. His death made her feel depressed and guilty. Later, she suffered from depression due to the dread of losing her husband who was afflicted with colon cancer. This brings up Kenyon's constant and painful struggle with chronic clinical depression, for she was diagnosed as bipolar.

Consequently, she was often depressed and "felt that she lived at the periphery of things" (BD 49). Like Dunqol, she recorded these feelings in one of her best poems, an autobiographical one, "Having it Out with Melancholy". Hall describes it as "her most direct account" of depression and adds that "It pained her to write this poem, to expose herself, but writing the poem also helped her: it set depression out as she knew it, both depression and its joyful tentative departure. She wanted with this poem to help others who were afflicted" (BD 144). And she did.¹¹ She describes it as: "Unholy ghost, / you are certain to come again. / Coarse, mean, you'll.. .turn me into someone who can't / take the trouble to speak; someone / who can't sleep, or who does nothing / but sleep; can't read, or call / for an appointment for help. / There is nothing I can do/against your coming. When I am awake, I am still with thee" ("Melancholy" 192).

In his memoir there is a chapter, "The Soul's Bliss and Suffering," that discusses Kenyon's depression. Like al-Reweiny, Hall does not delve into unnecessary details, but rather seems like a doctor reporting a case he is dealing with. He presents an overview of his wife's sickness and various stories about her severe fits. This chap-

ter confirms Scarry's belief that the one experiencing pain can effortlessly express it unlike those watching him/her. Kenyon did so in her autobiographical poem, whereas Hall could only describe the outward effect of depression on her and him as well. For example, he describes her in one of her fits saying: "she curled weeping on the sofa, and for days spent most of the time weeping in the fetal position" (BD 137). During those times, he admits to have been helpless, confused and even depressed. Realizing his failure to help her, he tended to distance himself.

In addition to depression, Hall refers to a miserable experience Kenyon went through at college, the failure of her love affair with a colleague. She had to get psychological help to overcome it: "Although it was she who did the breaking off, she felt miserable over what she perceived as her failure" (BD 52). Once more her feelings were expressed in the angry poems she wrote about her ex-partner (BD 53). All that she went through made Kenyon, like Dunqol, a sensitive person in whose life pain is unmistakably acknowledged (Mattison 121).¹² That is why, like Dunqol when he met al-Reweiny, Kenyon and Hall met after painful experiences and found the weary's pillow in each other; "we were...comforts to each other" (BD 52). For he, too, had encountered failure when his first marriage ended in divorce.

Thus, the two books show that instead of being overwhelmed by self-pity, both protagonists gave voice to their painful experiences in poems that cry out against injustice and depression. This reveals how these experiences deepened their poems and their visions. This is obvious from the previously quoted poems by Dunqol and Kenyon. Moreover, al-Reweiny states that Dunqol's experience with cancer took him into another "emotional dimension" and provided him with "a new aesthetic experience" (S 92).

Interestingly enough, a different kind of pain for authors and subjects emanated from their decisions to marry. The two men were much older than their women. Dunqol was thirteen years older and Hall, nineteen. To Dunqol, the decision to marry made him look at his poverty from a different angle, he who had cared about nothing except poetry. Al-Reweiny, too, acquired guilty feelings because in the first poem he dedicated to her, "A Special Meeting with Noah's Son," he stated that she had made him regain his strong feelings for his country and say "no to the boat" (S 62). However, he considered taking the boat and traveling abroad to provide money for their marital life. The other difficult choice, which he did, was taking out a mortgage on his land.¹³ However, their decision to get married aroused the surprise and anger of many of their acquaintances who warned her against this "dangerous" man (S58).

With the second couple, there were no financial problems, but rather the fear of failure. Therefore, it took them a long time to express their love for one another: "Maybe both of us feared that 'love' was a synonym for 'pain'" (BD 53). Nor was it easy for them to take the decision of marriage. As is the case with Dunqol and al-Reweiny, their friends and colleagues did not welcome their decision and thought little of its chances to succeed (BD 55).

Thus al-Reweiny and Hall succeed in giving pain a voice in their script narratives by resorting to the devices suggested by Miriam Fuchs. These are segment stories (in the first book, Dunqol's orphaned childhood, his uncles' cruelty, the betrayal of some friends and others; and in the second one Kenyon's depression episodes, her father's illness and her failed first love affair) and intertextuality (mainly in *The Southerner* by quoting from Dunqol's poems and letters and exploiting other written texts). However, both texts reveal that the real imposing catastrophe was brought about by cancer. In both books it is haunting and depressing. The writers turn their spouses' battle and theirs with cancer into epics or stories with beginnings, middles and unfortunate ends.

The death of the two poets begins the two books. *The Southerner* starts with Yussef Idris's epigraph of Dunqol. Death is also there in the title of the first chapter, "A Substitute for Suicide". As for Hall's memoir, it bluntly starts with the statement: "Jane Kenyon died of leukemia at 7:57 in the morning, April 22, 1995" (ED 1). And the first chapter is entitled "The Funeral Party". However, it is fascinating that despite knowing of the sad end of the afflicted poets, the successful portrayal of their cancer journeys makes us wish that they would get better and respond to treatment.

When examining the treatment of the cancer experience in *The Southerner* and *The Best Day*, Longinus' term, sublimity, imposes itself, though old and most probably unthought of by the two authors. Longinus speaks of the five sources of sublimity: "the power to conceive great thoughts," "strong and inspired emotion," "certain kinds of figures of thought and speech," "noble diction," and "dignified and elevated word-arrangement," which includes "the effect of rhythm and...a perfect unity" (140). The two texts include all these elements. Great thoughts are there in portraying their cancer tragedies as stories of struggle and victory, regardless of the final consequences. The powerful and genuine emotions with which the two experiences are rendered make the two books leave a permanent and powerful effect on the readers. One also feels how "emotions come flooding in and bring the multiplication of metaphors with them as a necessary accompaniment" (Longinus 149). This is supported by the various artistic techniques al-Reweiny and Hall employ.

On the one hand, al-Reweiny intensifies *their* cancer story by presenting it all in the last five chapters of her book. Hall, on the other hand, keeps cancer hovering over his book by tracing its story in every other chapter. In both texts, cancer's appearance seems to be tragically unexpected; yet, it somehow is expected. *The Southerner* shows that cancer appeared nine months after their marriage in the form of a tumour that began to grow in size gradually. It is bitterly ironic that cancer seemed like the infant begotten by this marriage. Fedwa Malti-Douglas has the same reading and refers to Susan Sontag who speaks of cancer as a "'demonic pregnancy'" (Malti 157).¹⁴ However, despite this shock, the first two parts of *The Southerner* lead us to cancer. They reveal his constant clashing with the world, his frustration with all sorts of injustice and his search for the absolute. Gaber Asfour called him Spartacus for in his victory, Dunqol was always heading towards his death (S 14). Again and again she

resorts to his voice as she quotes from his poem, "Make No Peace," where he makes it clear that he will not make peace until the murdered man returns to his child who has been waiting for him (S 111). Nessim Megalli, too, believes that cancer was not only caused by Dunqol's smoking, but also by observing the deteriorating conditions of his country and the terrible cultural climate that lacked freedom and was full of "poison and germs" (Megalli 21).¹⁵

Thus cancer was somehow an inevitable conclusion to a restless and painful life. Consequently, al-Reweiny deals with the whole experience from an analytical and—may I say—philosophical point of view. This is evident from the title of the first chapter in this part, "The Tragedy of the Rare Fish," and from the subsequent imagery of sea life and piracy. One feels that this whole part is a strong outcry against cancer, injustice, fate and other things. Al-Reweiny starts the part with the words of the Egyptian poet Ahmed Abdel Mo'ty Hijazi who wrote in a memorial of Dunqol:

As cancer donned away his withering body, his soul shone with fierce brilliance and grew stronger, until his visitors could virtually see his struggle with death, a struggle between two equals, death and poetry. At the moment when the body surrendered to the monster's paws, Amal Dunqol came out of the struggle victorious. He became a sheer voice, a great voice which would resonate more clearly and purely than any other ' time. (S 110)

She too describes him as "the most beautiful rare fish in the sea" (Sill). He kept looking for the difficult equilibrium within this unjust world of ours. It all got to him and made cancer spread inside him. She wonders: "why does the death of the poet have to be a loud cancerous explosion, why does he have to die cell by cell, to witness his death, moment by moment?" (S 111). She sees it as the fault of the sea which is unable to punish the pirates or protect its rare fish and its various treasures (S 111).

