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Representations of Pain and Expressions of Suffering in Autobiographical Writing: A Reading of Ammar Belhassen's *Diaries of Pain*

تمثيلات الألم وتجليات المعاناة في كتابة الذات؛ قراءة في يوميات الوجد لعمار بلحسن

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Abstract:

Diaries of Pain by the Algerian writer and critic Ammar Belhassen is an autobiographical work that documents the experience of living with cancer from the moment of diagnosis. In this narrative, the author recounts his struggle with the disease, portraying his body as a battlefield ravaged by cancerous cells. This personal suffering intersects with his anguish over a homeland in which intellectuals are marginalized and symbolically assassinated through neglect. Belhassen provides a vivid account of medical examinations and treatments in crisis-ridden Algerian hospitals, depicting them as spaces associated with pain, despair, and death.

In confronting his illness, Belhassen turns to prayer and the invocation of prophets as forms of spiritual resistance. Through this process, his writing transcends the mere narration of pain and becomes a profoundly human testimony marked by patience, resilience, and hope despite the proximity of death. The reader is thus drawn into a journey that oscillates between vulnerability and courage.

This study seeks to examine the representations of pain and the manifestations of suffering in *Diaries of Pain*. It explores the physical and psychological dimensions of suffering imposed by illness on the writer's self, highlighting how the body becomes both a site of pain and a subject of narration. Pain is transformed into narrative material characterized by confession, reflection, and self-expression. Furthermore, the study investigates the suffering associated with space, particularly the hospital as a suffocating environment that intensifies human anguish, and examines the predicament of the intellectual within a troubled homeland where writers and artists face marginalization, neglect, and symbolic death.

Keywords: Diaries of Pain; Ammar Belhassen; Suffering; Physical Pain; Psychological Pain.

المخلص:

تعد يوميات الوجع للكاتب والناقد الجزائري عمار بلحسن سيرة ذاتية مرضية تؤثّق تجربته مع مرض السرطان منذ لحظة التشخيص، يسرد فيها معاناته مع مرض الخبيث كما سماه هو، يتحول الجسد لديه إلى ساحة معركة تنهشها خلايا سرطانية، ويتقاطع ذلك مع توجبه صرخات ضد الوطن الذي يغتال فيه المثقفون، حيث يقدم وصفا تفصيليا للفحوصات والعلاجات في مستشفيات جزائرية مأزومة يصورها كفضاءات موتية.

يلجأ عمار بلحسن في مواجهته المرض إلى الدعاء واستحضار الأنبياء كأداة مقاومة روحية، فتحول الكتابة الوجع إلى شهادة إنسانية تنبض بالصبر والأمل، رغم اقترابه من الموت مشركا القارئ في رحلة الضعف والشجاعة.

يرمي هذا البحث تسليط الضوء على تمثيلات الألم داخل كتاب يوميات الوجع لعمار بلحسن، من خلال رصد مظاهر المعاناة الجسدية والنفسية التي يفرضها المرض على الذات الكاتبة، فيصبح الجسد فضاءا للمعاناة، وموضوعا للحكي والكتابة، حيث يتحول الوجع إلى مادة سردية تنبض بالبوح والتأمل، كما يتناول البحث ألم الفضاء، بوصفه مصدرا خانقا للمعاناة، واستجلاء ألم المثقف داخل وطن مأزوم الذي يغتال فيه الأدباء والفنانون بالإهمال والسرطان.

الكلمات المفتاحية: يوميات الوجع؛ عمار بلحسن؛ الألم؛ الألم النفسي؛ الألم الجسدي.

1. Introduction

Diaries of Pain by the Algerian writer and sociological critic Ammar Belhassen constitutes a distinctive contribution to autobiographical writing. Written shortly after the author's diagnosis with cancer, the work documents his arduous journey through illness, recording both the physical suffering caused by the disease and the psychological anxiety, fear, and obsessions that accompanied it.

The text is grounded in a meticulous chronicle of the various stages of treatment, particularly chemotherapy sessions and medical examinations. Through vivid descriptions, Belhassen portrays the body as a battlefield where cancerous cells confront toxic medications in a relentless struggle for survival.

