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SCRIPTURE IN A SEALED RAILWAY-CAR: A POEM OF DAN PAGIS

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> To understand the last collective response of a people in all its contradictions, one must look to the writers, who, because they shared the same fate and were intimately involved in all facets of the people's Armageddon, were able to transmute the screams into a new and terrible scripture.
>
> David G. Roskies
>
> And how was the Torah written? In black fire upon white fire.
>
> Midrash on Psalms

STORIES OF A NEW BIBLE

PRIMO LEVI, one of the few Italian Jews to survive Auschwitz, began to write of his ordeal as early as 1947.[1] Written within months of his return home, his memoir compresses the lapse that commonly distinguishes the survivor's recollection from the inmate's contemporary witness. He writes his memoir, however, keenly aware of the death camps' burden on language that would span even this short distance to speak of the past atrocity. The aftermath of Auschwitz, for Levi, threatened to sever the connective tissues of language that would bridge a 'here' and a 'there'.[2] He writes:

> Just as our hunger is not that feeling of missing a meal, so our way of being cold has need of a new word. We say 'hunger', we say 'tiredness', 'fear', 'pain', we say 'winter' and they are different things. They are free words, created and used by free men who lived in comfort and suffering in their homes. If the Lagers had lasted longer a new, harsh language would have been born; and only this language could express what it means to toil the whole day in the wind, with the temperature below freezing, wearing only a shirt, underpants, cloth jacket and trousers, and in one's body nothing but weakness, hunger and knowledge of the end drawing nearer.[3]

In Levi's reckoning, only a language of difference born of the Lager itself, could express the wind-whipping absurdity of his experience; but if it did so, who could understand it? In this case, difference shatters the continuity of language. 'There' remains, in Kafkan terms, that realm always 'away from here'.[4]

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Levi offers a different nuance, however, when he writes of the inmates' own storytelling. Of one prisoner he notes:

> He told me his story, and today I have forgotten it, but it was certainly a sorrowful, cruel and moving story; because so are all our stories, hundreds of thousands of stories, all different and all full of a tragic, disturbing necessity. We tell them to each other in the evening, and they take place in Norway, Italy, Algeria, the Ukraine and are simple and incomprehensible like the stories in the Bible. *But are they not themselves stories of a new Bible?*[5]

With this figure Levi affirms both discontinuity and continuity: these are 'stories of a new Bible'. On the one hand, the tales prisoners tell differ not only from each other, but from the biblical legacy of the interpreter's world. Their chronicle unscrolls a scripture that is new. On the other hand, even in their difference, these stories constitute a testament—'simple and incomprehensible'—that Levi understands as a Bible, a *megillah* of mysteries. Thus, a thread of likeness integrates that which is 'there' into a pattern already 'here'.

Levi's trope—'stories of a new Bible'—provokes questions current in discussions of holocaust literature and critical theory.[6] First, according to Levi, testimony of the Sho'ah requires a Lager language all its own and asserts a quality that is 'simple and incomprehensible'. Thus, he gives testimony connotations of difference and irreducibility that cut the cords of analogy and metaphor.[7] If such connotations resist efforts to integrate the holocaust into antecedent perspectives, what then is the nature of the continuity suggested by Levi's trope? Does it honor difference or seek to suppress it? Does it accept the existence of a *caesura*, or does it deny such a gap and its implication of silence?[8]

Second, Levi's trope, in its hint of continuity, encourages thinking of the Sho'ah through literary types, a mode of language that involves a network of intertextual relations. The trope concedes that while the Sho'ah may defy analogy, any language used to write of it will be tangled in a web of tradition and textual equivalences. Again, the question of continuity and difference asserts itself: can intertextuality, the network of relations between one discourse and another, avoid the ideological compromising of difference? Can one name the Sho'ah intertextually and yet keep its 'simple and incomprehensible' character or does intertextuality inevitably subordinate difference to a qualifying relation?