In this way, Hijazi's words and al-Reweiny's portrayal of the whole catastrophe metaphorically depict the battle with cancer as one between a *rare*, but helpless, fish and a ferocious shark or monster waiting for the right moment to mercilessly devour its prey.¹⁶ Their words bring to mind Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and his famous notion about human resilience: "man is not made for defeat... A man can be destroyed but not defeated" (87). It came true through his fisherman, Santiago, who struggled bravely and honorably until the last moment. Though the sharks devoured his marlin, he emerged triumphant at the end of the book. So did Dunqol. Al-Reweiny did not read Hemingway's novel, but strongly meant to present the experience as one of victory: "I was fully conscious that this is an experience of victory. I was not beautifying Amal...; I was just aware of his triumph" (interview).

Similarly, in *The Best Day*, the discovery of the illness took the couple by surprise. Kenyon's cancer came unexpectedly with symptoms that seemed like the common flu. She wrote in her diary: "Last day of January 1994. Monday. Flu? Trip to Dr. Foote.... I think I am dying in the car" (BD 33-34). Hall was away, but on learning of her "formidable nose bleed" and "the Woodwork" she underwent at hospital, he guessed her case: "I heard my mind deliver the unspoken sentence: 'Jane has leukemia'" (BD 28).

The diagnosis was shocking and ironic at the same time. No one expresses it better than Jeffrey S. Cramer who remarks: "Anyone acquainted with the story of Donald Hall and Jane Kenyon cannot help but stand in awe of the irony which, if it appeared in fiction, would appall by its tear-jerking manipulation" (493).

The irony is due to the fact that in 1992 Hall was diagnosed with colon cancer. It later metastasized to his liver, and part of it was removed. He writes: "My chances of long survival were poor, according to statistics, and Jane and I both believed I would die soon" (BD 144). Depressed, Kenyon wrote "Otherwise" and "Afternoon at MacDowell" from which some lines were supposed to be placed on his grave. Yet, they ended up being inscribed on hers. Hall quotes their friend, Alice Mattison, who described them in the last years of their marriage: "Jane and I [Hall] lived continually with the conviction that either was likely to die in the next five minutes" (BD 144).

However, the tragedy of cancer seems somehow expected when Hall informs us that Kenyon's parents died of lung cancer. She, too, had a cancerous tumor when she was thirty-eight years old. However, she was saved when "the tumor was wholly encapsulated within the [salivary] gland" which was removed (BD 143). Thus, cancer seems inevitable in her case as well, at least genetically. Consequently, Hall, unlike al-Reweiny, presents their experience from a medical and matter-of-fact approach.

Nevertheless, like al-Reweiny, he stresses metaphorically and metonymically the imagery of a battle. This is obvious in a chapter whose ironic title, "The Village Saved Destroyed," literally refers to a Vietnamese village of which an American major, quoted by Hall, said: "We had to destroy the village in order to save it" (BD 96). Figuratively, the title refers to what the treatment was doing to Kenyon. Hall remarks that the intensification (part of her protocol) she received affected her badly. She was weak, broken and never mended. It was a very difficult time as he "watched her sink; she watched herself sink. [However,] the mind needed constantly to remind itself: This is not dying-dying; we suffer *this* dying to avoid *that* dying" (BD 96).

The pronoun "we" in the previous quotation is repeatedly used throughout both texts. This suggests the oneness of each couple and shows that the two authors battled cancer with their subjects. Hall said in an interview: "Our marriage was close, and dread of separation only brought us closer until it seemed that we made a single soul" (Cramer 498). Out of countless quotations in Hall's memoir, I will cite only two that reveal their strong relationship. On their settlement in Eagle Pond, his family house, Hall writes: "By next year, *we* would live as *we* would live until *we* died, or one of *us* died" (BD 26; italics mine). And after the diagnosis of leukemia, we read: "I walked up and down in my room trying to make myself understand what was happening.... Over and over again I repeated one sentence: 'My wife has leukemia.' Again and again I misspoke internally, and it came out, 'My life has leukemia'" (BD 35).

Likewise, *The Southerner* offers many quotations that show the amazing relationship Dunqol and al-Reweiny enjoyed. They were "more of friends than a married couple" and when she was with him at home, "he would forget my presence as if I were his self" (S 68, 69). She also quotes from one of his poems (again intertextuality):

"When you are with me / I become alone / in my home" (S 69). Another example happens when Dunqol—on his death bed—asks his wife: "What will you do after my death?" She answers back with a question echoing his, "Nothing, exactly like what you would do after my death" (S 140). Fedwa Malti-Douglas' comment is:

She has not answered the question in the manner expected. Rather, she used the very words of the hero... it becomes clear that the question and answer are grammatically and syntactically identical. The death of the hero in the question is balanced by the death of the narrator in the answer... The fusion is effected in the dialogue. This fusion of the two characters functions as the axis around which the third part of *The Southerner* revolves. (158)

In addition, both works show that the real cancer is their separation. When Dunqol and al-Reweiny could not afford to pay for a room with a companion at the Cancer Institute, one of them (the text does not tell us who) said to the lady in charge: "How could the days pass when we are away from each other? Lady, the real cancer is our separation" (S 116). Similarly, Hall and his wife were inseparable during the whole period of her illness. He remarks after the diagnosis of the disease: "Crushed together in one room and one fact, we began the new routines that became our lives" (BD 31).

In depicting their fierce battles with cancer, al-Reweiny and Hall take us through every step of their journeys. The wife and husband/authors/narrators speak of the development of the illness, the medications, experimentations and surgeries their spouses/subjects took and underwent, as well as their last moments. They present these stages vividly through the use of onomatopoeia and visualization. Thus we see their various hospital rooms and view the body of each dying poet "as a contested body or territory invaded by an invisible adversary [cancer] [he/]she is not equipped to fight and which is argued over by innumerable physicians" (Fuchs 17). We also hear the doctors, nurses, visitors and the screams of other patients; and we smell anesthesia and even feel the bitter taste of the afflicted poets' medications and their side effects.

Al-Reweiny speaks of the first two surgeries to remove two tumors. Two and a half years later, cancer spread in his body and he had to be admitted to the Cancer Institute. Discovering teratoma was a death sentence, for a patient in that case would live for three months at the most (S 112). In the last weeks of his life, he suffered from multiple organ failure. Finally, he went into a coma that led to his death.

During these various stages, we learn, as is the case with Kenyon, that some of his medications were worse than the illness itself. They made him "mad" and resulted in his having scattered wounds oozing serum all over his body, a terrible sight to him, his wife and their friends (S 138-39). On other occasions, his medical treatment made him continually vomit, feel over fatigued, and stay in a dark room for five consecutive days (S 139). His eyes were also affected and finally, when his organs began to dysfunction, he was unable to move or talk.

All these symptoms illustrate the physical pain accompanying his cancer tragedy; it was terrible and at times unbearable. However, al-Reweiny never elaborates or gives

details of such scenes, so as not to impose feelings of pity on the *reader*. She simply presents glimpses of his/her pain in the last two chapters. Her sole remark was: "His raised hands, that were calling me to move him when he was unable to talk, were the severest kind of torture that I could have ever seen" (S 143). Since he was a silent person by nature, he did not say much. Therefore, she too could not speak on his behalf and consequently, we do not have the "as if structures" suggested by Elaine Scarry to give pain a voice. Instead we have, especially at the beginning, his extremely nervous attitude that made him shout at the nurses, or throw away his medication. At a later stage, pain is expressed in body language (his beseeching eyes or raised hands) and sometimes in silence that speaks more powerfully than words.

Thus, while giving all these bitter details, al-Reweiny deals with the whole experience poetically or, to borrow Longinus' term, with sublimity. She never presents a whole scene of her tears or his. Occasionally, we have short sentences such as "I kissed him while I was about to collapse," "I burst out crying," "I saw tears in his eyes" or "Amal remained silent while he was smitten by deep sadness" (S 114, 115; also see 126). By doing so, she follows the steps of her husband who, as told by one doctor, dealt with his illness as a poet (S 115). So while dying, he refused to "allow melodrama" into his room (S 118). Therefore, he did not befriend any of the patients at the Cancer Institute, except a sick child of four. Al-Reweiny too did not fall into the trap of melodrama. Rather, she did her best to avoid it:

Because the language I used is not descriptive, the book did not fall into melodrama. In general, I refuse going on and on with the same thing. I was mainly concerned with intensifying the experience. I did not want people to cry after reading the book; that was not my intention. I was conscious of writing a book that would make you feel the power of the human will, and would make you see how we came victorious [out of this experience]. (Interview)

It is the same with Hall as he makes us follow Kenyon's many ins and outs of the hospital. He speaks of her painful medications, of her suffering from herpes zoster and delirium as side effects of leukemia. Another stage was discovering the Philadelphia Chromosome, which meant the urgent need for marrow bone transplant (MET). The discovery of that chromosome "was devastating. It was the day on which I first clearly foresaw Jane dying" (BD 71). Hall gives us details of the MBT operation, which took place in Seattle. He speaks about the preparations preceding it and the precautions following it such as the procedures of entering an LAP room (laminar air flow), a sterile room in which she was isolated from her husband.