Throughout this journey, the author repeatedly turns to prayer and supplication, seeking divine support to overcome despair and preserve hope amid overwhelming darkness. In doing so, he invites readers to engage with the experience of pain and suffering as a means of reflecting upon the human condition and the limits of endurance.

Ammar Belhassen passed away on August 20, 1993, at the height of his intellectual and creative maturity, after a difficult battle with cancer. Published posthumously, *Diaries of Pain* preserves the details of his experience with the disease and stands as a powerful testimony to his resilience. Despite his untimely death, his writings remain alive, bearing witness to an experience through which he succeeded in transforming personal suffering into enduring literary creation.

This article seeks to explore the representations of pain and the manifestations of suffering in *Diaries of Pain*. It examines the psychological and physical dimensions of suffering as depicted in the text and investigates how pain is transformed into a creative force that reshapes the relationship between writing, the body, and the self. Through this analysis, the study aims to reveal the aesthetic and

existential significance of autobiographical writing in confronting illness and preserving human dignity in the face of mortality.

2. The Title as a Paratextual Threshold

The title constitutes a window through which readers gain access to the world of the text. It serves as a key that enables them to explore its depths and illuminate its hidden dimensions, as it represents “an essential preliminary introduction to reading the text”¹ and provides “an additional possibility for understanding literary works”².

A title should simultaneously encapsulate the content of the text and attract the reader's attention. For this reason, writers devote considerable care to selecting the titles of their creative works, given the title's central role in the literary process and its significant influence on shaping the reception of the text and stimulating the reader's curiosity.³

In *Lisan al-Arab*, the term '*ataba*' (threshold) derives from the root '*ataba*'. Ibn Manzur defines it as the doorstep or sill of a door upon which one steps when entering a house. The term may also refer to the upper or lower part of the doorway, and by extension, to the steps leading into a building. The plural form is '*atabāt*' (thresholds).⁴

According to its lexical meaning, the threshold functions as a gateway to another space. It is the first element encountered before entering a house, allowing one to approach it, become acquainted with it, and discover its characteristics. In literary studies, the concept of the threshold has acquired a broader significance, referring to all the textual and paratextual elements that mediate between the reader and the text, guiding interpretation and shaping the reading experience from the very first encounter.⁵

In literary theory, textual thresholds (*paratexts*) are regarded as one of the most significant forms of textual transcendence. Gérard Genette classifies paratexts into two principal categories: the *peritext*, which encompasses the elements physically surrounding the text, and the *epitext*, which

consists of materials located outside the text itself. These include such elements as the title, cover, dedication, preface, typography, interviews, and other accompanying materials.

Gérard Genette is among the foremost scholars who have examined this concept. He devoted an entire work to the subject in his influential book *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. According to Genette, a threshold comprises everything that enables a text to become a complete work and present itself to its readers or audience. It extends beyond the internal structure of the text to include paratextual elements such as the title, introductory pages, dedication, and cover, all of which prepare the reader for entry into the text and guide the process of interpretation.

These thresholds, which Genette collectively refers to as the *paratext*, impose their presence upon the reader from the very first encounter, both visually and intellectually. As a result, they play a decisive role in shaping the reader's initial perception of the work and establishing a relationship of acceptance, expectation, or even resistance toward the text.

The paratext performs several essential functions. It serves an identificatory function by distinguishing the work from others, a descriptive function by providing information about its content, a persuasive function by attracting readers and influencing their reception, and an interpretive function by offering clues that guide the reading process and contribute to the construction of meaning.⁶

The cover image is the first element that confronts the reader and often plays a decisive role in the initial selection of a book. As a visual paratext, it functions not merely as an aesthetic component but also as a communicative and interpretive device that shapes the reader's expectations before engaging with the text itself.