Third, the particular trope raises a narrower issue. If intertextuality is possible within Lager language, can the Hebrew Bible provide the Sho'ah

a source for continuity and trope? As 'stories of a new Bible', how are the tales inmates tell related to the tropes and types of the precursor Bible?

THE MESSAGE FROM EVE

Levi's text raises issues crucially at stake in the poetry of Dan Pagis. A Romanian-born Jew, Pagis survived Hitler's camps and emigrated to what was then Palestine in 1946. With Yehuda Amichai, Nathan Zach, and Abba Kovner, he became one of the leading poets writing in modern Hebrew during the first generation of the state of Israel.[9] His poems embody what Sidra Ezrahi has termed 'a poetics of displacement', a use of language that unmoors words from any determinate situation or fixed time and place.[10] In their displacement Pagis's poems emphasize discontinuity. Suspended in their own coordinates, his poems seldom refer beyond themselves. Thus, it surprises when Pagis employs biblical typology, evoking continuity amid unrelenting dislocation. Where Levi wrote of 'stories of a new Bible', Pagis speaks through the persona of an Abel and about a Cain, his fratricide. He reads words scrawled by an Eve, their mother, in a sealed railway-car.[11] Accordingly, the poetry requires a probing of the same issues that emerge from Levi's figure. Pagis best illumines these in the haunting lines of 'Written in Pencil in a Sealed Railway-Car'.

This is a dark poem full of white space, an empty page that takes away the wend of our word. It reads in full:

here in this carload
i am eve
with abel my son
if you see my other son
cain son of man
tell him that i

The spare economy of these lines exposes jolting movements. Stark and simple, the poem moves the reader to confront the Sho'ah's difference. The scene pushes the reader from a perception of the confinement of the railway-car to the devastating open-endedness of Eve's message. Yet, the poem shows a counter direction as well. It moves the reader from a position outside the boxcar to a space within it, a movement that insists the reader forge connection with the encountered difference. If Eve's ellipsis breaks every continuity, her mandate to 'tell' allows no discontinuity to remain unclaimed.[12]

The Preservation of Difference

Pagis's title expresses the only clear historical allusion in the poem. The 'sealed railway-car' evokes images of that time when narrow-gauge tracks

led to ramps of death; when the walls of freight trains entombed Jews in passage to other chambers, fast and secure.[13] Further, the title points to a trace of that season by hinting at the survival of an artifact, a text inscribed within the box-car walls. Through his allusion and the hint of artifactuality, Pagis loads his title with connotations of fixity and closure. The symmetry of the Hebrew title—language enwalled within its own structure—recreates the train's confinement and serves those connotations.[14] Like the sealed space of the box-car, the poem appears at first to have definite coordinates and thus, a capacity to be known and described. The drastic enclosure portends a closure of fact.

Any closure, however, starts to fall apart with the opening lines. The poem begins with a simple deictic marker, 'here' (*kaan*). The deictic grids the poem yet provides no external reference. 'Here' simply describes the place of the poem's speaker, the point from which she pencils her fragment. Of 'here' we know only two things: it marks the place of the box-car's human cargo; and it is never 'there' where the poem's readers find themselves. Though elusive, the 'here' maps a structure within the poem itself. As the poem designates 'here' as someplace within the box-car, it implies an opposing 'there' that is outside the car walls, a somewhere else. The mother's message, an address to a reader absent from 'here', presupposes a distance between writer and reader who always comes to these words after and from afar. 'Here' is where the reader cannot be; where the reader is cannot be 'here'.

The sealed chamber further loses determinacy when Pagis names its occupants as Eve and her son, Abel. With Eve's words Pagis introduces a mythic presence or transcendence into the poem, setting it at significant remove from the geography of history and the reader's desire for orientation. The box-car's 'here' corresponds to no 'where'—at least to no 'where' that a reader can control for the purposes of his or her knowledge. Eve's 'here', though not apart from the history of sealed railway cars, loads that history with a surplus of difference, elusive and irreducible.