Despite hope for recovery, we are tragically taken into the last phase when the physician tells them that the leukemia is back. Kenyon decides to die at home. She was expected to live for a month; however, she died eleven days later. Like al-Reweiny, Hall avoids melodrama; we rarely have scenes of tears, lamentation or self-pity. Only on few occasions do we have brief sentences such as "I walked the corridors weeping," "tears started," "I cried" or "Jane said and briefly wept" (BD 71, 222, 240).

Melodrama is also absent when Hall depicts examples of Kenyon's physical pain. Medically, we do have descriptive scenes at the hospitals, but he never presents ones of her suffering. Once more they are short and sometimes revealed through the dying poet's voice. Like Dunqol, she used to vomit a great deal and once it was up to fourteen times, which made her body wither. Hall's poetic comment reads: "Over the two days of Cytosan [a drug], Jane dimmed like a light with the rheostat turned down a millimeter an hour; she diminished to the faint glow of a filament" (BD 132).

He intensifies the experience and gives pain a stronger voice through his selection of very expressive passages from her diary. Her entries, too, are short and concise: "March 2...intractable pain.... Total exhaustion. Can't even talk on phone.... Pain Pain Pain.... March 3—panic after dinner trip to ER.... Terror and boredom....home at midnight. Shaking uncontrollably...." (BD 66). In another entry she writes:

Weak and breathless, but still eating, walking, trying.... Dr. Solow found me...hold ing my gut and crying when he came to see me mid-day. I felt trapped by pain.... What looked like a bird corpse hanging on the flowering crab: a sunflower head! All day slow deep powder snow. Severe gastric pain for forty-eight hours.... Now it is time for me to lie down—lie down in trust, and be where I am. (BD 41)

This quotation in particular reveals the poet describing herself and voicing her pain poetically. The simile of the bird and the sunflower seems like the "as if structures" suggested by Scarry to express pain. Using her voice brings to mind Scarry's belief that the one in pain can effortlessly grasp it unlike anyone else. This is also obvious when once Kenyon tells her husband: "I wish that for one minute you could feel what I feel" (BD 187). Her remark, which belittled his pain, "aggrieved [him,] and [he] immediately protested. [So] Jane felt contrite and apologized" (BD 187). His pain is also clear in his "suicidal notion" which occurred once when they were in Seattle.

Thus, both authors portray their cancer experiences in an effective way. However, in *The Best Day*, we are showered with daily and medical details supported by quotations from Kenyon's diary or medical reports. They are never boring, as they give us a meticulous explanation of the development of her case from January 1994 to April 1995. Besides, Hall's memoir abounds in domestic details that are missing in al-Reweiny's text. Therefore, the way the two authors go through these stages, reveals an interesting deconstruction of gender expectations. The author of *The Southerner*, a female, tends to be more economical and concise than her male counterpart. This reverses the common misconception of women's tendency to chat more and to give detailed reports. The two writers' different depiction of the cancer stories might be due, as mentioned earlier, to their various perspectives or approaches towards cancer.

Despite different presentations of their tragedies, we notice a reversal of roles when the dying patients calm down the healthy caregivers. Or when, unlike them, they are in control of their tears. This happens twice in *The Southerner*. The first time, when cancer had spread in Dunqol's body; they went to the Cairo Atelier where she felt

miserable while he was laughing and talking with his friends "as if nothing had happened" (S 115). The second time was after the discovery of teratoma when she totally collapsed and screamed in the face of the doctor. Dunqol calmed her down and then whispered to the doctor: "Why were you so cruel to her? You could have told me alone. The doctor was astounded even more at this granite patient" (S 121). Later, the doctor praised him for calming down "the patient, who was I [al-Reweiny]" (S 122).

The same reversal of roles happens in *The Best Day*, but on more than one scale. The first one happens when Hall and Kenyon exchange the role of the dying patient. When she was about to undergo a laparoscopy, Hall remarks: "Now I wheeled Jane to the limbo where surgical patients receive their general anesthesia, as Jane had done when I lost half my liver three years earlier. I paced in the room where caregivers wait, where Jane had waited" (BD 218). Reversal of roles also occurs when they know that Jane is going to die. Both cried, but, unlike him, she would control herself quickly and ask: "Can I die at home?" (BD 222). Driving home, Hall writes, "I cried and Jane was dry-eyed" (BD 222). During the last eleven days of her life, we read: "From time to time I cried and Jane did not. She lay thinking, thinking" (BD 240).

In their amazing self composure the dying poets wrote their wills and discussed the details of their funerals. Dunqol "spoke calmly about his coming funeral" with Gaber Asfour who was speechless on hearing Dunqol (S 144). Similarly, Hall and his wife composed her obituary and she chose the outfit she would wear in her coffin (BD 7). This brings us to the last stop in the cancer journey, to the most sublime scenes of the two texts, the death ones. Authors and subjects alike realized and silently agreed that they had to let go. The former even helped the latter do so. At the end of both books, the authors watch their loved ones die. The pain is strong but clothed with the fine sentiments of poetry. There are no tears, no screams, yet an incredible deal of grief.

Abla al-Reweiny entitles the chapter of his death scene "The Coma of Music." The first line reads: "Amal's Case Deteriorated" (S 142). They both "realized that death was definitely coming" (S 145). The foreboding sense of death started when they listened to Abdel Rahman al-Abnudi's last song which is like a motif, a thematic song or a soundtrack that subtly weaves its way through their consciousness and looms large in the background of this chapter. Its lyrics show that the hero has nothing to say as he was shot with an arrow which would certainly kill him. Dunqol realized that al-Abnudi was lamenting his death prior to it. When she asked him if he was sad, he answered in the affirmative for the first time; "this was his personal decision to die. He conveyed his secret to me and thus convinced me with the decision of death, and the endless heritage of sadness" (S 145).

Earlier he had asked her to wish him death when he became handicapped, regarding it as the only form of mercy to be given him. At three o'clock in the morning of his last day, he wanted to take out an intravenous injection from his arm. The nurse and his brother would not, so "he looked at me, his eyes were beseeching me to give him comfort. I took the glucose injection out of his arm: you can be comfortable" (S 146).

Thus, she helped him go. Finally, she ends the book with her very poetic comment on his moment of death: "His face was calm as they closed his eyes / my calm was impossible as I opened my eyes / cancer alone was screaming / and death alone was crying over its mercilessness" (S 146; my translation and Malti's).¹⁷

Hall too watched his wife die; he entitles and devotes a whole chapter to the last eleven days of her life. Regarding the first day, he writes: "That afternoon remains in my memory, interminable and timeless, as if it were a dream I dreamt this morning" (BD 240). Days later, he notes: "For a week I had sat beside her while her faculties diminished, disappearing like lights going out on a hillside. I had tended to her as I could.... I studied her breathing. I touched her and kissed her, but not so often as I wanted, because with whatever consciousness she maintained, she was concentrated on letting go" (BD 1). At the end of the book, he repeats: "I tried as hard as I could to let her go, because I knew (from her poems as well as from common sense) that my anguish to hold on to her could do nothing but cause more pain" (BD 241).

Thus, the authors present cancer's various stages vividly and poetically. This is heightened by depicting the mixed feelings of hope and despair that colored their catastrophes. Such feelings accordingly affect the tone and rhythm of the texts. For example, in *The Southerner* the couple was hopeful after the first surgery thinking that cancer would disappear for good. A faint glimpse of hope came in the last week of his life when he wanted to urinate despite his end-stage renal failure.

Likewise, on finding a marrow donor for Kenyon, joy erupts: "When you wish for something with intensity, and it happens, your first reaction is overwhelming: *All problems are solved*" (BD 102). A much more hopeful reaction took place on 13 March 1995 when Kenyon started to resume, to some extent, her normal life. Therefore, Hall optimistically thought of future plans. These hopeful reactions occur in a chapter that can be regarded as the climactic chapter of the memoir; it is entitled after the title of the book. It alternates between feelings of hope and recovery on the one hand and those of death and depression on the other one. This affects the rhythm of the book which gets quicker towards the end of this chapter.