Indeed, the image embodies what may be described as the impulse to see or the desire for visual engagement. This desire may take various forms, including

intellectual curiosity, artistic attraction, emotional appeal, or aesthetic seduction. Through its visual configuration, the image captures the reader's attention and stimulates the pleasure of looking, a concept emphasized in psychoanalytic and visual studies. In this sense, the image becomes a medium of knowledge and interpretation, guiding the reader toward a deeper understanding of the text while simultaneously enhancing its aesthetic reception.⁷

The title is not merely a word or a phrase; rather, it constitutes a semiotic structure endowed with semantic and symbolic dimensions. It carries meanings that may be explicit or implicit, guiding the reader toward possible interpretations of the text. The title *Diaries of Pain* opens a horizon of inquiry and reflection, inviting readers to explore Ammar Belhassen's personal experience and the diary's rich portrayal of contemplation, suffering, resistance, and writing.

Indeed, *Diaries of Pain* may be regarded as what critics describe as "a testimonial book: neither a novel, nor a collection of stories, nor a set of essays, but rather a testimony to the suffering of our age."⁸ The work chronicles the author's memories of his struggle against cancer and records the physical and psychological suffering that accompanied this experience. Through a sincere and unadorned narrative, Belhassen leaves behind an authentic trace of his pain, transforming personal suffering into a lasting literary testimony.

The title *Diaries of Pain* is a nominal construction composed of two key terms: *diaries* and *pain*. The word *diaries* is the plural form of *diary*, a literary genre commonly associated with autobiographical and self-reflective writing. In the *Dictionary of Novel Terminology*, a diary is defined as a daily record that includes thoughts, events, emotions, and observations documented by the writer from day to day, unified by their connection to the flow of everyday life. This literary form emerged in Europe during the eighteenth century, reflecting a growing

tendency among individuals toward introspection and self-examination.⁹

In this sense, a diary may be understood as a personal record in which an individual documents daily impressions, experiences, and reflections. By choosing the diary form, Ammar Belhassen adopts a mode of autobiographical narration that allows him to chronicle his ongoing struggle with illness. Through a sequence of dated reflections and personal testimonies, he records the experience of pain, fear, uncertainty, waiting, and the constant proximity of death.¹⁰ The diary thus becomes both a space of self-expression and a means of preserving the memory of suffering, transforming personal experience into a literary and human testimony.

From a semiotic perspective, the term *diaries* signals a discourse grounded in authenticity, confession, and personal experience, while the term *pain* directs the reader toward the central thematic nucleus of the work. Together, the two terms establish a horizon of expectation that prepares the reader to encounter a narrative shaped by suffering, introspection, and resistance.

According to *Lisan al-Arab*, pain is defined as “a feeling of suffering in the body and the soul; one is said to experience pain when afflicted by suffering.”¹¹ Similarly, *Maqayis al-Lughah* associates the term with an afflictive effect that occurs in either the body or the mind.¹² From a linguistic perspective, therefore, pain signifies a state of suffering that encompasses both physical and psychological dimensions.

Within the title *Diaries of Pain*, however, the term acquires a broader and more profound significance. It transcends its literal meaning to evoke an ongoing inner experience of suffering marked by loneliness, isolation, anxiety, and existential anguish. The word *pain* functions not merely as a reference to bodily affliction but also as an expression of emotional and spiritual distress, thereby enriching the semantic horizon of the title.

Moreover, the title is characterized by

a degree of semantic openness. Ammar Belhassen deliberately refrains from specifying the nature of the pain to which the title refers. It remains unclear whether the pain is physical, psychological, social, or existential. This indeterminacy expands the interpretive possibilities of the title and invites readers to explore the multiple forms of suffering represented throughout the text.

From a semiotic perspective, the combination of the terms *diaries* and *pain* establishes a discourse of confession and testimony. The title announces a narrative centered on the lived experience of suffering while simultaneously encouraging the reader to uncover the various meanings and manifestations of pain that shape the author's journey and self-representation.