Pagis's invocation of an Eve of the box-car involves the poem in intertextuality. The retrieval of Eve, Cain, and Abel as types infuses the poem with connotations funded by biblical mythology: that Eve, the mother of humankind, is the box-car's scribe emphasizes its claim upon all who are her children; that Abel is the box-car's child names that which threatens its passengers as unprecedented fratricide. Still, if these echoes place values in the text, the intertextual relations work no less to displace other connotations.[15] In particular, Pagis keeps the box-car free of any confinement within the schemes of biblical salvation history, or covenantal logic of national destruction and rebirth.[16] When Pagis puts Abel in the box-car, he displaces, for example, the nearly-sacrificed Isaac (or a crucified Christ) from the role of paradigmatic victim, a displacement that resists any surren-

der of the Sho'ah to frames of theological rescue or nationalistic empowerment.[17] For Pagis, too much coherence lurks in the biblical historical scheme. When he fills the box-car with the personae of myth, his intertextuality functions critically; that is, it displaces historical or theological schemes that would fix the box-car's meaning and conscript its service within religious, cultural, or national agenda. His use of myth guards against closure and its companion, the ideological purchase of history.[18] Eve's box-car remains uncoupled.

The deictic 'here' and the mythic displacement prepare the way for the culminating expression of difference: Eve's final silence. We do not know what accounts for this silence. In mid-scrawl has the door been thrown open with harsh, male shouts to hurry, to make a line, to march to this side or that? Or, has Eve crouched for days in the fetid chamber, pencil ready to inscribe words that simply do not come to language? Whether the silence of interruption or of inexpressibility, Eve's message remains fundamentally enigmatic. We know only the profundity of its effect.

All lines converge in the intractable blank of Eve's silence. At the poem's conclusion, when the reader most wants to bring Eve's message under the control of some perspective, the poem exposes an unbridgeable gap. The blank guards Eve's difference by rendering her message as an empty space, effectively negating any ideological impulse. No reader can co-opt the otherness of Eve's fragment, for it refuses to express itself in terms that one could subordinate to other controlling interests or govern by analogy to anything other than its own emptiness. Silent, it refuses to express itself in terms at all, an effacement of language that hushes the reader's inclination to speak before the difference of this box-car. What Eve does not say, the poem forbids the reader to utter in her behalf. Any language would be only the reader's, not hers.

From Difference to Connection

Eve's silence enforces the distance between the box-car and those who would speak of it. Still, in the midst of this discontinuity, the poem shows undeniable concern for connection. If Eve's silence stifles the pretense of language, her word to 'tell [Cain]' affords no refuge in the absence of speech. The poem obliges the continuity it has rendered so problematic.

The second half of the poem shifts the grammatical mood from the indicative to conditional imperative: 'if you see my other son/cain son of man/tell him that i'.[19] This turn reshapes the theme of closure. If, in one sense, the poem moves from the closure of the box-car to the open silence of Eve, in another, it moves from the statement of Eve's closed isolation to an expression of her will not to be thus sealed. Eve's imperative calls to another self. Her command implicates a reader—the poem's 'you'—whose attention frees the mother's voice from the confines of the box-car and

becomes the channel through which it connects with the world beyond. Through the reader the voice addresses Cain, Eve's other son, who roams outside the chamber walls.

The poem summons the reader to perform a dual role. He or she receives Eve's empty message, but also her mandate to 'tell' the 'other son'. The poem tangles these roles intricately. As the poem's 'you', the reader receives Eve's imperative and the devastating blank that follows. Accordingly, he or she must both hear and transmit the message of the silence. Yet, transmitting the message to Cain is ironic, for the poem identifies him not only as Eve's 'other son' but as '*ben adam*'. Literally, the phrase names Cain as 'Adam's son', but the same words also bear the meaning of 'son of man', or simply, 'a human being'.[20] Thus, at least in one sense, the poem compels the readers to transmit Eve's legacy to themselves, to address themselves as Cain, the figure who lurks outside the box-car.