Still, in the two texts the portrayal of the cancer journey is mainly colored by fear (of the unknown, of death, of separation), sadness, and helplessness. Once more, the expression of these feelings is never melodramatic. In *The Southerner* she never describes their fear in detail. Rather, she shows how with Dunqol it took the form of silence though he once revealed it to a friend in her absence. On many occasions, she expresses it in short sentences such as "the first surgery meant great terror," "I was paralyzed with fear" or "I am afraid that anesthesia would not affect me" (S 113,114). The strongest and longest expression of fear occurs at the Cancer Institute:

The first weeks were terrifying.... The doctor's examination used to make me cry.... The glucose injection, the medicine.... The huge x-ray machines would horrify me.... The voices of the other patients would fill me with great terror.... Just as the day was about to begin, I would be waken up by the screams of a patient next door, whose pains were not pacified by a morphine injection.... And before I wash my face, I would behold

crying faces round a corpse that was defeated by cancer. I kept counting the defeated day after day.... (S 120)

Thus, fear is portrayed in very short sentences or phrases. In Arabic, they are interrupted by ellipsis, thus leaving a strong and lasting impact on the reader. Their dread is a form of the psychologically agonizing pain brought on by cancer. It was accentuated by the humiliation, disloyalty and hypocrisy accompanying their catastrophe. It was shared by author and subject alike. Here al-Reweiny gives us various painful stories.

Humiliation was caused by their need of money to pay for his first surgery, and medical bills. It is also there, mixed with bitterness and anger at the injustice of society, in her image of her husband who was limping with his leg painfully and leaning on any stone or parked car while she was looking for a taxi to take them to the Cancer Institute. Her comment is: "(Cairo is crowded with millions of luxurious cars while one of its great poets is stepping with one leg into the Cancer Institute)" (S 116). Disloyalty was more painful, as many rich 'friends' did not help them in their financial problems. Dunqol was deeply hurt; "his sadness was noble in its silence... That day Amal mourned his illness, pain, and helplessness" (S 125, 126). Apart from these words, the reaction is poetic and she quotes from his poem, "Koraish's Hawk": "When will my death be accepted / before I become like a hawk / a broken-winged hawk" (S 126). Besides, after three months of his stay at hospital, the Minister of Culture sent him a bouquet of flowers which was followed by many phony flowers. They "reflected formal and cold smells and feelings" (S 127). Accordingly, Dunqol felt suffocated and became depressed. His reaction was writing his poem "Flowers," quoted by al-Reweiny. The poem smells of death and he describes the person whose name is on the card of each bouquet as a "killer" since he killed both the flower when he plucked it and the poet with his phony feelings (S 128).

In Hall's memoir too, the couple's psychological pain was brought about by the same feelings of fear and helplessness, but for different reasons. Such feelings weave the fabric of *The Best Day's* leukemia story which is dominated by the threat of death at different stages. This keeps us somehow on edge and affects the rhythm of the book. This tension is accentuated by fragmented narratives about two more dying characters in the memoir. The first and last leukemia months coincided with the serious illness and subsequent death of Hall's mother (from congestive heart failure) and Kenyon's mother (from lung cancer).¹⁸

Fear and tension are particularly obvious in the story of finding a donor for her MET. This is best explained in Kenyon's words: "Tuesday March 22. We learn...that they want a bone marrow transplant ASAP because of the Philadelphia chromosome markers, which make a relapse much more likely. So we're after R [her brother Reuel] today for blood to send to Dedham, where they make a culture with my blood to determine compatibility. ..Shock. I thought I was putting myself back together" (ED

70). Knowing that Reuel could not help her, they realized that her "chance for life depended on finding a nonrelated donor" (BD 71-72; also see 149).

Fear, tension and dread of the unknown were so overwhelming that the couple felt entrapped by the illness. Nothing expresses that feeling better than Hall's following description of their fifteen months of Leukemia: "as a dreary continuous landscape of drips, injections, and pills; sleeplessness and long sleep; nausea until there was nothing more to vomit. We sat in a small room with a big window, and we became ourselves a small room bounded by a door and a window, obsessed to remain together in life" (BD 38-39; italics mine). Additionally before her MET operation, he remarks: "We lived in an apartment on a street of the city but our only address was leukemia. We woke and ate breakfast and showered in leukemia. We walked around the block, keeping up strength, in leukemia's neighborhood. We slept in leukemia all night, tossing and turning with unsettling dreams" (BD 120). Hall's vivid portrayal of the toughness of the tragedy makes one believe that he was successful in choosing this pattern for his book. Having chapters of their happy, relatively busy and healthy lives before leukemia, slows down the rhythm and lessens the dreary effect of the haunting death that colors the leukemia period.

In addition to fear and helplessness, their psychological pain emanated from other reasons. Like al-Reweiny, Hall does not elaborate on these reasons and sometimes presents them in the voice of his wife, as he does regarding her falling hair: "In the shower this A.M. fists full of my hair.. looks as if a deathly battle between two minks had occurred" (BD 39). There is no sense of self pity in her words, but rather an ironic tone that reflects bitterness. This is clearer when she ends up having her hair shaved, and "she looked in the mirror at her wide bald head, feeling repelled and repellent. T am Telly Savalas" (BD 65, also see 77). As a woman, this was so painful to her that, Hall remarks, "nothing reconciled Jane to her baldness" (BD 39).

The scripts' portrayal of the cancer tragedy reflects, according to Miriam Fuchs, reconciliation, as well as, protest and resistance, sometimes, all at once. This is obvious from the way cancer is depicted in *The Southerner*. It was first the cruel and ferocious shark; then it "became our friend, or at least we were no longer much bothered by its presence...we made fun of it, we even defeated it with our continuous desire for life, for a happy life" (S 122). At the end, cancer emerges as a character lamenting the poet's demise: "And cancer alone was screaming" (S 146). Protest is clear when Dunqol broke out one day before a friend and angrily wondered: "Why does death attack me in the time of happiness and quietness? Why do I have cancer in the first year of my marriage?" (S 121). Protest is also obvious in his tearful questioning about the reason that makes a child of four suffer from cancer (S 119).

However, his anger did not affect his fighting spirit. A few hours before his death, a friend told him: "Amal, fight" (S 146). Though fully aware of the futility of fighting, Dunqol told him with difficulty: "I have nothing left but fighting" (S 146). Resistance took place through his undergoing many surgeries and accepting to take the highest dosage of nuclear radiation to be given to a patient (in the Middle East) in one ses-

sion. The doctors photographed him during the experiment and expected his body to collapse, but it did not; "it came out victorious" (S 138).

Resistance also occurred through their attempt to equip themselves with hope and to live as normal a life as possible. This is obvious in her lively description of room No. 8 at the Cancer Institute, a room whose cemented walls loved poetry (S 117). It was their home for the last year and a half of his life and, to quote G. Thomas, was "the last battleground for...Dunqol. There he opposed reality, fighting against cancer..." (7). The second chapter of the last part of the book, that describes their life at room No. 8, momentarily represents some kind of dramatic relief.

She describes in detail the colored pictures, caricatures, and poems hanging on the wall. The room was always full of visitors, "the street and the cafe moved into the room" (S 123). The lunch meal was communal and full of discussions and arguments. Therefore, it was a very different room from that of a dying patient. She remarks, "All the rooms at the Cancer Institute were inhabited by despair and tears, and Room No.8 was inhabited by *Amal*, [a pun referring to the inhabitant's name and to the hope which his name means in Arabic]. It was inhabited by a great love of the world which we may be unable to go to, but it always came to us" (S 119).

Nevertheless, Dunqol's major means of fighting cancer and its pains remained to be poetry which was his substitute for suicide.¹⁹ In room No. 8, he created six distinguished poems. However, all the poems are colored by the smell of death which is strongly reflected in the last poem, "The Southerner". Poetry was also his source of power. She recounts the story of his participation in a poetry festival. That night he was physically so weak, having lost half of his weight and unable to walk without help. With his hair and teeth falling out, he considered not participating in that festival, fearing that people would pity him. However, he changed his mind out of his belief in his talent. On going on stage and reciting his poetry, he was able to stand on his own, to the surprise of his wife. That night he ascended on foot seven flights of stairs non stop and in complete health. She writes that he managed to do so with "his success and the triumphant spirit of the poet inside him" (S 135).