"The blog's cover illustration depicts a chaotic convergence of intersecting and overlapping hues, specifically blending red, blue, orange, black, and purple. This chromatic palette is deliberately chosen rather than arbitrary, as the visual perception of specific colors induces electrochemical reactions within the human brain, thereby generating sensory signals between the eyes and the brain. Black, which dominates the background and occupies a substantial portion of the composition, is intrinsically linked to grief, mourning, mortality, and bereavement. Consequently, black functions as a profound symbol of sorrow and demise, connoting failure, hardship, and psychological distress".¹³

The color red is inextricably linked to wounds, hemorrhage, and bloodshed, thereby functioning as a visual metaphor for pulsating pain. In contrast, dark blue evokes sentiments of melancholy and isolation, while orange and pink serve as chromatic representations of fleeting hope and optimism. Moreover, the typographic choice to render the title *Diaries of Pain* in yellow connotes morbidity, pallor, caution, physical frailty, and emaciation. Fundamentally, the color yellow epitomizes suffering. Thus, a profound semiotic relationship exists between the afflicted body and the color yellow, as it lays bare the underlying

pathology and its consequent fragility or demise.

3. The Somatic Agony: The Body as a Site of Perpetual Suffering:

Physical pain serves as a central thematic motif in *Diaries of Pain*, functioning as the primary lens through which the author chronicles his lived experience with cancer. By positioning somatic pain at the forefront of the narrative, he articulates the self's confrontation with a malignant pathology deeply entrenched within his corporeal being. Yet, rather than capitulating to this suffering, he confronted it with profound resilience and fortitude. His resistance manifested through narrative agency and the evocation of childhood memories, culminating in a profound literary testimony. This text bears witness to a body ravaged by a consuming tumor, which compelled him to embark on a transnational odyssey in search of medical intervention and healing. Consequently, *Diaries of Pain* emerged as a seminal memoir, meticulously detailing his trajectory with the disease and the inescapable agony, obsessions, and nightmares that shadowed his journey.

"Ammar Belhassen furnishes the reader with granular depictions of somatic agony, pharmacological interventions, clinical settings, and the physiological metamorphoses of the corporeal form. He encapsulates this self-alienation in the following apostrophe: 'Oh, Mother... why have you become so emaciated, gaunt, brittle, and elongated like a matchstick? You have lost your softness, your flesh, and your fullness'.¹⁴ Here, the body is transfigured into a palimpsest, simultaneously read and inscribed through language, writing its own narrative of tumescence and decay. The author retreats into mnemonic spaces to summon childhood traumas, resurrecting past sorrows and cruelties. His existence is thus framed as an unending, cyclical oppression, translating somatic suffering from its earliest inception, as he declares: 'From a young age, I have suffered because of you, my body. My mother would say that I was plump, akin to her beloved son Anis,

and therefore more fit for kisses and caresses than for possessing a well-proportioned, muscular frame. My chest was full, my thighs were fleshy, and I possessed the stature of a teenage boy".¹⁵

Throughout the narrative, Belhassen employs a martial metaphor, framing the somatic self as a contested battlefield wherein the author is besieged by endogenous microbial invaders. The body, traditionally perceived as a locus of safety, is reconfigured as a perfidious entity. He apostrophizes his own corporeality, declaring: 'You are destroying me, my body, standing solitary against legions of bacteria and viruses that consume your cells, tissues, and organs beyond the visible realm... You remain entirely isolated in your confrontation with pathology'.¹⁶

The corporeal form is no longer a locus of strength but has been reconfigured as a space under internal siege by pathogens. Notwithstanding the gravity of the pathology, the author resists capitulation, articulating a plea: 'May my body regain its health, and may I be endowed with patience and fortitude'.¹⁷

Employing visceral imagery, the writer metaphorically equates the malignant tumor to a landmine embedded within the somatic landscape, poised for internal detonation. As the proverb suggests: 'There is a mine within your body...'

*Tumor... Oh, you grotesque, reckless, chaotic entity! You cultivate your domain, intertwining with other mines, orchestrating a new formation. Halt... Danger: Landmine. Cancer consumes the intestines, overlooking purulent or parchment-like terrain, emitting nuclear radiation*¹⁸.

Belhassen (may he rest in peace) utilizes a meticulously descriptive lexicon to chronicle the disease's obliteration of internal organs, tissue degradation, and abdominal distension. His narrative represents a sophisticated hybridization of clinical precision and poetic lyricism, framing the disease as an apocalyptic, destructive force.