Returning to the spatial grid of the poem, both the reader and Cain are not 'here' in Eve's sealed chamber. While their status as outsiders to the box-car may imply simply a different fate, the mythic identity of Cain suggests a stronger over-againstness. Not to be present with the victims is to stand with their executioners, guilty of a distance that, at least, imposes detachment and may escalate from indifference to violence. If the reader is to avoid remaining Cain, he or she must somehow move from outside to inside the box-car. Eve's imperative demands more than simple contact with Cain: to 'tell him' is to transform him so the weight of the heavy emptiness becomes his own, so he becomes present among the sufferers as their witness instead of their oppressor, so Eve's isolation comes to an end.

The poem's linking of Cain and the reader underscores the importance of Eve's fragment as text. She writes her lines within and likely on the walls of the sealed chamber, an act that endues her text as an artifact of the box-car. The text belongs to and emanates from Eve's 'here' such that to encounter the artifact is to connect with its source. The textual artifact makes available to some other time and place a vestige of that 'here', creating a channel through which the reader, though 'not here', is yet touched by its presence.[21] Reading does not empower one to overcome the difference of the box-car nor to say with confidence that one has 'here' arrived. The moment of listening to the text, however, does prod the one who has heard to a point no longer so clearly on the outside. It is then the reader turns away from the role of Cain and begins to unseal the chamber that has enclosed Eve.

SILENT LEGACY

'Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car' does not describe events of the Sho'ah as much as inscribe the dilemma they pose for those who would

speak of them. A poetic icon of the aftermath, these lines recreate something of the ordeal of the survivor or witness caught between the moral demand to testify and the impossibility of finding language with which to do so. The radical difference of the victim's experience, inscribed in Eve's blank, leaves one in silence. The victim's struggle against oblivion, heard in her imperative, compel one to find a language and a way not to stand apart. With what language can one respect Eve's otherness and yet fulfill her imperative? Here we are brought back to the questions raised by Primo Levi's trope.

Continuity and Difference

Pagis's poem sustains a stubborn dissonance. In its competing directions toward difference and connection, it preserves a tension that does not resolve. Such dissonance impedes the path of ideological reading, of seizing some one direction in the poem as absolute and using it to suppress any other claim. Read as a dissonantal whole, this icon of the Sho'ah allows the reader neither to mystify nor control its meaning. It forbids the reader either to ignore the artifacts or to reduce the holocaust's legacy to their mere accounting. Still, the poem involves the relation between more than the simple juxtaposition of clashing tones.

As the poem's readers approach the box-car's 'here', the connection enables a continuity of silence. The frustration of the readers' language when standing before the empty blank, yokes them with Eve in a moment's 'raid on the articulate'. The poem hosts a connection between artifact and reader that joins to the difference itself. The poem's 'you' stands, in Paul Celan's words, '*Davor das Fremde, des Gast du hier bist*'—as a guest of the [box-car's] strangeness.[22] He or she stands in relation to that which is other and receives the full expression of its difference. Before any such connection allows the reader to claim 'here' as his or her own, it displaces the reader's world and subjects it to the incursion of *das Fremde*. The reader does not claim, but is claimed by the profound difference, a connection forged from the other side. The same discontinuity which robs the reader of speech offers a continuity of silence.

The path of connection exists, but runs one way. A pronounced asymmetry governs the relation between the artifact and the reader who must defer to its difference.[23] To honour Eve's difference means *not* regarding the box-car from the outside, a vantage which yields only the view of Cain. To escape Cain, the box-car must not be integrated into the reader's familiar world as if its categories had not been cracked already by Eve's silent scream. The alternative to Cain's hermeneutic confers on the box-car a fundamental status, the freedom to express its own 'Lager language', itself generating metaphors and types: in this case, the mother in the box-car

with pencil in hand and a message rendered with silence.[24] Such a type, unavailable to the outside, yet interprets the reader's world, reversing the direction of Cain. The hermeneutic of the witness, that reader who touches the silent inside of the box-car, leads him or her to see the world through the now cracked openings of the train's panels, instead of seeing the sealed car through the seemingly unbroken glass of the world. The box-car, as fundamental, provides the lens through which the witness sees and the ground from which he or she must speak.