Likewise, Hall and Kenyon resisted cancer in several ways. Though her illness was dangerous from the beginning, she fought it with a strength that surprised her and her husband: "This depressive woman... struggled and sustained in the hope of survival. Her desire to live, her persistence in the face of agony, astonished her.... Jane was determined...and...expressed her amazement at how much she wanted to live" (BD 157, 159). She agreed to the MET despite its difficulty. Like Dunqol's unprecedented experimentation, Kenyon's operation was not common at that time, 1994, since it was a nonrelated transplant and she was then in her forties. However, she took the risk and never regretted it even after knowing of her inevitable death. Like room No. 8, we have a hospital room with pictures on the wall, ads about their play as well as visitors of all kinds: friends and acquaintances, the church minister, and her psychiatrist.

But, like Dunqol, poetry remains her major means of resistance. Amid her pain, joy erupted when she learnt from her publisher's new editor that they wanted to publish "a new-and-selected volume of Jane's poems. Insofar as any news could be cheerful, this was cheerful news" (BD 131). Therefore during her brief healthy time, she revised the twenty poems which she had written before her illness (BD 81-82). During her illness, she was dreaming of writing more: "In the plaid notebook [her diary] I read, after her death, notes from poems that will never be written" (BD 40). Ten days before her death, she was relatively able to concentrate. So she chose the poems to be published in her posthumous book, and decided on the cover of the book (BD 241). One feels that this was her last act of resistance against cancer and death.

This strong sense of fighting, that colors the cancer tragedies of Dunqol and Kenyon, brings to mind different stories from Greek and Egyptian mythologies. One can see Sisyphus who defied the gods and tried to elude death, but was destined to push a rock up a hill, only to have it fall when he neared the top. Prometheus, the champion and symbol of resistance, is also there. He was chained to a rock and had two vultures come and eat out his liver every day. Though not stated by al-Reweiny and Hall, these mythical figures loom in the lines. However, at the end, even after their death, the two protagonists emerge like a phoenix, the legendary bird that is reborn out of the ashes. In *The Southerner* al-Reweiny, too, seems like the loyal Isis whose love for her husband, Osiris, brought him back to life. Jamal al-Ghitani gives the same reading and adds that with this in mind, no wonder that in one part of the text, she calls him "the Pharaonic Warrior." Writing this book seems like a substitute for the child that never came out of their marriage. On the cover of the book we have the names of al-Reweiny, the author, and Dunqol the subject (al-Ghitani 3). The same can be applied to the couple in *The Best Day*. The memoir that has their names and picture on the cover seems like the child they begot out of their marriage.

Miriam Fuchs remarks that death, and I would add the whole tragic experiences portrayed in these catastrophe narratives stand as "an anomalous event of horrendous proportions [that] affect the writing of the narrative [s]" and their forms (9). This is evident in the two examined texts as the urgent need of al-Reweiny and Hall to record their testimonies about their loved spouses/subjects, and the ferocity of the tragedies the two authors and their protagonists went through affected the form of their narratives. In both books we stop before the genre. We can apply to them what Anna Kuhn says about two other personal narratives: "The strategies employed by these writers allow them to create new structures through which...to dismantle common generic categories within the dominant literary tradition" (14). Indeed, one cannot define the actual genre of *The Southerner*. It can be read as a biography or an autobiography (or a hybrid of both) as well as a memoir. In short, as Fedwa Malti-Douglas rightly remarks, we have in this unique book "the supposed biography of Amal Dunqol by Abba al-Reweiny...and because of the intertextuality, there is the autobiography of Amal.... Finally.. the project of this memoir can be seen as a hidden autobiography of Abba al-Reweiny" (150).

A biography, we have. On the cover of the second edition of the book, the text is categorized as a *Sirah* or a biography. "Conventional biography," to quote Anne Kuhn, is "a third person narration of the life of a public figure," (13) which, adds Catherine Parke, "plot[s] the circle of existence from birth to death" (xiii). Parke elaborates more on this general and rather simplistic definition when she gives a more detailed view derived from Samuel Johnson's opinion and practice of the genre, which remain to influence biography until the present. She defines it as "the history of an individual... depicted *accurately* and fully in domestic and other private settings, set in historical, circumstantial context, and examined *skeptically*, though not with sympathy" (Parke 18; italics mine).²⁰ In depicting the various events of the life of the subject, Paula Backscheider notes that the biographer has to take into consideration such elements as "selection, organization...[and] presentation" (xiv).

A first glance at al-Reweiny's text reveals how it fits these definitions. The title refers to her subject, Amal Dunqol, whose name is in the subtitle; his picture is also 314 on the cover. However, she does not pursue the chronological order commonly followed by biographers. Rather, she interplays between past and present events. The book begins with the author's attempt to find a true key to the world and character of her subject. In a personal interview she remarked: "I was trying to present a true image of Amal as I saw it at close hand. I tried to deconstruct and reconstruct him to present my own reading of his character, my point of view of him. It is by no means an objective or neutral vision" (Interview). That is why I stop before the words "accurately" and "skeptically" which appear in Parke's definition of biography.

Al-Reweiny's job was very difficult because of her subject's extremely complex character. In him, she writes, one finds a world of contradictions, the thing and its opposite (S 9). She describes him as chaotic, disorganized and logical at the same time, an extrovert and introvert, noisy and silent, showy and shy. In the first and introductory chapter she also gives a very brief overview of his childhood and youth, (referred to again in the sixth chapter) and his different ideological beliefs. Like many biographers, she uses the third person method of narration.

However, her voice, through the first person, briefly slips in when she speaks of his kindness even when they quarrel: "He likes to... wipe my tears in moments of violent fighting" (S 12; Malti's translation). She also refers to an incident from their marital life to reveal a certain element in his character, his hatred of defeat. This example and the whole of the first chapter reveal a great awareness of the character she is dealing with, an awareness that can only happen in intimate relations. And who can know a man more than his wife? Thus from the beginning she reminds us, as readers, of her "special position" (Backscheider 4). She also succeeds to create the (auto)biographical pact, to use Philip Lejeune's term,²¹ and to create "reciprocity between reader,... .text" and author (Kuhn 14).

As a biography, the text expectedly centers on two inseparable parts of his character, the man and the poet. The reader finishes the text with a clear image of the two aspects. As expected for a biographer, she reveals a great awareness of both, and as a

wife defends both. For example, she shows that his aggression was a cover up, a mask for his extreme sensitivity. In this and other situations, she appears as an analyst, applying, like many biographers, the technique of psychoanalysis (see Parke 25-26 & 54-55). Besides, her *selection, organization, and presentation* of certain events from his life reveal a great deal about the rebellious man he was and explain his obsessive search for freedom.

Concerning the poet, we learn much about his various and prolific readings, the different elements that shaped his vision and influenced him, as well as his rituals of writing and editing. We also have a critical and a deep study of many of his poems. In this regard *The Southerner* fits within the subgenre of literary biography which recreates "the life and personality of artists, attempting to account for the particular bent of their talent and sometimes...assessing their work" and "interpreting their writings as instances of conduct by which the biographical narrative is organized and hence character revealed" (Parke 29, 54)²². However, al-Reweiny's biography mainly presents her point of view of her subject. If other views are referred to, they are positive ones or else she defends him before the negative ones.

The text can also be read as an autobiography. However, the text presents two autobiographies, one of Amal Dunqol and the other of Abba al-Reweiny. The first autobiography starts from the title: *The Southerner* stands for Amal Dunqol who comes from Upper Egypt, and for his last poem which is autobiographical. Moreover, we see the subject speaking for himself, as some situations are narrated by Dunqol. For example, as cited earlier, he is the one who tells her/us about the suffering colouring his life from an early age (S 23). In almost every chapter, we hear him in the many conversations they shared. Here we can apply Kuhn's remark about other texts whose authors, "create new literary forms that substitute a dialogic structure for phallogen-tric discourse; a conversation...replaces the single authoritative (and authoritarian) narrative voice" (15).

Besides, his voice is strongly heard throughout the whole book, through his poetry as well as his letters which are there, again, in almost every chapter. Additionally, we have samples of his poems, written in his neat handwriting in the middle of the book, as well as the rough drafts of his poems included in the postscript of the book. I believe that this autobiographical form proves al-Reweiny's success to fulfil her objective. She wanted to present his life as one of victory, especially their battle with cancer. By having his voice heard until the end, he remains very much alive, and she makes it clear that he was not defeated by cancer or by any of the pains that weaved the fabric of his life.