4. Chemotherapy and Its

Therapeutic Effects:

Ammar Belhassen describes the extent of the suffering that chemotherapy inflicted on his body, stating:

"I did not write; I suffered from general weakness, bone pain, and an overwhelming urge to vomit. I ate very little, yet I kept vomiting under the terrifying effects of chemotherapy".¹⁹

This passage reflects the magnitude of his physical and psychological suffering. It begins with a detailed description of the deterioration of his physical and mental condition due to what he refers to as the terrifying effects of chemotherapy, which resulted in nausea, loss of appetite, and a significant reduction in food intake. These symptoms indicate a worsening of his health condition.

He then mentions being given "*sachets of medication in preparation for CT scans.*"²⁰ This statement reveals the series of medical procedures he had to undergo. At the same time, Ammar Belhassen experiences a state of tension, anxiety, anticipation, and uncertainty while awaiting further medical preparations, including radiotherapy and diagnostic scans.

As these devastating side effects intensify, the patient begins to experience depression as a consequence of physical pain and the sudden changes in his health condition. This is evident in his words:

"*I will drink it on Tuesday; my appointment for the CT scan is on Wednesday.*"²¹

For him, Wednesday becomes the day of revelation and a decisive moment suspended between hope and despair, between life and death.

The writer then moves to a pivotal moment when he received his medical report but refrained from reading it, fearing a direct confrontation with the reality of his potentially fatal illness and its consequences, which may be psychologically more painful than the disease itself.

Using vivid figurative language, the writer compares doctors to divers, suggesting that his body requires individuals

capable of diving into its depths to uncover the cursed disease hidden within. As he writes:

"*And here I am, alone, waiting for the results of the divers' and doctors' investigations and explorations.*"

This metaphor highlights both the complexity of the medical search for the disease and the writer's feelings of isolation, anxiety, and expectation as he awaits the outcome of the doctors' efforts.²²

5. The Pain of Space :

The writer portrays the hospital as a strange, harsh, and cold space in which the self becomes detached from its human surroundings. As one of the places where he spent most of his time battling cancer, the hospital in his blog is not merely a setting for events; rather, it is transformed into a painful entity that reflects the depth of the physical and psychological suffering he endured. He begins to outline the features of his harsh experience with the disease, particularly at Tlemcen Hospital, stating:

"Blood and urine tests, ultrasound scans, then fibroscopy... the beginning of deterioration, fear, and a sense of danger... admission to Tlemcen Hospital... through a series of blood and urine tests."²³

Here, the writer depicts the body as being subjected to a succession of medical examinations and interventions. It becomes an object of scrutiny, almost like an open body whose hidden realities remain unknown, surrounded by uncertainty and anxiety. As a result, the body itself becomes a stage upon which pain unfolds.

Ammar Belhassen then moves on to describe his experience at Oran Hospital, employing language charged with fear and tension:

"*Oran Hospital was a death trap, a cemetery of death filled with the stench of medical alcohol, serum, feces, and urine... The patients' wards were a dumping ground of smells, blood, and vomit... yet amidst the hell of disease and death.*"²⁴

In his depiction of the hospital environment, the writer adopts a dark and somber language saturated with symbols of

death. The hospital ceases to be a place of healing and instead becomes a cemetery where each day resembles the one before it, carrying the same outcome: pain and death. Beyond the pervasive odors of medical alcohol and serum, Ammar presents the hospital as a suffocating space marked by anxiety, isolation, and mortality. Oran Hospital appears populated by suffering, fear, and endless medical examinations, reflecting the patient's profound sense of loneliness in the face of a life-threatening illness.