What can the witness say? The poem bequeaths Eve's intention to 'tell', to forge the connection which breaks her enclosure. A witness might speak of this but must guard from betraying that intention by reenclosing Eve in categories not her own. To transmit Eve's message, may finally occur less through word than through the speaking of silence. The witness's silence, in contrast to the outsider's speech, expresses the willful refusal to any longer say certain things: 'I know' and 'You are'. As such, the witness's silence becomes a mode of listening to the difference of Eve and crafts a vessel through which its resonance may be heard in the world of Cain. The language of continuity and difference is the language of silence; the testimony, a transmission of the gap.[25]

Intertextuality and the Bible

The presence of Eve in the box-car exposes an intertextual relation in Pagis's poem. As a textual strategy, intertextuality emphasizes the relation between texts and thus may threaten the perception of difference in any one text.[26] Moreover, where difference is radical, the strength of a precursor text may be called upon to supress its threat. Pagis's use of biblical types—Eve, Abel, and Cain—avoids this ideological temptation in three ways. First, the mythic types function not to displace the box-car as the center of the poem's meaning, but to frustrate any retrieval of other types, theological or historical, whose presence would run in an ideological direction. Second, the poem's primary type, Eve, is itself anti-ideological in its self-consuming character. Shaped by the blank of Eve's message, the type empties rather than asserts itself in any form that could be fixed or used to oppress. It expresses rather than obscures difference. And third, in that very respect, the biblical types are themselves interpreted by the box-car, taking on the features of its enclosure, isolation, and separation.

While serving to express the box-car's difference, do these biblical types manifest sufficient continuity to justify Levi's category of 'stories of a new Bible'? Such continuity, in this case, would show a tendency in the precursor text to manifest its own 'simple and irreducible' difference and to demand a connection with that difference. The biblical account of the murder of Abel by Cain (Genesis 4: 1–16) narrates an unprecedented act, a deed for

which there is no available language. It is not for fear alone that Cain fails to answer YHWH's question, 'What have you done?' (4: 10). To answer, he cannot reduce the fratricide to anything else, for it is its own first instance and thus, in its moment, filled with difference. A blank exists in the text at the point Cain is called to confess or be a witness to his brother's absence. He has once evaded and now YHWH talks on, but never does Cain utter what there is no language for: 'I killed my brother'.[27]

This silence, hidden in the noise of the text, only underscores the deeper silence of another. The murdered Abel has no voice: separated from the world of the living, he cannot speak and his brother has no words to say. As a story of a victim whose unprecedented fate forms silence and demands testimony, the biblical text finds common ground with the box-car. Like his mother in the box-car, this silent victim is not silenced. Absence leaves its trace in both texts: the stain of blood crying out from the earth (Gen 4: 10) and pencil-marks in a sealed chamber. These artifacts of difference speak their imperative and claim their Cain. The silence of 'the simple and incomprehensible' again seeks connection. If this feature of the ancient narrative invites us to find in Lager tales the 'stories of a new Bible', the more recent chronicle of our poem suggests we search scripture for signs of a former Sho'ah; that is, that we read it from the vantage of the box-car, listening for the moment when this Eve claims her precursor and calls forth silence to testify.

REFERENCES

[1] Martin Gilbert writes of the fate of Italian Jewry during the end of 1943: 'Of the 1,015 Jews deported from Rome on October 18, only 16 survived the war. Within two months, a further 7,345 Jews had been seized throughout northern Italy. Of these, 6,746 were gassed on arrival at Auschwitz, or died soon afterwards' [*The Holocaust. A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1985), p. 223]. Levi was deported in February 1944. Between February and December of 1944 another 4,056 Jews were deported to the east, of whom 2,425 were known to have died. See Meir Michaelis, 'Italy: General Survey', in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, ed. Israel Gutman (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 2:725. On the history of the writing of *Survival in Auschwitz*, Levi's first memoir, see his own comments in *The Reawakening*, tr. S. Woolf (New York: Collier, 1986), p. 195.