The second autobiography, or the "hidden autobiography," to use Malti's words, is al-Reweiny's (150). This impression starts from the second chapter when she begins talking about their first meeting. From that chapter on, there is a clear shift in the voice; for we have the first person narrator through which al-Reweiny subtly wedges herself and her image into the text. Still, she continues to use the third voice when speaking of Dunqol's creativity and his fiery relationships with his friends. *The*

Southerner presents clearly the character of Abba al-Reweiny. We know about her upbringing, her French education, as well as her social class and rich conservative family which differ so much from his. However, deep inside her, she always belonged to the poor and the downtrodden, and was never happy with her bourgeois world. Therefore, she renounced it after meeting Dunqol and easily established herself into his world: "The bourgeois world, which I belonged to, coloured my vision, but it never inhabited my heart. From the very beginning, I had a heart that was willing to renounce the whole world for the sake of that poet who owned only one black torn pair of trousers" (S 53-54).

This semi-autobiography also puts the reader face to face with her strong and determined character and the positive role she played in the deceased poet's life. Al-Reweiny emerges out of the text as a revolutionary woman who definitely stands up to the rebellious man and poet she married. When still young (about twenty-two years old) and in her formative training period as a journalist, she insisted on conducting an interview with a leftist poet who was all but banned by the Egyptian media: "I thought, at the beginning of my work at Al-Akhbar newspaper... before being [formally] appointed, to go through all the red, green, yellow lights, by having an interview with the poet Amal Dunqol" (S 17). She was challenged to carry on what she had intended after knowing of the difficulty of meeting him and the impossibility of having the interview published in the newspaper in the first place. This determined character is more clearly revealed when she takes the initiative in declaring her love for him. Moreover, she insisted that they should marry despite the challenges they both met. Nothing explains these qualities better than the following dialogue:

"I cannot marry you, because I own nothing."

"We will marry."

"You will suffer with me; for I do not have my daily bread."

"I will suffer more without you even if I have my daily bread."

"Amal we will marry, not simply to make love victorious, but also to make your choices victorious" (S 58, 59).

Al-Reweiny also emerges as an equally creative and talented person. If the text celebrates the great value of Dunqol the poet, who respected and cherished his talent above everything, it similarly presents the intellectual and gifted Abba al-Reweiny. We have samples of her letters to him, some written in a highly poetic language. Likewise, she ends the text in the form of a poem through her comment on the scene of his death. Besides, the book does not show that her belief in her husband's poetry is out of her love and loyalty as a wife. Rather, it comes out of her understanding and appreciation of the great value it presents. This is also evident in her clever choice of his poems (always placed in the right context and situation) and in the critical view she offers of some of them.

Thus *The Southerner* blurs the boundaries between the genres of biography and autobiography. However, recent readings and studies of both genres tend to demark the line separating them. For example, Susan Bell and Marilyn Yalom note that "Whatever their differences, autobiography and biography presuppose the factual data of a lived existence... [and] the boundaries between... [them] are not as distinct as their definitions imply" (2-3). Sharing their view, Anna Kuhn "call[s] for a reading of biography as a subcategory of autobiography" (3). Her view is based on the fact that we can no longer regard biography as objective in contrast with the subjectivity of autobiography because the choice of the subject matter as well as the attitude of the biographer towards the material chosen reveal as much about her/him as we know of the subject (Kuhn 13; also see Bell & Yalom 3; Middlebrook 159). Moreover, many scholars remark that sometimes through writing the life story of a famous person, the biographer is given the chance to write his/her own autobiography. This is namely notable in the case of women who, particularly in the past, were denied access to the public sphere. Hence they wrote their lives "obliquely" through the biographies of their famous husbands, male relatives, lovers or friends (Bell & Yalom 4).²³

A biography, an autobiography, a memoir, *The Southerner* may be read as such. Memoir and autobiography "approach one another" and are sometimes used interchangeably due to "their literary and structural dependence on personal experience and on the special knowledge of the author/narrator" (Malti 145). However, unlike the autobiography, which covers a great span of the writer's life, a memoir often tries to capture certain highlights or meaningful moments in this life and may focus on more than one character. It can be seen as a personal reconstruction of certain events and their impact. While doing so, the memoirist may contemplate the meaning of these particular scenes, or events at the time of writing the memoir. Vivian Gornick's view of memoir stresses the importance of the writer's dramatization of and reflection on the events so as "to lift from the raw material of life a tale that will shape experience, transform events, deliver wisdom.... What happened to the writer is not what matters; what matters is the large sense that the writer is able to make of what happened" (*Personal Narrative* 13).

Applying these views to *The Southerner*, we discover that we are before the genre of memoir starting from the second chapter. That is when she begins talking about how they met and how their relationship developed. From that chapter on, the book is mainly the story or memoir of Abba and Amal, of certain events from their shared life and their final battle with cancer. Al-Reweiny does not simply narrate these events but reflects on them to finally bring before us an image of herself and her subject/ spouse as strong victorious people who were not defeated either by the illness or by the fake materialistic world that tended to suppress them. Fedwa Malti-Douglas views the text as a personal memoir and remarks that it can be placed among "a subgenre of autobiographical writings...in which a woman writes of her late husband. [It is] a specific literary genre...revolving around an individual other than the author himself [/herself]" (144,145). However, this definition cannot be applied to the whole text,

for as discussed earlier, the text does not revolve solely round the deceased poet, but also round his widow. Here it is worthy to note that al-Reweiny successfully uses the pronoun "we". On the one hand, it refers to the special relationship they enjoyed, as mentioned earlier. On the other hand, it also reveals "the binarism or duality that... governs the work in its entirety" (Malti 151).

A fourth form of personal writing imposes itself in the last five chapters of the book. This is again the effect of their cancer story which makes the last part of the text seem, particularly in the first chapter and at the end of the last chapter, like a diary. Here she uses dates for the first time as sub titles. Prior to this part, she mentions only a few dates within the text, like when she interviewed him and the publication date of this interview. However, in this last part, dates are written in bold, except the first one. The writing underneath them seems like a diary entry. She begins with September 1979 when cancer appeared for the first time. Less than two pages later, we have another significant date, March 1980, when another tumour appears. The entry is written in two short concise paragraphs to be followed by the third major date, February 1982, which marks the beginning of the last and most ferocious phase of their battle against cancer. This date and the diary entry following it take place in the last two pages of the first chapter of the last part of *The Southerner*. After this, the text goes on as a memoir of this last period of their life. Then we are back to the form of the diary in the last page of the book when she mentions the date of Saturday 21 May [1983], the date of his death. On the last day of his life, we are given the exact time, three o'clock in the morning, when he looked at her for the last time, then eight o'clock when he dies. This intensifies the experience and quickens the rhythm.

Thus in *The Southerner* we encounter a work that defies conventional generic definition. It can be at once a biography, an autobiography, a memoir and at one point a diary. It is fascinating that all these genres blend easily in the text and they all contribute to the intensity of the experience presented. In this regard, al-Reweiny has succeeded in fulfilling her objective. She told me in an interview: "I was not in the least concerned with defining the genre of my book, nor with the way it would be classified. All I was concerned with is to express my vision of my life with Dunqol and of his true personality and triumphant spirit" (Interview). Recognizing the complexity of the book's structure, she asked that the third edition not be called a *Sirah*, so the term was removed from the cover.

As for *The Best Day*, it is classified by Donald Hall as a memoir, which, as indicated from the subtitle, recollects his life with Jane Kenyon. Indeed, we can place it with *The Southerner* in the "subgenre of widows' [or widowers'] memoirs" (Malti 147). Nevertheless, in Hall's book we can detect two distinct, though somehow interrelated, narratives: one that deals with the leukemia story, and the second with the life of the two poets together and prior to their meeting and marriage. The story of leukemia fits within the genre of memoir. It is chronicled in chronological time from the beginning to the end. Hall only disrupts the chronological order at the beginning when he begins his book where we might expect it to end: her death, her funeral

and the beginning of his solitary life. However, he ends the book with a postscript that seems like the completion of the first chapter as it starts on the second day of Kenyon's funeral. This creates a complex structure and highlights the effect of her death on his life, beginning and ending the book with it.

Hall presents plenty of details about Kenyon's cancer tragedy, but they help dramatize the whole story. Moreover from the first chapter he highlights certain events, such as the discovery of the disease, the falling of her hair and the beginning of her entrapment by pain. This is the pattern in every chapter of the story of their battled leukemia: he narrates all needed details with a focus on a particular event, a new symptom or development in her disease. What intensifies the experience is quoting heavily, especially at the beginning, from his late wife's diary. This creates a weave of their two voices. He also names the first two leukemia chapters after her "plaid notebook" and her own description of her state, "terror and delight". Thus, like Dunqol, we hear her voice and we see that she is not presented as a passive subject. When her case deteriorated and she was not able to write in her diary, he quoted from her medical reports.