In a sorrowful tone, Ammar Belhassen writes about a painful and miserable reality within a healthcare institution that resembles hell more than a place of recovery. Rather than alleviating patients' suffering, it seems only to intensify their pain and despair. Consequently, the writer decides to leave this environment and seek treatment at Ain Naadja Hospital, hoping to find a glimmer of hope there. As he writes:

*"But amidst death and the infernal ordeal... I hoped to escape the bed of pain and endless tests. Oran Hospital... every day brought a death caused by error, filth, or negligence. I would go to the capital and enter Ain Naadja Hospital, the Central Military Hospital..."*²⁵

He then describes the new hospital environment:

*"The hospital was clean, calm, and organized, with serious treatment, cleanliness, and proper meals... but the spirit remained sad, the illness deceptive... and the pain dwelled deep within. Yet amidst all this... the illness remained a troubling question, gnawing at my insides and stomach... the tests revealed serious and painful truths..."*²⁶

He continues:

"After analyzing the blood... I discovered the horror and the pain; there were neoplastic cells in the acidic fluid..."

And further states:

*"At Ain Naadja Hospital, I discovered the horror of that accursed disease and its grim path toward death..."*²⁷

Although the hospital appears clean,

orderly, and reassuring on the surface, the writer reveals that beneath this outward appearance lies an inner reality marked by sadness, fragility, and invisible suffering. The pain is internal and unseen, yet it relentlessly consumes the body from within.

Through a poignant and coded language that blends scientific and medical terminology with symbolic imagery, Ammar Belhassen exposes the presence of a cancerous threat hidden inside the body. The discovery of this threat deepens his sense of isolation and confronts him with the terrifying reality of his illness.

6. The Intellectual's Pain Between the Ailing Body and the Troubled Homeland:

Ammar Belhassen writes with anguish and bitterness about the relationship between the intellectual and his homeland, stating:

*"Damn you, my country... land of immense suffering... your artists never knew peace. Your honorable people face only assassination or death from cancer".*²⁸

This passage represents a heartfelt cry emerging from the depths of a wounded intellectual's soul. It vividly portrays the tragic condition of intellectuals, artists, and honorable individuals who have been abandoned by their homeland—a homeland that failed to preserve their dignity and instead became a space of profound suffering and multiple forms of pain: physical, psychological, and intellectual.

In such a troubled country, the honorable intellectual is denied the opportunity to live a life of dignity. Instead, he is either assassinated or left to die of cancer, alone and forgotten, deprived of adequate healthcare and social recognition. The writer suggests that the nation neglects its cultural and intellectual figures, leaving them to confront illness and death in isolation.

As a result, hospitals cease to function as places of healing and recovery and are transformed into spaces of despair and abandonment. Sighs, memories, and longing become the final companions of the

intellectual in his last moments, as he writes:

*"Alone in fetid hospitals, isolated except for their longing and sighs"*²⁹.

This statement reflects a profound sense of loneliness and marginalization. The hospital, rather than offering comfort and care, becomes a symbol of neglect and suffering. Through this powerful image, Ammar Belhassen criticizes a reality in which intellectuals are denied the recognition and support they deserve, even in their most vulnerable moments.

Ultimately, the writer intertwines his personal struggle with illness and the broader suffering of the intellectual within a troubled homeland, presenting a poignant vision in which bodily pain merges with national disappointment, and individual suffering becomes a reflection of a collective tragedy.

7. Between Prayer and Pain: Invoking the Prophets as Symbols of Patience:

Ammar Belhassen employs Qur'anic verses and supplications in a deeply symbolic manner to express suffering and psychological anguish throughout his diaries. This is particularly evident in his repeated invocation of the noble verse:

"And [remember] Job, when he called upon his Lord, 'Indeed, adversity has touched me, and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful.'" (Qur'an 21:83)³⁰

The verse serves as a powerful symbol of affliction, patience, humility, and unwavering faith in the face of adversity.

The repetition of this verse constitutes an emotional cry that conveys the intensity of his suffering during moments of profound pain. At the same time, it reflects his certainty in God's mercy and his belief that divine compassion will ultimately deliver him from the circle of suffering.

Many of Ammar Belhassen's texts take the form of lengthy supplications filled with earnest appeals and pleas for divine assistance. As he writes:

"I read Surat Ar-Rahman... and I fear that God may forget me, yet this is my supplication: Lord, hasten to destroy the

*disease within my body and grant me strength from Your presence. Shower my heart with mercy, strength, and courage. Give me the steadfastness of Moses to confront this cancerous disease"*³¹.