[2] Note the dramatization of this severance in David Grossman's compelling novel *See Under: Love*, tr. B. Rosenberg (New York: Washington Square, 1989).

[3] Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, tr. S. Woolf (New York: Collier, 1961), pp. 112–113.

[4] See Franz Kafka's parable, 'My Destination', in *Parables and Paradoxes* (New York: Schocken, 1961), p. 189.

[5] *Survival in Auschwitz*, p. 59. Emphasis mine.

[6] In particular note the discussions of writing, type, and genre in the works of David Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1984) and James Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust. Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana, 1988).

[7] On the breaking of analogy, see Lawrence Langer, *Versions of Survival. The Holocaust and the Human Spirit* (Albany: SUNY, 1982).

[8] On the notion of '*caesura*' and its theological implications, see Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), pp. 27–58. Note, too, the various writings of Emil Fackenheim on the uniqueness of the holocaust, a uniqueness which presupposes an unbroachable gap between the world of the death camps and the interpreter's world. See, e.g., *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim. A Reader*, ed. M. L. Morgan (Detroit: Wayne State, 1987), pp. 119–156.

[9] In addition, Pagis became an important scholar of Medieval Hebrew poetry, teaching at Hebrew University from the early 1960's until his death in 1986.

[10] Sidra Ezrahi, 'Dan Pagis and the poetics of incoherence', in *Remembering for the Future*, ed. Y. Bauer et al (New York: Pergamon, 1989), p. 2418.

[11] The poems which involve personifications of Cain and Abel are 'Autobiography', 'Brothers', and 'Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car'; the last of these personifies Eve as well. Each of these poems appears in Dan Pagis, *Variable Directions*, tr. Stephen Mitchell (San Francisco: North Point, 1989).

[12] Note Shoshana Felman's comparable use of the categories 'inside' and 'outside' to interpret Claude Lanzmann's important film, *Shoah*. See S. Felman and D. Laub, *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992). Reading the film as an inquiry into the 'particularity of difference' that separates insiders and outsiders (222), Felman probes the work of art's capability to 'create a *connection* that did not exist during the war and does not exist today *between the inside and the outside*—to set them both in motion and in dialogue with one another' (232).

[13] For one description see Claude Lanzmann's interview of Franz Suchomel, SS Unterscharfuehrer at Treblinka, in *Shoah. An Oral History of the Holocaust* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), p. 53. Lanzmann's mammoth film amply shows the potent iconography of trains or even their suggestion by abandoned tracks.

[14] In Hebrew the title reads: '*Katub be ipparon baggaron hechatum*'. Naomi Sokoloff analyzes the form of the title as an icon of its semantic content. She writes, 'The form of the title puts into relief its semantic content, as a striking symmetry of pattern divides the line quite neatly in two; the number of syllables in each half is an even six, and this balance is strengthened by the close assonantal and consonantal rhyme (*a-u*, *ron*+*ron*, *a-u*) which depends on the chiasmic pattern of *pa'ul*+(preposition and noun)/(preposition and noun)+*pa'ul*. This conscious fashioning of simple vocabulary into strict design, which brings the two adjectives to frame the two nouns clearly, thereby encloses them and so dramatizes the meaning of *chatum*'. See 'Transformations: Holocaust Poems in Dan Pagis' *Gilgul*', *Hebrew Annual Review* 8 (1984): 216.

[15] On intertextuality and displacement, see Vincent B. Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism* (New York: Columbia, 1983). In discussing Roland Barthes, Leitch notes: '... the theory of intertextuality works less as a positive notion about social-historical determinations in (of) language and more as a tactical instrument to arrest the extensions and continued expansions of ideological repressions. That is to say, intertextuality, as a critical instrument, combats the "law of context", which always attempts to set borders on dissemination' (pp. 109–110).

[16] David Penchansky notes a comparable use of the book of Job's legendary, or at least dehistoricized setting, to displace any efforts to infuse that text with the explanations of catastrophe offered by the Deuteronomistic history. See *The Betrayal of God. Ideological Conflict in Job* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), pp. 32–34.