In his recollection of their catastrophe, Hall does not only chronicle the tragic events they went through, but also reflects on them. Like al-Reweiny, he presents a story of victory, of the power of the human will. As quoted earlier, he was impressed by his wife's fighting, despite her depressed nature. The whole experience and the postscript present the wisdom of the story; they show how love and art endure: "Today, ten years after her death, her poems endure. So do I, still at Eagle Pond Farm, where Jane fills the air around me like a rainy day.... I am old, hobbling through my eighth decade, but I do not fret about dying. I am able to love and to work" (BD 258). We also see the positive effect of different kinds of love, that of family, friends and neighbours. They motivated Kenyon to fight, and brought relief in time of distress. In their cancer memoir Hall alternates between the use of the first and third person. He also narrates many of the events through the communal pronoun "we".

There are also parts when we get the impression of a diary when he uses the direct speech. For example, after they go to Seattle, he writes: "Tomorrow her physicians would begin to infuse Cytosan.... This afternoon we mostly sat alone on the sofa, holding hands and hugging, which we would not be able to do tomorrow" (BD 126). There is also a heavy use of dates, but major ones are given in detail, accompanied sometimes by the actual name of the day and the clock time. For example, the book starts with the exact date and time of her death. The date of the appearance of leukemia is mentioned in a quotation from Kenyon's diary. We also have dates such as Thursday, November 17, the day of the transplant. Then similar to a diary entry we read at the beginning of the sixth chapter: "December 22, 1994. After two months sleeping apart, we occupied a bed together in our Seattle apartment" (BD 176). A third major date is "ten-thirty P.M. on February 24, 1995" the day of their return to New Hampshire after her MET (BD 197).

The second narrative of *The Best Day* tackles the two poets' marital life and offers glimpses and reminiscences of their lives before meeting one another. This part is also triggered by the cancer experience and the great loss it brought along. Here, he more or less follows a chronological order, yet as is the case in the leukemia narrative, he departs from the order at the beginning. Hall starts his chronicle of their marital life three years after their marriage. In the second chapter he moves back to their first meeting. This second narrative offers us an autobiography of Hall and a biography of Kenyon. Brief as they are, they reveal much about the two poets' growing up and their families (Hall traces his family lineage up to his great-grandparents).

Hall's autobiography starts in the first chapter of the second narrative where he speaks of the history of his family house and farm in Eagle Pond. In other chapters he narrates, in his own voice, the various parts of his life. However, he remains silent about his first marriage as if his true life began with his meeting and marriage to the deceased Kenyon. Kenyon's biography starts with the second chapter, which begins: "Jane Jennifer Kenyon was born on May 23, 1947, in Ann Arbor, Michigan" (BD 46). This sentence answers back to the stark beginning of the first chapter of the book, "Jane Kenyon died of Leukemia...April 22, 1995" (BD 1). We know of her family, her growing up and her education which finally took her to Michigan University. In this regard, Hall presents "primary materials" that are highly valued by Samuel Johnson. Parke speaks of the importance of including "authenticated personal details and evidences as letters, autobiographical documents, anecdotes, and contemporary accounts which... reveal the subject's character most precisely and engage the reader most pleasurably" (16).

This part of the narrative, like al-Rewein's, reads like a classic literary biography. As a poet and as her former teacher at university, Hall gives us a comprehensive view of his wife's poetry, of her growing accomplishment and her development into a professional poet as well as the readings that affected her poetic vision (BD 111-112).²⁴ In addition to the genres of autobiography and biography, this part also presents a memoir of the highlights of their shared life. Hall presents a detailed description of their daily life, their church community, their walks in the fascinating landscape surrounding their house, their Bible and prose reading, their pets and their travels in and out of the country, as well as their reading and editing of one another's works (BD 110-11, 114-17). Thus we end up having a clear image of both poets' lives and literary creation, an image with such an enduring effect that it contradicts Vivian Gornick's view of the text.

Gornick sees Hall's descriptions of his life with his wife as "a series of unexplored clichés about nature, small town community.. that could have been written by anyone for any reason" (Art 3). She also believes that as a memoirist, he stops short of creating the kind of narrator one expects in a memoir. She says:

a memoir is satisfying only when I feel myself in the presence of a 'slowly clarifying persona'; that is, a narrator fashioned out of the raw material of a writer's own undisguised being whose *raison d'être* is self-discovery, not self- presentation. This narrator—or

persona—is the one...who approaches (even if not necessary arriving at) the wisdom of the self that, in a memoir, provides the texture necessary to make a work of literature... In short, the existence of such a persona on the page is.. the instrument of the memoirist's effort to mine the experience at hand. (Art 2-3)

Gornick believes that after reading the memoir, we know almost nothing "about the narrator or those who people his landscape," and we remain unable to understand the reason behind writing this book. We can take issue with Gornick's view. Indeed, we learn about the narrator and the characters *peopling his landscape*. We see how the various events (particularly the cancer tragedy) that he and his wife went through left their strong imprint on their lives and personalities, drawing them even closer. We do not have the "slowly clarifying persona" who aims at self-discovery; yet a memoir is not only meant to reflect this objective. It could also deal with the self, life and experiences of its author and subject/s from different perspectives and facets. This applies to *The Southerner* as well.

Thus, like al-Rewein's book, Hall's text cannot be simply regarded within the framework of a particular personal genre. It is not, as we read on the cover, simply a memoir. It is a blend of genres that work together to intensify the tragic cancer experience of the couple. Through this blend and the structure of the whole text, he succeeds to convey the urgency of the catastrophe that entrapped them during the last fifteen months of their marital life and remains to color his life after his wife's demise. This blend of genre and voice also keeps his life with Jane Kenyon alive, certainly poetically alive.

Consequently, *The Southerner* and *The Best Day* present examples of personal narratives that offer us telling tales of pain. In these heartfelt works, the two subjects' pain, cancer and their accompanying feelings of fear, sadness and confusion are made shapely and shareable.²⁵ Noble sadness pervades the scenes and grief emanates from the lines. One can describe them by quoting Leslie Ullman's comment on Hall's *Without*: "Grief's soundings—their depth and intricacy—arise from...[this book] as naturally as mist over water, even as they also provide the harshness from which the book takes its form.... Hall's grief, so keenly and elegantly sustained, provides a map for others to follow if they risk, as he has, loving what they may well lose" (312, 313). This feeling and many others that remain with us long after reading the two books are due to the writers' successful poetics of pain and cancer.

Al-Rewein and Hall chose different patterns which intensify their cancer stories and make their books well structured. Their approaches to this terminal illness vary, but it remains the foe that came unexpectedly to turn their happy lives upside down. Consequently, bitter irony is felt in many parts of the books and the image of a battle is central. Though we experience with them moments of despair, the dominant attitude is one of resistance. The two authors mime their tragic experiences without resorting to melodrama or overwhelming their readers with tears or self-pity. On the contrary, the various stages of their tragedies are depicted in a vivid, concise and poetic way that made their personal narratives true aesthetic and artistic works of

art. They also resort to segment stories and quote heavily from their subjects' words (poems, letters or diary) to tell their life stories. Making use of their protagonists' voices intensifies their presentation of pain and cancer.

The blending of voice that *The Southerner* and *The Best Day* offer reveals the strong relationships both couples enjoyed. It made them seem like one and enabled the authors to give pain a voice since they shared in their subjects' pain, especially that caused by cancer. One can imagine al-Reweiny and Hall telling their spouses these lines from a poem on cancer written by Royce Hix: "This cancer in you is killing me / the pain that I just couldn't see/and through your eyes I will find / the pain that someday I will fight" (Hix). They did fight it and conquer it by sharing their stories with a wide range of readers. Moreover, hearing the voices of both Dunqol and Kenyon has kept them alive or, to use the words of Paula Backscheider, assured their "present-ness" (4). It also made us feel that it is not the horror of their death that remains with us after finishing these books. Rather, it is the clear presence of mutual love and the two couples' persevering in the face of hopeless circumstances. In this way, we have two stories that are buoyed by integrity and enduring emotion, that celebrate the power and triumph of love, art, and the human will. After reading the two books, we can understand fully Hall's remark, which applies to al-Reweiny as well: "I embraced the solitude without Jane [Amal], or my solitude in the exclusive company of her [his] absence..." (BD 14). Thus the two works feel like the dying refrain of a completed song, the final verse of a finished poem that victoriously says:

Cancer can no more have the final word
Nor can death claim triumph.