Alongside these prayers, Belhassen frequently invokes the names and life experiences of the prophets as symbols of strength, patience, endurance, and submission to God's will. He draws inspiration from the experience of Job (Ayyub), peace be upon him, whose story embodies perseverance and long-suffering in the face of severe affliction. Likewise, he invokes Moses (Musa), peace be upon him, as a symbol of courage and steadfastness when confronting danger. Just as Moses faced Pharaoh with unwavering determination, the writer seeks the same spiritual strength to confront his illness and endure its physical and psychological burdens.³²

Similarly, he writes:

*"Grant me the serenity of Jesus in the moment of crucifixion. Give me the determination of Noah as he builds the Ark to protect himself from the flood and gathers within it two of every kind. Grant me the strength and resilience of Abraham as he remained steadfast amid the fire that became cool and peaceful."*³³

Through these invocations, Ammar Belhassen does not merely ask for healing; rather, he seeks the capacity to endure suffering and transform pain into a spiritual test that strengthens faith and rebuilds the self.

He further invokes the determination of Noah (Nuh), peace be upon him, as a symbol of patience and perseverance; the strength of Abraham (Ibrahim), peace be upon him, as an example of steadfastness in adversity; the experience of Joseph (Yusuf), peace be upon him, with its promise of relief after hardship; the serenity of Zechariah (Zakariya), peace be upon him, which reflects unwavering faith despite feelings of helplessness; and the courage of Jonah (Yunus), peace be upon him, in confronting isolation and darkness. As he writes:

*"Have mercy upon me as You showed mercy to the noble Joseph. Save me from temptation and doubt when his Lord called upon him. Grant me the serenity of Zechariah as he endured the sorrow of old age without offspring. Bestow upon my heart and soul the tranquility, fortitude, and courage of Jonah in the belly of the whale."*³⁴.

Through these texts, Ammar Belhassen presents a vivid example of how prayer and the invocation of prophetic figures can alleviate the psychological isolation experienced by patients, providing them with spiritual strength and emotional resilience. By linking his personal ordeal to the trials endured by the prophets, he transforms his suffering into a meaningful experience rooted in faith, hope, and perseverance.

8. Writing during illness:

Ammar Belhassen writes:

"To write in the shackles of illness and the prisons of the body means to suffer. With every letter, every stroke of the pen, and every dip of ink, a fragment of your flesh or skin falls away—a mark of sacrifice for the freedom of the spirit and an act of resistance against despair."³⁵

This passage reveals Ammar Belhassen's profound perception of writing as an experience inseparable from pain and suffering. He composed his memoir while enduring intense physical and psychological distress, in a state where the body appeared imprisoned, confined within the chains of illness and the siege imposed by disease.

The writer employs powerful metaphorical language to describe the constraints of illness. The body is portrayed as a prison, while writing becomes an exhausting struggle that demands both physical and emotional sacrifice. Every word written and every movement of the pen seem to require the surrender of a small part of the self, as though the act of writing consumes the body even as it preserves the spirit.

At the same time, this painful process acquires a deeper significance. Writing is

not merely a means of recording events or documenting personal experiences; it becomes an act of resistance against suffering and despair. Through writing, the author seeks to liberate his spirit from the limitations imposed by the diseased body and to affirm his existence in the face of illness.

Moreover, the image of flesh and skin falling away with each written word underscores the intimate connection between creativity and suffering. The text suggests that authentic writing emerges from sacrifice, transforming personal pain into a meaningful narrative capable of transcending the boundaries of the individual experience.

Thus, writing becomes both testimony and therapy: a means of documenting the ordeal of illness and, simultaneously, a symbolic struggle against surrender. By continuing to write despite his physical deterioration, Ammar Belhassen affirms the power of the human spirit to confront suffering through creativity, memory, and self-expression.