[17] On the dynamic of displacement in Pagis's poetry, especially with regard to the displacement of politically-constructed theologies of history, see Ezrahi, 'Dan Pagis: The Holocaust and the Poetics of

Incoherence', pp. 2415–2424. On the displacement of Isaac as the Jewish victim archetype, see Ezrahi's review of Pagis's *Variable Directions* in *The New Republic* 204 (Feb 25, 1991): 36–39. The use of Abel and Cain typology in holocaust literature is rare, but note Michel Tournier's *Le roi des aulnes* as one such instance; see the discussion of R. Quinones in *The Changes of Cain* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1991), p. 231. The Isaac type, however, is common, especially in its association with the writings of Elie Wiesel, and may underlie the very tendency to speak of the death camps as a 'holocaust'. See Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman, 'Why Do We Call the Holocaust "the Holocaust"?' in *Modern Judaism* 9 (1989): 197–211.

[18] As Ezrahi's articles remind, Pagis's poetics of displacement involve a significant departure from Zionist ideology and render him controversial within Israel. For significant critiques of the logic of destruction and rebirth and its ideological use, see Marc H. Ellis, *Beyond Innocence and Redemption. Confronting the Holocaust and Israeli Power* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990); and James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, p. 185. Young interestingly pursues the semiotic connections of political and religious commemoration in Israel, connections which depend upon a scheme of nationalistic history. Of *Yom Hasho'ah* he notes: 'Now falling on the Hebrew calendar in the same month as Passover, seven days before *Yom Hazikkaron* (remembrance day for Israel's war dead) and eight days before *Yom Hatzma'ut* (Israeli Independence Day), Holocaust Remembrance Day in Israel simultaneously recalls—and thereby links—biblical and recent historical liberation, modern resistance and national independence' (p. 185).

[19] For one development of this shift, see Sokoloff, 'Transformations', pp. 218–221.

[20] For Pagis's own use of '*bene-adam*' to denote 'human beings,' see the opening two lines of his poem 'Testimony', in *Variable Directions*, p. 33.

[21] On the presence of artifacts, see Karl A. Plank 'Unbroken Trains: Reflections on Michael Martin's *Approaching History*', in *Shenandoah* (forthcoming). Martin's poetry inspires my present use of 'artifact' and 'connection'. See the collection of his work gathered in *The Iron Mountain Review* 4 (1987): 3–28.

[22] See Celan, 'Stilleben', in *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstatt, 1955). This line provides an epigraph for Martin's *Approaching History*, cited in note 19.

[23] This notion is informed by the writings of Emmanuel Levinas whose perspective structures the moral relation in terms of an other-centeredness or a decentering of the self. See, e.g., *Totality and Infinity*, tr. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne, 1969), p. 215.

[24] To confer on the box-car a fundamental status is to allow it to function, in Emil Fackenheim's terms, as a 'root event' or to have a 'commanding voice'. See *God's Presence in History* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), pp. 8–14 and 67–104.

[25] On the implications of silent listening for Christian discourse about the Sho'ah, see Karl A. Plank, 'Broken Continuities: *Night* and "White Crucifixion"' in *The Christian Century* 104/32 (1987): 963–966 and 'The Survivor's Return: Reflections on Memory and Place', in *Judaism* 38 (1989): 263–277; and for Christian discourse about Judaism generally, see 'The Eclipse of Jewish Difference: Merton's Discourse on Judaism' in *Cistercian Studies* (forthcoming).

[26] In current discussion 'intertextuality' appears both as a constitutive feature of language (a property of texts as such) and as a textual strategy. The latter takes the form of an author's deliberate choice to construct a relation to some other text or discourse through quotation, allusion, typology, or other literary means.

[27] Pagis accents the unprecedentedness of Cain's deed in his poem 'Autobiography'. Here, a murdered Abel says: 'My brother invented murder,/my parents invented grief,/I invented silence'. In the poem's opening verse a raven has to teach Abel's parents what to do with his body: it has never before been necessary to bury a human corpse.