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ENDNOTES

1. Whenever quoting from Hall's memoir, the initials *BD* will be used in parentheses followed by the page number.
2. Many critics and scholars of the genre of personal writing agree on its therapeutic effect. Philip Neilsen remarks: "Print life-writing is well established as a therapeutic and healing tool, especially for those in stress" (Neilsen 2). Personal writing's healing role is also evident in the number of studies in this field, and in the great number of counselors and writers who tackle this topic, as clear when surfing the internet. One of the early treatments of this subject is a special issue entitled "Ill ness, Disability, and Lifewriting" of the periodical *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* in spring 1991. At that time, not many scholars expressed interest in this topic. This is obvious in the introduction to this issue where Thomas Couser refers to his colleagues' surprise at the subject of "personal narratives of illness and disability" regarding them as "depressing" or as "sub... too narrow in focus, too confined in theme, too conventional in form to be of lasting interest or significance" (1). The articles included in this issue cover different kinds of illness, such as AIDS and breast cancer.
3. Janet McKenzie was a university lecturer in the field of sociology, but the murder of her younger sister changed her life, and she "trained to be a counsellor and developed an interest in how, even after a major crisis, people have been able to re-orientate themselves..." See <http://www.crisisaid.co.uk/phdi/pl.nsf/supppages/1954?opendocument&part=9>
4. The writer of this paper interviewed al-Reweiny at Akhbar el Yum building, Cairo, December 2006.
5. Fedwa Malti-Douglas speaks of the same division. See "Subverting the Male Body" 151-152.
6. The relation between the pattern and title of Hall's book is also suggested by Timothy Haugh in Spotlight reviews on the memoir, the reviews are offered by Amazon. See <http://www.amazon.com/Best-Day-Worst-Jane-Kenyon/dp/0618478019>
7. Elaine Scarry believes more in the unsharability of physical pain than that of psychological pain which makes the former rarely presented in literature because "psychological suffering, though often difficult for any person to express, does have referential content, is susceptible to verbal objectification and is, .habitually depicted in art" (11).
8. The death of the brother, which took place when Donkol was five, is not mentioned in al-Reweiny's biography, but in Megalli's *Amal Dunqol: The Prince of the Poets of Rejection* (30).
9. Whenever quoting from *The Southerner*, the initial *S* will be used in parentheses followed by the page number. The quotations are from the second edition which came out in 1992. All the quotations are my translation unless otherwise stated.
10. Dunqol puts a line of ellipsis before the refrain, "And God saw that it was not good." Al-Reweiny does the same when she quotes from "The Book of Genesis". In my translation of Dunqol's poetry I focused on "rendering the prose sense of the words," to quote Mohammed Enani; I do not intend to present a literary translation of his poems. Dunqol's "verse is very pleasing to hear but it suffers most in translation" (Enani 12, 52).
11. "The remarkable 'Having It Out with Melancholy,' to quote Keith Taylor, "is often quoted in small excerpts in newspapers and psychological studies, both to show a sympathetic understanding of chronic depression and as an example of the artistic temperament's proclivities toward illness" (702).
12. Alice Mattison, a poet and a friend of Kenyon's, formed with her and with a third friend and poet, Joyce Peseroff, informal workshops in which they used to write together and share opinions about their creativity. She speaks of Kenyon's character: "Jane's feelings were intense, her perceptions acute... It would have been impossible to be her friend without acknowledging pain, often the pain in small things—though sometimes Joyce and I teased her about discovering pain everywhere" (121).

13. In Egypt, particularly in Upper Egypt, one's land is a symbol of honor; so selling it or disposing of it in any way is regarded as a disgraceful act.
14. Malti goes to extremes when she remarks that the growing of the tumour in the body of the sick poet, similar to that of the fetus inside the mother's womb, emphasizes a reversal of gender role. It is true that the reversal of sexual roles is evident in the book, but Al-Reweiny did not portray this particular incident as such. Illness occurred despite themselves and, of course, against their will. And Al-Reweiny, in her writing about this tragedy, does not look at it from the perspective suggested by Malti in the title of her essay, that is, "Subverting the Male Body".
15. Megalli refers to other prominent critics who share his opinion such as Sami Khataba, Raga' al- Nakkash who wrote a long article entitled "Why do we Kill Poets?" and Sayed Teleb who expressed his shock at the death of many poets in the few years preceding Dunqol's. See Megalli 22-24 and al-Meqaleh 28,29.
16. The severity of cancer is depicted in a poem by Deja M. Still: "It's fierce and deadly; / and has no conscience. / It holds no sympathy; / only feeds on your sickness. / This is my cancer...(Cancer <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/cancer-5/>) It is interesting to note the number of literary works, whether in the form of poems or personal narratives that are triggered by cancer. The internet too offers a variety of these works in which cancer and its accompanying pain are depicted in different images. For example, Anita Clark compares it to a spider: "Cancer is a spider; / Growing legs, / Branching out..., / It lays its eggs...." (The ellipses are the writer's: <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/>). In a diary entitled *Sisyphus Redux, Cogitas* we read: "Friday, November 10, 2006. I've been on my 'chemo' vacation for 2 months___ Pain with the severity of an electric shock from elbow to wrist." The writer includes the image of Sisyphus pushing the heavy rock up the mountain (<http://berman.redtoenail.org>) See also "Ode to Cancer" by Chris Tusa, <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/ode-to-cancer/>; "Cancer" by Royce Hix, <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/cancer-4/>; and "Cancer" by Irene Clark Hogg, <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/cancer-8/>
17. Unlike Fedwa Malti-Douglas, I do not consider this end a form of "reversal and replacement of the male by the female" (144), but a poetic and gifted expression of her grief.
18. Ironically, cancer afflicted one of the three cats Hall and Kenyon had, and its leg was amputated. It finally died of cancer.
19. This is the title of the first chapter of *The Southerner*. As well, Dunqol used the same expression 24. when in his last interview he was asked what poetry meant to him. His answer was "a substitute for suicide" (Abdel Aziz 121).
20. Many recent studies of the genre doubt the accuracy suggested by this definition. The biographer is required to be as accurate as possible in his/her pursuing and search for data and information concerning his/her subject's life. However, one can never be sure of the biographer's personal biases which may affect the required element of accuracy. This has been the subject of many studies that question the accuracy and objectivity of the genre. See for example, Parke 29-30; Bell and Yalom 3.
21. In his groundbreaking book, *On Autobiography*, Philip Lejeune discusses the autobiographical pact, which is like a "promise of sincerity" or "the type of contract entered into between the author and the reader." He speaks of "identity ('identicalness') of the name (author-narrator-protagonist). The autobiographical pact is the affirmation in the text of this identity, referring back in the final analysis to the name of the author on the cover." Lejeune suggests two ways to establish the "identity of name between author, narrator, and protagonist: 1. Implicitly.. 2. In an obvious way." Within the first way, he gives sub means: "a) the use of titles.., b) initial section of the text where the narrator enters into a contract vis-a-vis the reader by acting as if he were the author, in such a way that the reader has no doubt that the T refers to the name shown on the cover, even though the name is not repeated in the text" (*On Autobiography* 14). In a later article on autobiography, Lejeune speaks of the autobiographical pact as "the reading contract [contrat de lecture]" (*Autobiography in the Third Person* 27; and also see 28).

22 At the end of her elaborate and well researched chapter that presents an overview of the genre of biography, Catherine Parke concludes that "biography is not a monolithic term" but rather a generic territory that can be divided into different categories: "(1) popular biographies; (2) historical biographies; (3) literary biographies. ..(4) reference biographies, also called collective biographies" (29).

23. Susan Bell and Marilyn Yalom in their introduction to *Revealing Lives: Autobiography, Biography and Gender* refer to these autobiographical biographies, especially those written by women. Other articles included in their book deal with the same phenomenon. See for example, Marilyn Yalom, "Biography as Autobiography: Adele Hugo, Witness of Her Husband's Life" (53-64) and Carol Han- bery MacKay, "Biography as Reflected Autobiography: The Self Creation of Anne Thackeray Ritchie" (65-80).
24. The first literary biography about Jane Kenyon came out in 2002: *Jane Kenyan: A Literary Life*, by John H. Timmerman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).
25. In my conclusion, I am borrowing from the following comment on *Without* written by an anonymous reviewer in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*. He/she writes: "It serves as a moving elegy for her life and work, and it spares none of the pain she and Hall experienced.. ..But it is not the horror of the death and dying that remains with the reader after he has finished this book. It is the clear presence of mutual love and two people's persevering in the face of hopeless circumstances.. ..It is a sad and painful book, but it is buoyed by integrity and enduring emotion" (54).