9. Conclusion:

Based on the provided research paper by researcher "Djouadi Fatma" from Maghnia University Center, entitled **"Representations of Pain and Expressions of Suffering in Autobiographical Writing: A Reading of Ammar Belhassen's Diaries of Pain"**, here is a comprehensive formulation of the research conclusion, including the main findings and recommendations, written in the same academic and analytical language of the paper:

Based on this study's exploration of the representations of pain and the manifestations of suffering in the autobiographical writing of the Algerian writer and sociological critic Ammar Belhassen—analyzing its physical, psychological, existential, and spatial dimensions—the main cognitive and aesthetic findings can be summarized, followed by future recommendations and perspectives as follows:

First: Main Research Findings

- **The Semiotics of Thresholds and Chromatic Indicators:** The study demonstrated that the title and cover of the diaries constitute an integrated semantic structure that shapes the reader's horizon of expectation. The dominant black color on the background profoundly symbolized grief, mourning, mortality, and psychological distress, while the typographic choice of yellow for the title connoted morbidity, physical frailty, and emaciation. Furthermore, the nominal construction of the title remained semantically open, leaving the nature of the pain unspecified and expanding its interpretive possibilities.
- **The Body as a Battlefield and Narrative Material:** In Belhassen's text, the body is transfigured from a mere biological entity into rich narrative material characterized by confession and reflection. Through martial metaphors, it is depicted as a contested battlefield under internal siege, where the somatic self is ravaged by cancerous cells and toxic medications. Rather than capitulating, the author used narrative agency to resist physical degradation and self-alienation.
- **The Geography of Pain and the Semiotics of Space (The Hospital):** The analysis revealed that the hospital in the autobiographical text transcends being a mere setting to become a painful entity that intensifies human anguish. The spatial representation oscillated between Oran Hospital, depicted as a suffocating "death trap and cemetery" marked by negligence and filth, and Ain Naadja Hospital, which, despite its superficial cleanliness and organization, remained an oppressive space that confronted the patient with the terrifying reality of his illness and mortality.
- **The Intersection of Personal Pain and National Anguish:** The study highlighted a profound intersection between the

physical suffering of the ailing body and the broader anguish over a troubled homeland. Belhassen's personal struggle merged with a bitter critique of a reality where intellectuals, writers, and artists face marginalization, neglect, and symbolic death, leaving them to confront illness and isolation in cold hospital environments.

- **Spiritual Resistance through Prophetic Invocations:** The text relied heavily on Qur'anic verses and supplications as a defensive and spiritual mechanism to alleviate psychological isolation. By invoking the life experiences and trials of the prophets (such as the patience of Job, the steadfastness of Moses, the determination of Noah, and the serenity of Jesus, Abraham, Zechariah, and Jonah), the writer transformed his personal ordeal into a meaningful spiritual test rooted in faith, hope, and resilience.
- **Writing as an Act of Liberation and Resistance:** The study concluded that writing under the constraints of illness functions as a profound act of resistance against despair and a means of liberating the spirit from the prison of the body. The visceral imagery of flesh and skin falling away with each written word underscores that authentic creativity emerges from sacrifice, transforming temporary physical suffering into an enduring human and literary testimony.

Second: Recommendations and Future Perspectives

Building upon the qualitative data and analysis provided by this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- a. **Directing Critical Attention to Illness Narratives:** There is an academic need to encourage critical and analytical studies focusing on autobiographies, diaries, and memoirs that document the experiences of illness and bodily trauma in Algerian and Arabic literature, as this genre remains less explored compared to novels and short stories.
- b. **Adopting Interdisciplinary Approaches:** Future research should analyze narratives of human suffering by

combining semiotics, psychoanalysis, and the sociology of literature to deeply decode texts written during existential confrontations with terminal illness and mortality.

- c. **Preserving and Re-evaluating Ammar Belhassen's Literary Legacy:** The study recommends gathering and re-reading the complete sociological, critical, and autobiographical works of the late Ammar Belhassen, shedding light on his intellectual contributions that were cut short at the height of his creative

maturity.

- d. **Deepening the Semiotic Study of Confined Spaces:** Researchers are encouraged to explore the semiotic and aesthetic configurations of restrictive or traumatic spaces (such as hospitals, sanatoriums, and exiles) in modern Arabic autobiographical writing to understand how space shapes and escalates the dramatic structure of self-narratives.

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